

'A Better Way'

***A Course in Miracles: The Development and Legitimation of a New Religious
Discourse and its Diffusion through Spiritual Self Help Literature***

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Abstract

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This study examines the development and legitimation of the religious discourse inspired by the text, *A Course in Miracles*. Part One places *Course* spirituality in the context of other channelled texts of the 1960s and 70s which were a significant feature of the New Age network of the 1980s. It also explores themes from other channelled material of the time, the ‘Seth’ texts by Jane Roberts, and argues that the widespread acceptance of channelled wisdom by New Age devotees suggests that they accept authority from outside the Self whilst holding to an epistemology of individual experience. An examination of emic definitions of the New Age in the 1980s suggests that the New Age network of spiritualities was not as amorphous as many scholars believed. It offers a five-point definition of ‘holistic spiritualities’ and suggests that this term could replace the term ‘New Age’. Part Two follows Weber’s study of how religions develop legitimation strategies for their followers. It shows that the narrative of how the *Course* came to be written developed into a tradition that legitimised the *Course* for its devotees and conferred charisma on its scribe, Helen Schucman. An analysis of the text of the *Course* demonstrates how appeals are made to rationalism through the internal logic of its thought system. The text is also shown to make links with ancient traditions by harking back to a biblical metanarrative and an ontology reminiscent of Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Hermeneutical battles between *Course* teachers in the last decade are shown to demonstrate Weber’s routinisation of charisma, which marks the passing of the founding charisma. The study challenges Weber’s linear model of development from charisma to routinisation. Part Three explores the popular spiritual self help literature derived from *A Course in Miracles*. These bestselling books detraditionalise religious language and authority making spiritual themes accessible to a wider public. The commercial success of the self help industry has caused publishers to commission further books of this genre. Part Four describes the fieldwork undertaken for the thesis, including descriptions of a selection of *Course* meetings attended as a participant observer, the results of a survey placed in *Miracle Worker* magazine and interviews with *Course* devotees and readers of *Course*-related self help texts. In the context of contemporary secularisation debates, the thesis concludes that religious discourse is developing rather than disappearing. It argues that holistic spiritualities should no longer be regarded as ‘alternative’. This has come about, in part, through the diffusion of holistic spiritual themes in popular *Course*-related self help literature.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to examine the formation of a new religious discourse and to explore the way its legitimisation strategies establish spiritual authority for its devotees. The religious discourse examined is the spirituality of the channelled text *A Course in Miracles*. The thesis also explores the process of routinisation in the last decade within the *Course*¹ community as second generation devotees carry on the practice of *Course* spirituality. Finally, it shows how key ideas and practices of *Course* spirituality have become diffused throughout society as a result of strategies of legitimisation adopted by authors of popular spiritual self help literature. In the larger context of New Age or holistic spiritualities, the thesis relates the phenomenon of new religious discourses to contemporary secularisation debates and suggests that the “paradigm shift” predicted by Marilyn Ferguson’s New Age manifesto *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980) is now taking place in popular perception.

To meet the objective of the thesis I have adopted a four-fold strategy. Part One locates the context of *Course* spirituality in the continuum of New Age spiritualities. Chapter One, ‘Issues and Background’, considers the problems attached to use of the term ‘New Age’ for scholars and for devotees. It notes scholarly discussion on the difficulties involved in defining New Age spiritualities and suggests that ‘holistic spiritualities’ might be a more acceptable term. As the *Course* falls within the category of channelled

¹ Students and teachers of *A Course in Miracles* refer to the text as “the Course”. *Course* publications also use the term interchangeably with *A Course in Miracles* when referring to the text. Whilst I am aware that scholars using the term often place it in italics (for example, Hanegraaff, 1996: 37), *Course* publications do not (for example, Skutch, 1984: 64; Wapnick, 1991: 18). I have chosen to follow the former convention.

esoteric texts, the chapter also places the *Course* in the context of the channelled literature of the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing on other influential channelled texts, I offer my definition of New Age or holistic spiritualities.

Chapter Two looks at the methodology used in the thesis. It shows how Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' was helpful in the fieldwork with *Course* devotees as I strove to establish a balance between unbiased reporting, which allowed the voices of *Course* devotees to be heard in their own terms, and my analysis of data using the tools of the discipline of religious studies. Gavin Flood's dialogical approach to research of an alien discourse offered insights into how a researcher might apply Bourdieu's ideas to religious studies. That said, the problem of the 'situatedness' of scholar, method and the discipline of religious studies itself may never be solved adequately. However, the chapter argues that awareness of the problem is a first step towards gaining a truer understanding from an etic perspective of the dynamics of those within a religious discourse.

Chapter Three looks at the literature upon which this study builds. It contains a brief overview of relevant scholarly writing on New Age themes, channelling and self help literature. To date there has been little scholarly work on *A Course in Miracles*. Whilst substantial research has been done on New Religious Movements (e.g. Stark and Bainbridge, 1985; Barker, 1992; Chryssides, 1999; Dawson, 2003), until recently little scholarly work in the field of religious studies has been done on new esoteric spiritualities (Hammer, 2004: xiii). Furthermore, within the discipline of studies of new religions, little work has been done on the legitimisation strategies developed by new

religious discourses for their devotees. The most significant work in the area is *Legitimizing New Religions* (Lewis, 2003a), originally written as a thesis under Sarah Lewis at Lampeter. The current thesis attempts to fill this gap by exploring the legitimation strategies developed in the formation of the religious discourse based on *A Course in Miracles*.

Part Two examines the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles*. Chapter Four traces the origin of the text *A Course in Miracles*. It argues, following Weber's model, that the story of the *Course* becomes a strategy for discourse formation and legitimation. Chapter Five is an analysis of the text of *A Course in Miracles*, locating key themes which are picked up by later self help authors. The internal logic of the *Course* text is shown to be a legitimating appeal to reason, or what Weber called 'rationalism' (Lewis, 2003a: 14). Chapter Six traces the process of development and routinisation of charisma within the *Course* community.

Part Three examines the diffusion of *Course* themes in popular self help literature. It traces the background of contemporary self help books in the largely Christian popular self help literature which flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter Seven explores the strategies of the first two authors of self help literature based on *A Course in Miracles*: Jampolsky's *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* (1979) and Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love* (1992). Chapter Eight examines the influence of *A Course in Miracles* on M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* (1978) and Louise Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life* (1984). Both continue to be bestsellers today: they make

Course themes accessible to many who would not consider themselves religious and who may not have heard of the *Course*. Chapter Nine looks at popular spiritual self help literature of the last decade. The chapter shows how authors and publishers used *Course* themes to build on the commercial success of Peck, Hay, Jampolsky and Williamson; it also shows how these books use legitimisation strategies similar to the *Course*'s to draw people into the *Course* community.

Part Four is devoted to the fieldwork undertaken for the thesis. Chapter Ten describes *Course* meetings I attended as a participant observer; it reports the results of a survey conducted on readers of *Miracle Worker*, the magazine of the Miracle Network in the UK. Chapter Eleven contains in-depth interviews with *Course* devotees who have practised *Course* spirituality for more than ten years and with consumers of the *Course*-related self help literature of Part Three. The fieldwork suggests that elements of the *Course* narrative form a powerful legitimisation strategy for *Course* devotees, while the narratives of experience contained in the self help books perform a similar task for readers of this literature.

The conclusion argues that the religious discourse developed through the “story of the *Course*” is seen to illustrate and legitimate the teaching of the *Course*. Fieldwork revealed that the narratives of experience contained in *Course*-related self help literature also legitimate the *Course* discourse for devotees, as do their personal narratives. These narratives of experience form the bedrock of what Wallis described as “an epistemology of experience” (1984: 299-327). *Course* teaching itself (for example the belief that one

does not have to believe the teaching of the *Course* in order to practise it and derive benefit from it) also enhances “an epistemology of experience”. The thesis concludes that holistic spiritualities have left the margins of society and now exert influence on the public sphere. It argues that religious discourse is developing (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 307-308) rather than disappearing.

Part One

The New Age Context of Contemporary Holistic Spiritualities

Chapter One

Background and Issues

Introduction: A New Perception

This thesis examines the development of a new religious discourse based on the channelled text, *A Course in Miracles*. The new spiritualities, of which the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles* is an important part, have been known as 'New Age' or 'alternative' spiritualities. However, these spiritualities now influence all parts of public consciousness; this study shows how the development of one largely unknown religious discourse came to influence the wider culture.

Since the late 1960s, when the New Age was often connected in people's minds with the counter culture movement of young people, alternative spiritualities have evolved into a commonplace feature of ordinary living. New Age vocabulary is used in public discourse. Its practice is fashionable amongst middle class professionals and celebrities, but it has also become a pool of spiritual resources for all sections of society. Even music shops have a section marked 'New Age'. There now is a genre of music composed as New Age music. Also, the 1970s music of Brian Eno and the music of primal people enhanced through synthesizers have become popular to devotees of new spiritualities. New Age spiritualities have influenced the practice of medicine, not only through

alternative therapies (now often referred to as complementary medicine), but also with the demand that a person's body, mind and spirit be treated as a whole. Business management training and teacher training in education draw on New Age themes. Newspapers and most popular magazines now have a section called "Body, Mind and Spirit" devoted to spirituality. Supermarkets have shelves designated as "well being" or "body and mind" carrying an implicit spiritual connotation. Knowledge of New Age spirituality is assumed in advertising, films and popular humour.² There appears to be little in contemporary life that remains untouched by New Age spiritualities. Since the 1980s the new spiritualities have become the subject of academic research as well as of popular and polemical writing.

In *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), one of the earliest emic texts of New Age spirituality, Marilyn Ferguson predicted that the future "New Age" would represent a "paradigm shift" in people's understanding of themselves and the world. This "shift", she argued, would prove to be as significant as that of the Renaissance. This thesis argues that this shift has now taken place in two senses: it has taken place in the self perception of devotees of New Age spiritualities, and it has also taken place in the perception of the wider public. Whether this perception is true and the fundamental shifting of tectonic plates of Ferguson's prediction has in fact happened, or whether the plethora of new spiritualities and religious discourses merely represent a transitory phase of late modernity, is impossible to ascertain. However, my fieldwork with the community of

² An episode of *The Simpsons*, for example, features an educational psychologist encouraging the academically failing Bart to get in touch with his inner Self in order to "unleash the power within". See C. Partridge, 2004, 2005 for a comprehensive overview of the pervasiveness throughout Western society of what were popularly known as New Age ideas.

devotees of *A Course in Miracles* suggests that there exists a widespread perception that their spirituality, along with many other new spiritualities bearing Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" (Barker, 1992: 189), are now a familiar language of religious discourse. This thesis attempts to show how this has happened.

The Background of 'New Age' Spiritualities

The term 'New Age' is used for alternative spiritualities less today than twenty years ago. Many devotees of the new spiritualities, for example David Spangler and Kenneth Wapnick, the editor of *A Course in Miracles*, object to the term because they associate the New Age with superficiality, celebrity glamour and commerce-driven motives which seem alien to true spirituality. However the term appears to have no pejorative connotations in scholarly writing on the European continent (Hanegraaff, 1996; Hammer, 2004) and it is useful in this study to differentiate New Age spiritualities from other popular alternative spiritualities: Paganism, Heathenism and Satanism, for example. I am less happy to call the new spiritualities "alternative" because I believe they no longer occupy the alternative space in the minds of devotees or, arguably, for the wider public.

Difficulties of Definition

Since the early 1990s scholars have commented on the difficulties of defining New Age spiritualities. Mary Bednarowski, noting that many contradicted one another, wrote that the 'New Age' as a term seems "at first nearly useless for purposes of definition or interpretation" (1994: 67). Indeed it was a convention to comment on the amorphous nature of New Age spiritualities (Partridge, 1999: 77). Sometimes 'amorphous' was used

in a pejorative sense (Lewis, 1992: 6; Basil, 1988: 28). New Age beliefs and practices did not fit easily into traditional religious categories. There were said to be “no dogmas, no binding doctrines, no central leadership, no identifiable boundaries and no register of members” (York, 1994: 16). There were no founders, prophets nor authoritative scriptures. New Age apologist David Spangler compared New Age spirituality to a “flea market or country fair” rather than to a cathedral (1993: 80). The Christian scholar John Drane referred to the contents of a Hoover when describing New Age beliefs. He used the analogy to show what he saw as the random and eclectic nature of New Age spiritualities: Hoover up everything in one place and you will have a set of contents different from that produced by Hoovering in another area. He argued that the New Age is not a religion, nor a belief system nor a cult, nor even a movement in that it is not a recognisable pressure group. He viewed it as a movement only in the sense that “it is, quite literally, moving and changing its shape all the time” (1999: 6-8). The Swedish scholar of the New Age, Olav Hammer, writes, “There is no need to believe in any particular doctrines...the ultimate litmus test is whether you can experience their veracity for yourself” (2004: 331).

My study challenges the view that the new holistic spiritualities defy definition and authority, and there are other scholars who have found this emphasis misleading (see Kemp, 2003: 13-17). Paul Heelas has argued that New Age spiritualities show a remarkable consistency regarding the “human and planetary condition and how it can be transformed” (1996: 2). Christopher Partridge notes that “New age worldviews do connect” and that “common themes” run through New Age thinking which give it a

characteristic shape (1999: 77-78). Bednarowski found four themes which occur again and again in New Age spiritualities. These unifying themes are clustered around a new cosmology, belief in divine immanence, individual and social transformation and a new ecology (1991: 209). Against those commentators who claim there is neither cohesion nor a “shared language” in the new spiritualities, Partridge suggests that what he calls ‘occulture’ is now supplying that common language. He defines ‘occulture’ as a reservoir of ideas, beliefs and theories and practices drawn on by devotees of the new spiritualities to such a degree that they permeate all aspects of Western culture (2004: 186; 2005: 2-3).

Taking Partridge’s point a step further I would argue that the new spiritualities share more than a family resemblance and shared language. Whilst avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism, I believe there is a set of shared beliefs found in most of the new spiritualities. These themes are so commonplace amongst devotees that they have become “taken-for-granted truths”. How did a core of ‘doctrines’ emerge from spiritualities that cherished the belief that the only spiritual authority is that of the Self as it is variously understood? (Woodhead, 2001: 9) How did what Partridge calls a “reservoir of ideas, beliefs and theories” coalesce in spiritualities which have been described as a free-for-all “flea market” of ideas? (Spangler, 1993: 80) If, as Roy Wallis argued, New Age devotees are “epistemological individualists” (1984: 100), what can account for the sometimes surprising coherence, revealed in my fieldwork, binding together the admittedly diverse beliefs and practices found under the New Age umbrella? To answer these questions, one must look at the specific context of *A Course in Miracles*, the context of channelled literature.

Channelling in New Age Spiritualities

Whilst the influence of channelled wisdom on core New Age beliefs has not been widely recognised, the importance of channelling as a New Age therapeutic activity has received scholarly attention. Of special interest to scholars are various understandings of the sources of channelled wisdom. The Dutch scholar Wouter Hanegraaff defines channelling as “the belief of individuals that they are able to act as a channel for information from sources other than their normal selves. People receive information which they believe comes from a source other than their normal consciousness...living on higher levels of being....” (1996: 23). This source is believed to represent “a level of wisdom or insight superior to that of most humans” and communication with such sources is “sought for the purpose of learning and guidance” (1996: 24). The authority implicit in channelled messages makes a contrast with messages received through mediums in classical spiritualism where the purpose is communication with a loved one who has died recently. Another scholar defines channelling as a “process in which information is accessed and expressed by someone who is convinced that the source is not his ordinary consciousness” (Riordan, 1992: 105). Jon Klimo, a scholar writing from an emic perspective, defines channelling as “the communication of information to or through a physically embodied human being from a source that is said to exist on some other level or dimension of reality than the physical as we know it, and is not from the normal mind (or self) of the channel” (1998 [1987]: 2). Klimo stressed the importance of the phrase “is said to” in his definition and argued that one’s own intuition and inspiration were potentials for channelling (1998: 4, 10). Given the New Age belief in the

interconnectedness of all life with the divine, one's intuition and inspiration could also be viewed, at least in some New Age understandings of the Self, as divine wisdom coming from that which is greater than the individual self.

Channelling may be spontaneous or intentional. In the former, the channeller is at the mercy of the revelation, while for the latter, there are techniques taught in spiritual self help books, tapes, seminars and workshops, to teach people how to become channels. These channelling manuals have become in themselves a genre of spiritual self help literature.³

Intentional Channelling

Information gained from intentional channelling is often claimed to be specifically helpful and authoritative for the person acting as channel. The activity of channelling itself is said to have beneficial effects on the channeller. One author of a channelling manual writes that “typically people who channel become more self-confident, happier, clearer about their path and their choices, less selfish, less stressed over life's problems, calmer, more loving and psychologically much stronger” (De Alberdi, 1998: 8). When channellers Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer asked their spirit guides what channelling will do for a person, they received the reply, “You can gain a greater sense of what you want to create and find easier ways to bring it about. If you follow the advice of your

³ See, for example, the following, the titles of which are significant: Lita de Alberdi, *Channelling: What It Is and How to Do It* (1998); Ted Andrews, *How to Meet and Work with Spirit Guides* (1992); Willis Harman and Howard Rheingold, *Higher Creativity: Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights* (1983); Anita Muhl, *Automatic Writing: An Approach to the Unconscious* (1963); Tony Neate, *Channelling for Everyone: A Safe, Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Your Intuition and Psychic Awareness* (1997); Ivy Northage, ‘Teach Yourself Mediumship’ (1978, cassette tape); Kathryn Ridall, *Channelling: How to Reach Out to Your Spirit Guides* (1988); Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer, *Opening to Channel: How to Connect with Your Guide* (1987); Donald F. Walters, *How to Be a Channel* (1987).

guide...changes will occur in your emotional nature and you will less frequently have feelings of depression, anxiety or heaviness” (Roman and Packer, 1987: 16).

The number and popularity of these ‘how to do it’ books about channelling demonstrate that New Age devotees look outside themselves for spiritual wisdom, help and encouragement from sources which are seen to have authority and knowledge beyond that of the individual devotee. The literature on channelling, as well as the individual stories of channelling experiences by devotees,⁴ suggest that these channelling manuals have encouraged many to see channelling as central to their spiritual experience. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the messages received have helped them over specific difficulties, helped them in relationships and sometimes given them a ‘foundation’ of confidence built on the belief that they are cared for by their own spirit guides. Thus intentional channelling can be seen as a source of authority for New Age devotees.

Spontaneous Channelling

Hanegraaff, however, has pointed out that messages which have come through intentional channelling, helpful though they may be for the individual, have not commanded the authority which messages from spontaneous channelling have achieved for the wider New Age community. Most, he argues, if not all, core beliefs central to New Age spiritualities have come, not from intentional channelling, but from spontaneous channelling (1996: 31). J. Gordon Melton agrees: “Channelling was the instrument through which the New Age vision was articulated and the supernatural entities who

⁴ During the course of research over the past five years, I have spoken to many New Age devotees about their channelling experiences. Most speak gratefully of the authoritative role a spirit guide plays in their lives and of the therapeutic benefits of channelling.

spoke were the authority, at least initially, for New Age teachings” (1998: 138). Looking further back, scholars often cite Alice Bailey’s theosophy movement of the early twentieth century as a source for the New Age ideas that flowered in the 1980s. Here too, however, the process of spontaneous channelling was significant: the idea of a coming “new age” was originally channelled by Alice Bailey (Melton, 1998: 138). One can also note the spontaneously channelled material of the 1950s in which messages from extraterrestrial beings were received, spawning various manifestations of UFO religions (J. Lewis, 1995; Partridge, 2003; S. Lewis, 2003; Tumminia, 2005). Hanegraaff views this spontaneous channelling in the 1950s as the specific precursor to the channelling which took place in the 1970s and suggests that David Spangler, one of the “fathers of the New Age” and the author of the influential channelled text, *Revelation: The Birth of a New Age* (1977), is the link between these two significant periods of spontaneous channelling. Spangler was involved in UFO groups in the 1950s and possibly absorbed their apocalyptic beliefs during this period (1996: 95).⁵

Whilst intentional channellers have control over the phenomenon, indeed try to induce the practice by various techniques, the spontaneous channeller has been taken by surprise by the ‘dictation’ coming from a source outside his consciousness. This was true of the genesis of three of the most influential channelled texts in New Age spiritualities: *A Course in Miracles* (the focus of this study); the material from the entity ‘Ramtha’ channelled by J.Z.Knight; and Jane Roberts’ ‘Seth’ texts, widely considered the most

⁵ Hanegraaff refers to the UFO cult movement as a “kind of proto-New Age movement” (1996: 96). For information on channeling in UFO religions, see Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter, (1956); C. Partridge, ed. (2003), especially, Diana Tumminia, ‘When the Archangel Died: from Revelation to Routinisation of Charisma in Unarius’ (62-83) and Sarah Lewis, ‘The URANTIA Book’ (129-148); and Diana Tumminia (2005), which challenges some of the assumptions of Festinger, et al.

influential channelled material for New Age spiritualities (Hanegraaff, 1996: 126). The stories of all three illustrate how authoritative spiritual entities appear to invade the ordinary existences of the channellers.

Helen Schucman and *A Course in Miracles*

I will look in greater detail at the story of Schucman's experience of channelling *A Course in Miracles* in Part Two as the narrative has become the basis for the formation of the religious discourse of the *Course*. However, in this introductory section, placing the *Course* in the context of other channelled texts of the period, I will simply show the similarities in the respective stories of Schucman, Knight and Roberts.

In the case of *A Course in Miracles*, the channeller, Helen Schucman, was Associate Professor of Psychology at Columbia University in New York. An atheist, she viewed the hearing of 'voices' as pathological behaviour. In her unpublished autobiography, she describes how she resisted the process and only allowed the material to be published anonymously, fearful that it would damage her professional reputation (in Wapnick, 1999: 183-187). After going through a disquieting period of receiving dream-like visions, in October 1965 Schucman heard an inner voice commanding her, "This is a course in miracles. Please take notes". As Schucman later wrote:

That was my introduction to the voice. It made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a shorthand notebook. The writing was never automatic. It could be interrupted at any time and later picked up again. It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete (*A Course in Miracles*, 1996: viii).

Schucman resigned herself to the task of taking down the daily dictation over the next eight years, but she never fully accepted her role, and said to a friend, “I know the *Course* is true, but I don’t believe it” (Skutch, 1984: iv). In spite of Schucman’s ambivalent reaction to the task of channelling, she seems never to have doubted the authority of the voice. She wrote:

I did not understand the calm but impressive authority with which the Voice dictated. It is largely because of the strangely compelling nature of this authority that I immediately referred to the Voice with a capital ‘V’. The particular combination of certainty, wisdom, gentleness, clarity and patience that characterized the Voice made that form of reference seem perfectly appropriate (in Wapnick, 1999 [1991]: 179).

In spite of her avowed atheism, Schucman clearly viewed this inner voice as having the authority of something like a divine entity.

J.Z.Knight and ‘Ramtha’

In contrast to Schucman’s experience, the famous channel J.Z.Knight came to feel that all of her life had been a preparation for the work of channelling authoritative wisdom for humankind from a spiritual entity called ‘Ramtha’. Before she became aware of ‘Ramtha’, a psychic had predicted that Knight would soon meet ‘the One’. Another psychic informed her that there was “an awesome power walking with her”, someone like Jesus Christ (Knight, 1987: 244-245). Yet the decisive moment surprised Knight, and unlike Schucman, according to her description, she was able to see her entity. Whilst in a silly mood, playing with paper pyramids with her husband, she claimed to have made a new brain machine and placed a paper pyramid on her head.

After a few moments, I lifted the end of the pyramid just to eye level and, laughing so hard that tears were streaming from my eyes, I caught the glimmer of a bright light at the other end of my kitchen. The light was blurred by the tears, so I reached for a

tissue and wiped the tears away. I blinked, and to my utter shock and amazement, there stood a giant man at the other end of my kitchen...just standing there, aglow....His shoulders came to the top of the door, and it was as if the ceiling had disappeared to make room for his head. It was beautiful....A smile so divine parted his lips to reveal glistening, immaculate teeth. "I am Ramtha, the Enlightened One. I have come to help you over the ditch" (Knight, 1987: 11-12).

It seems clear from the descriptions of Schucman and Knight that both were overwhelmed by the authority of the entities they believed they had encountered. Schucman refers to the need to speak of the Voice with a capital 'V' and Knight describes "Ramtha's smile" as "divine".

Jane Roberts and 'Seth'

Third, Jane Roberts, whose channelled material was perhaps the most influential of all for New Age spiritualities of the 1980s (Hanegraaff, 1996: 126; Hammer, 2004: 342), writes similarly of her surprise at her first encounter with 'Seth'. At the time, she claims, she was not drifting nor looking for a purpose in life. While sitting quietly at a table writing poetry "on a lovely autumn evening" in September, 1963,

A fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force, as if my skull were some sort of receiving station, turned up to unbearable volume. It was as if the physical world were really tissue-paper thin, hiding infinite dimensions of reality, and I was suddenly flung through the tissue paper with a huge ripping sound. My body sat at the table, my hands furiously scribbling down the words and ideas that flashed through my head. Yet I seemed to be somewhere else, at the same time, travelling through things. I went plummeting through a leaf, to find a whole universe open up; and then out again drawn into new perspectives. I felt as if knowledge was being implanted in the very cells of my body so that I couldn't forget it – a gut knowing, a biological spirituality. It was feeling and knowing, rather than intellectual knowledge. When I came to, I found myself scrawling what was obviously meant as the title of that odd batch of notes: The Physical Universe as Idea Construction. Later the Seth Material would develop those ideas, but I didn't know that at the time (Roberts, 1970: 10-12).

The early messages from 'Seth' came through the ouija board and were taken down as dictated by Roberts' husband, Robert Butts, in a process that seems similar to that of Schucman. Later, however, Roberts went into a trance in order to speak the words of 'Seth'. At these times, her voice deepened and her demeanour became that of a man (Roberts, 1970: 46-50).

Like Schucman, Roberts and her husband were not religious and she claims to have had no background in paranormal experience: "Rob and I were hardly religious in conventional terms. We hadn't been to a church in years...I was brought up a Catholic, but as I grew older I found it more and more difficult to accept the God of my ancestors" (1970: 6). Her husband came from a liberal protestant background but, like Roberts, had ceased to be religious. She wrote: "I had my poetry; Rob, who is an artist, had his painting. Each of us felt a strong sense of contact with nature. No one was more surprised than I was, then, to find myself quite abruptly speaking for someone who was supposed to have survived death" (1970: 6-7).

Even after publishing her first esoteric book, *How to Develop Your ESP Power* (1966), Roberts resisted the idea that she was speaking for an otherworldly personality who identified himself as 'Seth'. She believed she had written what had come from her own subconscious mind: "To me it was tantamount to intellectual suicide to even admit the possibility that 'Seth' actually was a personality who had survived death" (1970: 4-5). She described how she looked for other explanations for the messages, from psychology, parapsychology and spiritualists, but remained dissatisfied with their explanations. By

1969, Roberts had received more than fifty notebooks of dictated material which she believed came from the entity identified as 'Seth' and felt compelled to believe that "the Seth material springs from sources beyond myself, and that it is much less distorted by pat, conventionalised symbolism than are other paranormal scripts we have encountered" (1970: 6-7). She described her struggle to accept the phenomenon of channelling:

The word 'revelation' came to mind and I tried to dismiss it, yet the word was apt. I was familiar with inspiration in my own work, but this was as different from ordinary inspiration as a bird is from a worm! The ideas I 'received' were just as startling. They turned all my ideas of reality upside down. I'd been sure of one thing: you could trust physical reality....Now I could never feel that way again. During that experience I knew that we formed physical matter, not the other way around; that our senses showed us only one three-dimensional reality out of an infinite number that we couldn't ordinarily perceive; that we could trust our senses only so far and only so long as we did not ask questions that were beyond their limited scope of knowledge (1970: 12).

After the first book in 1966, Roberts went on for the next twenty one years to produce six more books which she claimed were dictated by the 'energy personality essence' called 'Seth'. After a long illness and hospital stay of nearly two years, Roberts died in September 1984. As her books went out of print in the 1990s, the continued demand for them encouraged her husband to bring out new editions with notes by himself describing the circumstances of the encounters with 'Seth'. He also published posthumously four books based on Roberts' notebooks with his own foreword and accompanying explanations.⁶

⁶ By Jane Roberts: *How to Develop Your ESP Power* (1966); *The Seth Material* (1970); *Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul* (1994 [1972]); *The Nature of Personal Reality: A Seth Book* (1994 [1974]); *The Unknown Reality: A Seth Book, Vol. I, II* (1995 [1977]); *The Nature of the Psyche: Its Human Expression: A Seth Book* (1996 [1979]); *The Individual and the Nature of Mass Events: A Seth Book* (1997 [1981]). Published posthumously by Robert Butts: *Dreams, Evolution and Value Fulfilment: A Seth Book, Vol. I, II* (1986); *Seth, Dreams and Projection of Consciousness* (1986); *The Magical Approach: Seth Speaks about the Art of Creative Living* (1995); *The Way to Health: Specific, Practical Techniques for Solving Everyday Problems and Enriching the Life you Know: A Seth Book* (1997).

Hanegraaff has suggested that the Seth texts, the 'Ramtha' material, *A Course in Miracles*, and other channelled texts largely from the 1970s greatly influenced and helped to spawn the New Age movement of the 1980s (1996: 126-127). These texts encouraged others to take channelling seriously. New Age devotees tried to become channellers themselves and began to write 'how to channel' manuals for devotees and for others looking for spiritual help. But more importantly, it could be argued, as Hanegraaff suggests, that the "pool of ideas" referred to by Partridge, the "taken-for-granted truths" uniting devotees of holistic spiritualities, derive from these channelled texts.

An Emic New Age Definition and Themes from 'Seth'

In order to place *A Course in Miracles* in its proper context as one of several influential channelled texts, I shall explore significant themes from Roberts' Seth material because it is regarded as the most influential of these spontaneously channelled texts. In so doing, I will be building on the work of Hammer who refers to Jane Robert's Seth texts as a "major manifesto for New Age thought....For the growing New Age network, this was the first time that channelled messages were widely read and accepted" (2004: 342). Hammer believes that the basic metaphysical concepts which became common currency for New Age devotees in the 1980s were developed from the Seth material (ibid.: 324). I shall try to demonstrate this by showing how an emic definition of New Age spiritualities from the 1980s echoes many of the themes of the Seth material.

Writing at the end of the 1980s, New Age Activist William Bloom, though reluctant to box the New Age into a conventional definition, nevertheless cited six ideas common to

most forms of New Age spiritualities. He referred to the six themes as “open-ended scaffolding on to which we can hang our experiences, wisdom and intuition” (1990:12).⁷ Since Bloom writes from an emic perspective, and since he circulated his ideas to other New Age devotees for criticism, approval and suggestions, his “scaffolding” is especially significant for the researcher as it represents a conscious attempt from within a movement which claimed to have no boundaries, to define its boundaries. Bloom argued that New Age devotees are united in the six beliefs that: 1) all life is the manifestation of spirit; 2) all life is interconnected energy; 3) each person has two levels of consciousness – a temporary outer personality and a multi-dimensional eternal inner being (or Higher Self); 4) all souls in incarnation are free to choose their own spiritual path; 5) individuals may seek supernatural guidance from spiritual teachers (angels, guardian spirits, extraterrestrials, spirits of the dead, non-physical beings – all beings who have been released from the cycle of reincarnation) through channelling (1990: 13); 6) there are a greater number of these ‘enlightened teachers’ at the present time, causing what Marilyn Ferguson has referred to as a ‘paradigm shift’ of cosmic proportions which will bring a ‘New Age’ (1980: 23-34). Like Ferguson, Bloom had a vision of a millennial New Age of love and harmony (1990: 14).

There were two significant features of Bloom’s definition: it assumed a belief in reincarnation and, in spite of recognising no authority beyond the Self, it recognised teaching authorities with special knowledge of spiritual truth helpful to seekers outside the Self. This reliance on teaching from ‘outside’ (even when that ‘outside’ is one’s

⁷ For other attempts to define New Age spiritualities see Spangler (1984: 82); Wilson (1989: 17ff); Melton et al (1990: xvff); Bloom (1991: xvi); Streiker (1991: 51 ff); Perry (1992: 4ff); Olds (1993: 69ff); Hanegraaff (1996: 522); Hammer (2004: 76-77).

Higher Self) constituted a form of authority both in a specific way for the individual devotee and also for humankind. Receiving spiritual wisdom from an authority higher than the individual's consciousness came through the process of channelling. Furthermore, if Bloom's "scaffolding" revealed a surprising unity and structure within the New Age of the time, it also assumed a unity in what the New Age devotees condemn. Bloom saw the New Age replacing and therefore repudiating: 1) the closed, rational mechanistic view of the universe based on Newtonian science and the positivist edifice built on this foundation; 2) the Enlightenment belief in the omnipotence of human reason, built on the foundation of the temporary outer human personality; 3) the hierarchical structures and dogmas of traditional religions which are seen to be compromised by, if not constructed and nurtured by, the first and second points above. For the individual New Age devotee, following the path of a New Age spirituality meant transformation and evolution of the ego-centred personality with its emphasis on individual gain, to a holistic outlook based on the belief in the interconnectedness of all life. This mysticism of interconnectedness was the foundation for the millennial vision of a New Age of all-encompassing unity and love. Bloom's definition revealed a core of non-negotiable beliefs which positively united New Age devotees as well as at least three outlooks toward which they were united in opposition. It was significant that Bloom believed that the increase in the number of authoritative, enlightened teachers imparting spiritual wisdom by channelling would usher in Ferguson's "paradigm shift" of cosmic proportions, bringing in new scientific, political, religious and philosophical systems (1980: 23-35). Like Ferguson in the 1970s and 1980s, Bloom in the early 1990s saw the cosmos evolving towards a New Age. It was the process of channelling which was

central to this taking place as the individual devotee received direct access to spiritual truth from teaching entities beyond what is available through a person's senses, or as devotees received mediated revelation through channelled texts such as the Seth books and *A Course in Miracles* (1990: 14). In the following section I shall show how the channelled wisdom of the Seth material may have influenced Bloom's taxonomy.

All Life is the Manifestation of Spirit and Is Interconnected Energy

Bloom's first and second themes relate closely to one another. The understanding that all life is the manifestation of spirit and is interconnected energy is also the foundation of teaching about metaphysical reality in the 'Seth' texts. In an early session with Roberts, 'Seth' refers to himself as an "energy personality essence" and teaches that "we are individualised portions of energy, materialised within physical existence to learn to form ideas from energy, and make them physical" (1970: 13). Whilst Bloom writes of all life as "spirit" and "energy", in the Seth texts there are references to all life as "consciousness", "thought" and "energy" (ibid.: 13). Furthermore, the Seth material teaches that "everything has its own consciousness". As Roberts wrote after a session of dictation from 'Seth', "Now I suddenly felt the fantastic vitality present even in things I'd previously considered inanimate. A nail was sticking in the windowsill, and I experienced ever so briefly the consciousness of the atoms and molecules that composed it" (1970: 12). Bloom taught that "all life is the manifestation of spirit" and Roberts wrote that matter is the manifestation of thought: "We project ideas into an object...the basic idea is that the senses are developed, not to permit awareness of an already existing material world, but to create it...." (1970: 13).

Bloom's second point is broadly egalitarian: all life forms – people, animals, plants, the amoeba, indeed all existence – are part of the same interconnected energy. The understanding of the unity of all levels of existence and reality ('holism') lies at the core of New Age spiritualities. Holism makes sense of the other themes in Bloom's "scaffolding". It is possible that this desire for wholeness evolved from a common opposition to what are perceived as the non-holistic views of the former age. Examples of non-holistic thinking might be forms of dualism from the Judaeo-Christian tradition: the distinction between God and creation, the distinction between humanity and nature, and the distinction between spirit and matter (see MacCulloch, 2002). Also to be opposed as non-holistic are forms of reductionism associated with the Enlightenment, especially the reduction of spirit to matter, viewing the spiritual as part of material processes. The Seth material appears to turn this thinking on its head, viewing the material as spiritual, as in the case of Jane Roberts' "nail".

Whilst it is clear that Roberts' channelled writings seek to replace all forms of dualism and reductionism with radical teaching about the interconnectedness of all existence, there are passages which are less egalitarian than others. God is referred to as "All That Is", but also as "Primary Energy Gestalts" (1970: 267). The latter seems to give legitimation for the belief that all reality comes from an Ultimate Source. Some scholars argue that the privileging of an Ultimate Source gives rise to a hierarchy within reality instead of the egalitarianism behind other theories of interconnectedness (Hanegraaff, 1996: 123). Roberts may have been influenced in the belief in an Ultimate Source by an

earlier channeller, the Christian psychic Edgar Cayce, who several decades earlier had written of creation myths which show reality emanating from one Original Source (Sugrue, 1970 [1942]: 308). The Seth material tells its own version of a purposeful creation.

At first, all of probable reality existed as nebulous dreams within the consciousness of 'All That Is'. The purpose is, quite simply, being as opposed to nonbeing...nonbeing is a state in which probabilities and possibilities are known and anticipated but blocked from expression.... 'All That Is' saw then an infinity of probable, conscious individuals, and foresaw all possible probabilities from its dream...with love and longing It let go that portion of Itself and they are free. The psychic energy exploded in a flash of creation. It has given life to infinites of possibilities....It found a way to burst forth in consciousness....Yet all individuals remember their source and now dream of 'All That Is' as 'All That Is' once dreamed of them. And they yearn toward that immense source...and yearn to give it actuality through their own creations (1970: 266-268).

While this teaching about the interconnectedness of all reality clearly receives legitimation from belief in an Ultimate Source in the Seth material, more egalitarian theories of interconnectedness are also emphasised.⁸ The apparent contradiction between these two views is accommodated by use of the holographic paradigm, another feature of Roberts' writing which became significant in later New Age thinking and self help texts.

Holography

Holography, originally a technique for making three-dimensional images of objects, has been adopted by New Age thinkers because it suggests that objects can be converted to frequency patterns and back to objects, thus changing Newtonian/Cartesian 'mechanistic' ideas about the nature of physical reality.⁹ New Age devotees are drawn to holography

⁸ For a comprehensive exploration of the tensions between these forms of holism and for an overview of other forms of New Age holism, see Hanegraaff (1996: 119-158).

⁹ For a New Age critique of Newtonian/Cartesian view of reality, see Capra (1983, 37-62).

because there is not a one-to-one relationship between the object and the frequency. Each part of the frequency contains all the information of the complete object.

Neuroscientist Karl Pribram had theorised that the brain stores memory by distributing memory fragments throughout the brain in such a way that each part of the brain contains the information of the whole. To Pribram, this implied that reality as we perceive it might be a holographic image, created by the brain out of frequencies (in Talbot, 1991: 27). David Bohm, a physicist influenced by the Indian thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti, coined the term 'implicate order' to describe a radical holistic worldview: "...everything is enfolded into everything. This contrasts with the explicate order now dominant in physics in which each thing lies only in its own region of space (and time) and outside the regions belonging to other things" (Temple, 1982: 361-365).

Using the holographic paradigm, Roberts writes: "Each part of the soul contains the whole" (1972: 358). According to 'Seth', reality exists outside time and space: it is a singularity containing the potential for all creation. In 'Seth's' holographic scheme, each conscious mind is the creative source responsible for its own realities. Realities in the physical world are illusions which have come from this singularity. The Seth material sees each mind as containing all the information of the universe in the "spacious present" – a concept which involves non-dimensionality. The "spacious present" implies not a return to the Ultimate Source, but the place where multidimensional realities can be created: "Now the inner ego exists in the Spacious Present. The Spacious Present is the

basic ‘time’ in which the whole self exists but *the various portions of the self have their experiences in their own time systems*” (1970: 222 – italics in original).

After ‘Seth’ various New Age writers used the holographic paradigm to combine physics with parapsychology to give scientific legitimation to “the ancient mystics’ ideas of reality”. For example, the popular New Age writer Michael Talbot wrote in 1991:

If the picture of reality in our brains is not a picture at all but a hologram, what is it a hologram of? ...was it possible that what the mystics had been saying for centuries was true? Reality was *maya*, an illusion, and what was out there was really a vast, resonating symphony of wave forms...that was transformed into the world as we know it only after it entered our senses (1972: 78).¹⁰

Talbot seems to follow closely the Seth material in this understanding of reality:

You form physical matter and the physical world that you know. The physical senses actually can be said to create the physical world, in that they force you to perceive an available field of energy in physical terms and impose a highly specialised pattern upon this field of reality (ibid.: 78).

The transpersonal psychologist, Ken Wilber, though suspicious of the use of the holographic paradigm by New Age writers, nevertheless sees a unity between New Age spiritualities and ancient Eastern beliefs such as Zen Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism and Hindu Advaita Vedanta: “...what we once imagine to be the isolated self in here turns out to be all of a piece with the cosmos out there. And this...is your real self. Wherever you look, you behold your original face on all sides...Tat tvam asi, the Hindus say, “You are That”. Your real Self is identical to the Ultimate Energy of which the universe is a manifestation (2001: 50).

¹⁰ Wouter Hanegraaff points out that “the holographic model does not imply that the holographic blur is the ‘true’ reality. The true reality is the original object....If the New Age interpretation were correct we would be forced to regard both the image and its original as equally illusory.” To Hanegraaff, this shows that “the holographic world view is not actually derived from holography” but is used to “defend an already existing intuition” (1996: 143).

The Seth material describes Wilber's place of "no boundaries" by suggesting "the physical environment is as much a part of you as your body" (1970: 136). Commenting on 'Seth's' teaching, Roberts writes, "Through the centuries many people have recognised that mind and matter were related, but the Seth material specifically gives the ways and means by which mind is translated into the reality that we know" (1970: 137).

Roberts reconciles egalitarian interconnectedness with a belief in an Ultimate Source by using the holographic principle: "What you call God is the sum of all consciousness, and yet the whole is more than the sum of its parts. God is more than the sum of all personalities and yet all personalities are what He is" (1970: 271). Roberts' conjoining of these contradicting interpretations provides the theoretical foundation for Bloom's first two themes. It later gave rise to what is possibly the most powerful theme in today's self help literature (examined in Part Three of this thesis), namely that "we create our own reality".

Other New Age writers besides Bloom drew on Roberts' use of the holographic paradigm and her theories of interconnectedness and multidimensional reality in a variety of ways. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Ferguson applied holographic ideas to human consciousness: "Our brains mathematically construct 'hard' reality by interpreting frequencies from a dimension transcending time and space. The brain is a hologram, interpreting a holographic universe" (1980: 198). Chris Griscom uses the hologram as a means of accessing healing techniques for devotees: "At the Institute, we create a

threshold for people to begin accessing the hologram, to recognise that anything they see or experience is part of themselves” (Griscom, 1987: 149). The popular New Age writer Shirley MacLaine made holographic ideas of interconnectedness accessible to the general public in the 1980s and 1990s. Her view of the interconnectedness of all things, life and matter, is as radical as that found in the Seth material.:

Basic to New Age subatomic discoveries is the concept that in the subatomic world – the stuff of the universe – everything, every last thing, is linked. The universe is a gigantic, multidimensional web of influences, or information, light particles, energy patterns and electromagnetic ‘fields of reality’. Everything it is, everything we are, everything we do, is linked to everything else. There is no separateness (1990: 100).

Bloom’s second theme, that everything is interconnected, continues to inspire New Age devotees. Interconnectedness which acknowledges an Ultimate Source leads to a hierarchical view of the cosmos whilst the holographic paradigm suggests a radically egalitarian and, arguably, a deterministic view of reality. Both can be seen to be derived from the Seth texts, and both continue to be authoritative for those in new spiritualities. It is also true that whilst adherents of various interpretations of interconnectedness do not agree with one another, few New Age devotees would disagree with Bloom’s broad theme, that “all life is interconnected energy”. This theme, perhaps more than any other, gives definition to the new spiritualities. It provides them with a unifying ontology, making them far from ‘amorphous’. I have devoted much space to Bloom’s second theme and its link with the Seth texts; it is the foundation which supports and makes sense of his other themes.

The Higher Self

Bloom's third theme described each person as having two levels of consciousness – a temporary outer personality and a multi-dimensional eternal being. Bloom also described this as the “Higher Self”, what Paul Heelas calls “the sacred self” (1996: 2). The Seth texts use many words to describe this Self, which is one's true identity. Implicit in a belief in the Higher Self is criticism of outward religious authority and the edifice of modernity which has encouraged humankind to forget its true identity as one with God, thus denying the inherent wisdom of the Self. In Seth's words, “Western man has chosen to focus his energy outward and largely ignore inner realities” (Roberts, 1972: 317).

Regarding the loss of memory of one's true identity, Roberts wrote, “Man desired to step out of himself...this meant a giant separation from the inner spontaneity that had given him both peace and security” (1972: 399). The Higher Self is contrasted with the limitation of information from the five senses believed to reveal only one dimension of reality. Roberts wrote, “The physical senses actually create the physical world in that they force you to perceive an available field of energy in physical terms, and impose a highly specialised pattern upon this field of reality” (1972: 78). In contrast to this limited physical world of the five senses, the Higher Self,¹¹ is not limited: “The Higher Self is a field of concentrated action...a powerhouse of probabilities or probable actions seeking to be expressed” (1972: 88).

¹¹ Roberts also referred to the Higher Self as ‘the soul’ (1972: 88), the ‘inner self’ (1972: xv) and an ‘energy personality essence’ (1972: vii).

This concept of the 'soul' or the 'Self' came to be known by New Age writers most often as the Higher Self, although a variety of other names were also used, for example, sacralised Self, Universal Mind and divine Self. However, the idea of the divine found within each person was as central to New Age writers as was the theme of the interconnectedness of all life. David Spangler and George Trevelyan were two New Age thinkers who used this concept. Writing a few years after Roberts' first publication, Spangler, whilst not using the term 'Higher Self', referred to the concept in this way: "There is another part of myself, one that is vastly more expansive than my personality; it is a keeper self, one that participates in eternity even as my daily self participates in time" (1984: 64). In Spangler's thought system, the Self has an infinite consciousness not bounded by space and time; it participates in the divine Mind, yet is personal to the individual. The following year, George Trevelyan used the term 'Higher Self' and described it as our individual channel to the divine realm: "The great cosmic being is personalised for us through our Higher Self" (1985: 94). In her introduction to *Seth Speaks*, stressing the centrality of the Self, Roberts writes, "this book is Seth's way of demonstrating...that the soul or inner self is not something apart from us, but the very medium in which we exist" (1972: xv).

As with Roberts' theme of 'interconnectedness', the belief in the Higher Self was interpreted by New Age writers in several ways. Gary Zukav believes that a personality cannot communicate with his own soul (which contains all a person's incarnations simultaneously) without the Higher Self acting as intermediary (1989: 29-31; 86-87). MacLaine's books, seminars and television programmes made the vocabulary of the

Higher Self common currency to the public in the 1980s: “It has been through incarnation after incarnation and knows all there is to know about you because it is you...It is the energy that interfaces with the energy we refer to as God. It knows and resonates to God because it is a part of God” (1990: 104).

The Three Remaining Components of Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s fourth theme, that all souls in incarnation are free to choose their own spiritual paths, is allied with Roberts’ teaching that in our minds we create our own reality. The Seth texts offer the reader the prospect of infinite creative expansion: “You will discover the multidimensional love and energy that gives consciousness to all things. This will inspire you to take a better hand in the job of creation” (1974: 460). In Seth’s teachings, the theme of choosing one’s own spiritual path, of creating one’s own reality, means becoming co-creators with God. The holographic theory of the ‘spacious present’ makes it possible for Roberts to suggest to readers that they are/were active participants in the energy which created the universe. The Seth texts assert that our very being consists of creative energy and through us ‘All That Is’ created all reality. Whether we know it or not, we are “constantly creating our own reality as surely as we breathe” (1970: 202; 1974: 458-459).

The idea of choosing one’s own path and creating one’s own reality became an important empowering theme in New Age literature of the 1980s and in the later spiritual self help

texts discussed in Part Three.¹² It continues to be an important concept. For example Louise Hay, author of one of the earliest popular self help books, *You Can Heal Your Life*, claims: “Each one of us creates our experiences by our thoughts and our feelings....We create our experiences, our reality and everyone in it” (1984: 7).

The very existence of the Seth texts (and other channelled texts largely from the 1970s) and their continued influence illustrate Bloom’s fifth and sixth themes: that individuals may seek supernatural guidance from spiritual teachers through channelling, and that there are a greater number of these teaching entities now than was previously the case.

Bloom and ‘Seth’: Towards a Definition and Name

Bloom’s six themes were “open-ended scaffolding” upon which each devotee could construct a personal spiritual edifice. Nevertheless, however broadly the themes were articulated, the notion that New Age spiritualities were formless, defying all attempts at definition, created simply at the whim of each devotee, appears to be flawed. Basic metaphysical concepts such as the interconnectedness of all life and the belief in the Higher Self were fundamental to New Age spiritualities and were considered non-negotiable truth to participants. I would suggest that there are five ‘beliefs’ which continue to be such taken-for-granted ‘truths’ by devotees of new spiritualities that they form useful points of definition: 1) the belief in the Self as in some sense divine; 2) the belief in the interconnectedness of all reality (however this is understood); 3) the belief

¹² See, for example, *A Course in Miracles, Text* (1976: 14); Bohm and Peat (1987: 70, 203); Griscom (1987: 74; 1988: 56-57); Hay (1984: xiii); Houston (1982: 199); Jampolsky (1979: 129); MacLaine (1987: 19; 1990: 254); Pierrakos (1990: 214); Spangler (1984: 103); Susan Jeffers (1987: 195-196); Spezzano (1991: 251); Williamson (1992: 66-67); Neale Donald Walsch (1995: 45); Eckhart Tolle (1999: 80-81); Gary Renard (2002: 132).

that an experience of the Self has transforming powers for the individual and the cosmos; 4) the belief that in our minds we create our own reality; and 5) the belief in optimistic, limitless evolution for the individual and the cosmos. This final point represents a change of emphasis from the confident expectation of New Age participants in the 1980s that the turn of the millennium would see a transformation bringing universal peace and harmony. As this palpably did not happen, the hope was replaced (especially in the flow of self help literature featured in Part Three of this thesis) with the belief in limitless possibilities of evolutionary transformation for the individual. As with earlier new religious movements (and perhaps more rapidly), a pattern of routinisation became apparent.

I have noted the difficulties associated with use of the term 'New Age'. It is useful in differentiating between it and other spiritualities such as Paganism. It is also helpful as an historical marker for the emerging new spiritualities of the 1980s whose advocates happily embraced the term 'New Age'. However, the desire of many devotees of new spiritualities not to carry this label suggests that another term is needed. As noted, 'holistic milieu', 'occulture' and 'holistic revolution' have been suggested by scholars as more appropriate terms for the spiritual environments which, I believe, broadly adhere to the five points of my definition. Given the importance of theories of interconnectedness (or holism) in making sense of the other themes recurring in these spiritualities, I suggest that the term 'holistic spiritualities' might best describe many of the new spiritualities. It carries no negative connotations in today's culture and has the advantage of being faithful to the ethos of the new spiritualities.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to place the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles* in the context of the New Age spiritualities of the 1980s and in the context of the channelled literature largely of the 1970s. By showing the influence of another set of channelled writings from that period, the Seth texts, on 1980s New Age spiritualities, it has argued against the myths that New Age spiritualities defied definition and recognised no authority beyond that of the Self and individual experience. In this belief I have followed Hanegraaff, who wrote, “Many of the fundamental New Age beliefs have first been formulated in channelled messages. It is therefore fair to say that, in spite of the tendency among New Age believers to emphasize personal experience as the exclusive basis of religious truth, New Age religion must to a large extent be considered a religion of revelation, *Offenbarungsreligion*” (1996: 27).¹³ Hanegraaff views Roberts’ writing as paramount amongst the channelled texts emanating from this period: he calls her the “Muhammad of New Age and Seth as its angel Gabriel”. He questions whether New Age spiritualities of the 1980s would have developed as they did without the influence of this ‘revelation’ (1996: 126). This observation is borne out by the recommendations on the covers of the Seth texts republished in the 1990s. Commendations come from the foremost spiritual self help authors of the present time, including Gerald Jampolsky, Louise Hay and Marianne Williamson, authors of bestselling self help books based on *A Course in*

¹³ Another source of authority for New Age devotees has been provided by the Gnostic gospels. Given the belief (in Bloom’s sixth point) that the turn of the millennium is a time of rapidly advancing spiritual evolution, it is seen by New Age devotees to be no coincidence that the Gnostic library was discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in the twentieth century. Especially influential are Elaine Pagels’ *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: 1982) and *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (London: 2003). Other important sources of authority for New Age devotees were Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and the wisdom of ancient Mayan, native American and Celtic cultures.

Miracles, and Deepak Chopra, perhaps the most popular self help author of all time (in Roberts, 1994 [1974]).

Devotees of holistic spiritualities hold their epistemology of individual experience in tension with their recognition of a form of revealed authority. This feature of holistic spiritualities makes it possible for the researcher to explore the strategies used for religious discourse formation and legitimation in the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles*, as will be shown in Part Two. The following chapter will discuss the literature upon which this study builds.

Chapter Two

Literature Survey

Until the early 1990s there was a paucity of scholarly literature on New Age themes. This may have been linked to the perception within disciplines such as religious studies, sociology and psychology that it was a transitory popular trend largely linked to the 'baby boomer' generation and counter culture of the 1960s. There was a plethora of emic texts such as Marilyn Ferguson's early manifesto *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), the popular books of Shirley MacLaine (for example, 1985; 1987; 1990) the thoughtful works of David Spangler (1977; 1978; 1984 and 1993) and the transpersonal psychology texts of Ken Wilber (for example, 1990). However, the popular nature of the spiritualities and the flavour of excitement in many of these books perhaps militated against New Age spiritualities becoming the focus of serious research in the field of religious studies.

General Etic Texts

However, from the early 1990s onwards many aspects of New Age spiritualities have been studied and a handful of foundational works are now available to the scholar of new spiritualities. First of these is Paul Heelas' *The New Age Movement* (1996), which rightly identified the Self and "Self spirituality" (1996: 118) as the unifying theme in what seemed to be a movement of bewilderingly diverse beliefs and practices. Heelas also traced the now familiar roots of the New Age in Theosophy, Eastern thought, Gurdjieffians, the Human Potential Movement, the Romantic poets and American transcendentalism and New Thought. Heelas presciently identified areas where New Age

beliefs were beginning to influence mainstream culture such as education (ibid.: 77-80), healing (ibid.: 80-84) and business (113-115). Furthermore, Heelas was one of the first to suggest that, whilst Self spirituality may be the unifying factor in New Age spiritualities, and whilst “epistemological individualism” may be a defining characteristic, at the same time there are voices of authority coming from “sources other than those within the Self” (ibid.: 34). This is an idea upon which this thesis builds.

Second, the Dutch scholar Wouter Hanegraaff’s comprehensive *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (1996) is based on a study of New Age texts. It looks at major trends within the movement, varieties of New Age experience and the significance of Western esotericism as it relates to secular Western society. Hanegraaff’s discussion of ‘Channelling’ and his identification of the lack of research into this aspect of New Age spiritualities pointed me toward the study of a channelled text, *A Course in Miracles* (1996: 23-41).

Third, the Swedish scholar Olav Hammer’s *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (2004) was published during the course of my research. Hammer’s discussion of “Narratives of Experience” (2004: 331-454) encouraged me to look for such narratives as a means of religious discourse formation and legitimation within the often repeated story of the genesis of *A Course in Miracles* and also within the narratives of *Course* students. Hammer’s case study of *A Course in Miracles* (ibid.: 441-453) coincided with many of my ideas on discourse formation within the *Course* community. An earlier book, Jon P. Bloch’s *New Spirituality, Self, and*

Belonging: How New Agers and Neo-Pagans Talk about Themselves (1998), had suggested to me the importance of allowing participants of alternative spiritualities to speak of their experiences, background and difficulties. Bloch's account predicted what my fieldwork confirmed in two instances, that there is considerable overlap between different spiritualities and, perhaps more surprisingly, that there is considerable overlap between the approaches of new spiritualities and those of Christians (1998: 83-86).

A Course in Miracles uses Christian vocabulary and draws on the gospels in that it is believed to be Jesus' channelled correction of errors in the Gospel accounts. Therefore, Daren Kemp's published thesis, *The Christaquarians? A Sociology of Christians in the New Age* (2003), whilst concluding that there is not sufficient ground to argue for the existence of an organised movement of New Age Christians (ibid.: 3), confirmed my conclusions from field work with *Course* students and readers of spiritual self help texts, namely that Christians draw on New Age ideas. Likewise Christianity has influenced the new spiritualities especially, perhaps, in the eschatological ideas developed in many of them. Kemp's *New Age: A Guide* (2004) provides a case study of *A Course in Miracles* and a study group which he attended as a participant observer (ibid.: 13-28). Kemp points to the need for more work to be done on the spirituality of the *Course* (ibid.: 27).

Fourth, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's *The Spiritual Revolution* (2005) explores the results of fieldwork done in the town of Kendal over a three year period. Heelas' earlier work (1996) had mentioned channelling eight times (ibid.: 23, 26, 34, 40, 75, 89-90, 109, 110) and acknowledged the authoritative role it plays for New Age participants (ibid.:

34). I was disappointed, therefore, to find that in their questionnaire, the possible New Age activities listed for the residents of Kendal to identify did not include channelling as a choice. In spite of this, several respondents indicated that it is a spiritual activity which they regularly practise. The Kendal Project, as reported in Heelas and Woodhead's book, confirmed that holistic spiritualities have entered the mainstream of life in Great Britain and they predicted the continued decline of traditional Christian denominations. Their study found, as I have found in research with the *Course* community, that the new spiritualities represent something more than the 'baby boomer' generation coming into positions of power but being unable to pass their spirituality on to the next generation (Bruce, 2002: 99-101): 27 per cent of those interviewed in Kendal who were involved in a new spirituality (in some sense) were under the age of 45 (2005: 134). Furthermore, my survey (see Chapter Ten) confirmed their findings that people tend to turn to spirituality after the age of thirty (2005: 107): only one respondent to my survey was under the age of thirty. Finally, Heelas and Woodhead's work was significant in the context of my study as they argue that the term 'New Age' should be put to rest. They suggest instead the term 'holistic milieu', which is more open-ended and highlights the importance of a holistic approach, whether it be towards the environment, one's own health, social concerns or an underlying ontology.

Fifth, Christopher Partridge's magisterial two volume *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004/2005) confirmed (on a much larger canvas, yet in meticulous detail) what I was finding from my fieldwork with *Course* students, namely that 'alternative' spiritualities

are no longer viewed as developments on the fringes of society by the devotees themselves and also possibly by the wider public.

Hannegraaff (1996), lists a comprehensive bibliography of New Age texts, both emic and etic and Daren Kemp (2004) contains a chapter which surveys academic literature on new spiritualities, including unpublished theses.

Finally, James R. Lewis wrote the following in a chapter exploring the legitimation strategies used by the Heaven's Gate group: "The discussion of the strategies power elites deploy to maintain their position has consumed a small lake of scholarly ink....In sharp contrast, the analysis of the legitimation strategies deployed by new religions has not moved forward substantially since Weber....No one has published a single article (much less a book) focused on this issue – despite the fact that legitimacy is a core issue for emergent religious movements" (in Partridge, 2003: 105). Lewis has since made his own contribution towards filling this gap in his *Legitimizing New Religions* (2003a). By exploring the legitimation strategies employed by the scribes, editor and students of *A Course in Miracles*, I hope to extend, in a preliminary and exploratory way, the discussion on legitimation strategies in new religious discourses begun by Lewis.

Literature on Channelling

I have already listed a few of the many self help manuals which teach seekers how to become channels in order to receive unmediated wisdom from spiritual teaching entities. Hannegraaff has rightly pointed to a paucity of scholarly work on channelling and its

influence on the new spiritualities. From an emic perspective, Jon Klimo's *Channeling: Investigations on Receiving Information from Paranormal Sources* (1998), gives a comprehensive history and modern overview of channelling with material on the Seth texts as well as *A Course in Miracles* (ibid: 27ff).

Channelling is referred to, sometimes only in passing, in most scholarly texts on new spiritualities or new religious movements (e.g. Barker and Warburg, 1998; Chryssides, 1999; Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000). James Lewis and J. Gordon Melton included a chapter by Suzanne Riordan on channelling in their *Perspectives on the New Age* (1992: 105-126). Melton has written of channelling,

Channelling was essential to the New Age. It was not peripheral as some who have presided over the demise of the New Age have suggested. Under the barrage of the heavy media criticism of channelling, some have attempted to argue that channelling was a superficial addendum loosely attached to the New Age. To the contrary...the idea of a New Age was presented to the public by entities who spoke through Alice Bailey and her students and repeated by channellers to the present" (in Barker and Warburg, 1998: 138).

This thesis hopes to begin to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the text of *A Course in Miracles* and exploring the manner in which a new religious discourse formed around a channelled text.

Literature on *A Course in Miracles*

To date there has been little scholarly work published on *A Course in Miracles*. In 1991 Hanegraaff published an article in Dutch comparing *A Course in Miracles* with other sources of channelled wisdom such as Seth, Armerus and Ramala: 'Channeling-literatuur: een vergelijking tussen de boodschappen van Seth, Armerus, Ramala, in *A*

Course in Miracles'. Daren Kemp (2004) contains a case study of the *Course*, studying it from the perspectives of the History of Ideas, Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology. James R. Lewis' *Encyclopedic Sourcebook of New Age Religions* (2004) contains a chapter on the *Course* by Kelly T. Pollock, 'The Success of *A Course in Miracles* in the World of Material Culture'. Pollock argues that the success of the *Course* lies in its connecting with themes already present in popular culture.

There have been several doctoral theses written on the *Course* within the discipline of psychology. Predating these is a Master's thesis in 1987 in the Philosophy Department of the University of Cincinnati by Robert Hellmann, 'Evil and *A Course in Miracles*' which presents *Course* teaching as "a solution to the problem of evil". Claiming to be "the first masters thesis explicitly based on *A Course in Miracles*", it was published as a book in 2002: *God, Self and Evil: A Miracle Theodicy*. The earliest doctoral dissertation (1986) was Marion Pastor's 'The Nature of Forgiveness in the Christian Tradition: Modern Western Psychology and *A Course in Miracles*'. Pastor published a revised emic version of the thesis as *Anger and Forgiveness: An Approach That Works* (1990). In 1997 Lori Lynn Phelps wrote a dissertation, 'Freud and *A Course in Miracles*: A Comparative Analysis'. This study investigated to what extent *A Course in Miracles* fulfils a need for a psycho-spiritual understanding of the self. Phelps described it as a hermeneutical study of Freudian thought and *A Course in Miracles*. As to current research, Gaia Zanini in Bologna, Italy is pursuing doctoral research on the *Course* and its influence on new spiritualities in Italy.

Emic Course Literature

The last mailing from the *Miracle Worker* magazine (July/August 2006) contained a leaflet offering over two hundred books on some aspect of *Course* teaching by over a dozen authors. No doubt similar mailings in the USA and Australia, for example, might offer even larger numbers of emic texts, popular and scholarly, providing interpretations of the teaching of *A Course in Miracles*. Most of these books are published by the in-house publishers of *Course* organisations. Robert Perry's books, for example, are published by his organisation, the Circle of Atonement through their publishing arm, Circle Publishing. Chapter Six, on the development of competing *Course* interpretations, deals with some of these emic texts. However, so vast is this area, that an in-depth analysis of the plethora of *Course* books would need to be the subject of another study. That said, several emic texts are significant for this analysis of the development of the religious discourse based on the *Course*. Kenneth Wapnick, the final editor of the *Course* and a close friend of William Thetford and Helen Schucman who scribed the *Course*, has written the story of how the *Course* came to be written. This book, *Absence from Felicity* (1991), is perhaps the most important source for the narrative which came to give *Course* spirituality authority for its devotees. Other books by Wapnick and those by Robert Perry and, for example, Colin Tipping show how *Course* themes were developed along diverging paths and therefore are significant for this study of discourse development.

The chapters on *Course*-generated popular self help literature rely on a different sort of emic text, the spiritual self help manual. These follow the pattern of the largely Christian self help texts popular from around 1870 to 1960. Examples of these are popular books

such as Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) and Hannah W. Smith's *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life* which was first published in 1875 but was reprinted by popular demand throughout the twentieth century. An exception might be M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* (1978) which draws on *Course* themes, along with Buddhist, Christian, Freudian and Jungian ideas. However, Peck does not acknowledge his debt to the *Course* and in later books attacks *Course* teachings on evil. One could say that there is an element of 'coming full circle' with Steve Chalke's *The Lost Teachings of Jesus* (2003), designed to present the Christian message to those in holistic spiritualities by repudiating the stereotype of a wrathful God of punishment, and emphasising a Christian God of love, and with Rick Warren's bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002), which purveys an orthodox Christian message but uses the self help format: each chapter gives the reader a "point to ponder", "a verse to remember" and "a question to consider" for each day, whilst techniques are offered to help the reader to learn, for example, to pray more effectively. Warren's book has sold over 20 million copies worldwide and is reminiscent of the success of Christian self help books in the first half of the twentieth century.

This chapter has looked at the literature upon which this study builds. The following chapter will examine methodological issues involved in trying to gain an 'insider's' understanding of a religious discourse whilst undertaking research from an etic perspective.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

The concept of phenomenology has grown up alongside the development of religious studies. It is seen as an examination of non-Christian religions, not looked at through the prism of the Christian faith, or compared to the Christian faith, but as 'phenomena' in their own right. The Christian faith was thus placed on 'a level playing field' with other religious traditions. This movement grew out of a belief in the superiority of the Western Enlightenment setting. The movement towards phenomenology strove to listen sincerely to the voices of those within religious traditions and to understand them in their own context and in their own terms. However, even with the open minded attitude implied by the phenomenologist's approach there remained the tension between maintaining neutral standards by letting the emic voices be heard without judgement, and the need for analysis and critique demanded within the discipline of religious studies. Furthermore, even whilst 'alien' traditions were heard with respect, there continued a tendency to ignore what were seen as fringe (or strange) religious innovations such as Theosophy in the last two centuries and more recently the religious creativity of Jane Roberts, Helen Schucman and other manifestations (for example the UFO religions). Until recently, what was written was largely polemical, either from an Enlightenment or from a Christian stance. Phenomenology introduced a hermeneutical or analytical approach which strove to understand a religious group's teaching for its own sake whilst bracketing questions of verifiable truth (the concept of *epoche*). This approach tied religious manifestations

closely to cultural contexts. However, helpful as phenomenology has been, many have felt the need to acknowledge that the researcher, the method and the discipline of religious studies itself are situated in their own cultural context and carry baggage which influences what a researcher sees and even chooses to investigate and analyse.

Reflexivity

Scholars of religion over the last two decades have found the idea of ‘reflexivity’ helpful in taking a step towards greater objectivity in research. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines reflexivity as “a method, theory, etc. which takes account of itself or especially of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated.” It was the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who influenced research in the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century by introducing the concept of ‘reflexivity’ to fieldwork. Other disciplines, including religious studies, have benefited from it in several ways.

First, Bourdieu is seen to have shown the way a researcher should lay open for inspection in his work the process of reflection involved, as well as the interplay between theory, practice and epistemology. He insisted on what he called “the objectification of objectification” (1990: 59). By this he meant that the practice of the researcher must be subjected to the same critical and sceptical eye as the practice of the researched (1977: 15-27).

Second, Bourdieu wanted to lay open the researcher, as much as the method of research, to self-critical reflection. In his words, “as soon as we observe the social world, we introduce in our perception of it a bias due to the fact that, to study it, to describe it, to talk about it, we must retire from it more or less completely” (1992: 69). To neutralise the distorting effects of this inevitable distance between the researcher and the object of research, he called for a consciousness that conclusions drawn from empirical work are the product of a theoretical gaze, “a contemplative eye”, and he urged the researcher to try to ignore “everything injected into his perception of the object by virtue of the fact that he is placed outside of the object, that he observes it from afar and from above” (1992: 70).

Bourdieu was also conscious of the danger of ethnocentricity on the part of the researcher. He warned against focusing too much upon the private person of the sociologist in a way that fails to “objectivise himself”. Researchers may fail to “realise that what their apparently scientific discourse talks about is not the object of research, but their relation to the object” (1992: 68). He wrote, “a genuinely reflexive sociology must constantly guard itself against epistemocentrism and the ethnocentrism of the scientist” (1992: 69).

Third, Bourdieu changed the way a researcher views the object of research. Researchers had spoken of doing empirical field work. In sociology, a field had been defined rather rigidly as “a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 34-35). Bourdieu spoke

instead of a 'habitus', a set of historical relations in the form of "mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action" (ibid.: 35). 'Habitus' is a more flexible concept than a field of research. Thus, in addition to his call for the fusion of theoretical construction and practical research, Bourdieu aimed for greater analytical flexibility when weighing up varying respondents' views. The flexibility implicit in Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus', in a sense, combines all the above points demanding that researcher, method, the object of research and the discipline of religious studies itself acknowledge its 'situatedness'.

Christopher Partridge has applied Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' in his study of *The Re-Enchantment of the West*: "Biographical identity construction – the choices we make, the cultural preferences we have, our ways of thinking, how we make sense of life – is done within a 'habitus', the cumulative collection of cultural and personal experiences that all of us carry" (2005: 328). The idea of 'habitus' as opposed to 'field' suggests a more level playing field. 'Field' suggested a place where researchers observed from a privileged position of neutrality those being researched. 'Habitus' carries with it the suggestion that each person, the researcher as well as the persons who form the object of research come together, each with their own 'habitus'. The process of research can be expected to change both the researcher and the researched, adding something to that which was previously the 'habitus' of each.

Gavin Flood, another religious studies scholar who has drawn on Bourdieu's ideas, suggested in his *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999), that 'reflexivity' might be achieved

through a dialogical approach involving a “metatheoretical discourse” (1999: 34-36). He writes, “Research within...religious studies is in the end conversation with texts and persons. The researcher is entering into a dialogue with a text or person and herself becoming a part of an intersubjective and intertextual matrix in which all understanding – and explanation – arises” (ibid.: 35). The perennial problem of finding the balance between third person objective accounts and first person subjective narratives may be solved, according to Flood, by a ‘dialogism’ which recognises “many voices”: “Dialogue therefore involves the recognition that all utterance is intertextual and all encounters intersubjective. Such an approach to the inquiry into religions, that might be called ‘dialogical reflexivity’, becomes aware of the intertextual and intersubjective subjectivity. Furthermore, dialogue is not agreement or consensus, but can be the clarification of difference; a clarification that will necessarily entail reflexivity in delineating the boundaries of a discourse against another’s, which is also critique” (ibid.: 35). Flood agrees with Bourdieu that “reflexivity can create a critical distance from theory formation and reveal the biases inherent within any research study” (ibid.: 35). In Bourdieu’s words, “Such critical reflection on the limits of theoretical understanding is not to discredit theoretical knowledge...but rather to give it a solid basis by freeing it from the distortions arising from the epistemological and social conditions of its production” (in Flood, 1999: 35).

Application of Bourdieu’s Theory to this Study

First, Bourdieu demanded that the researcher lay open himself as much as possible by trying to approach the subject with an attitude free from preconceived notions. This is to

ask a great deal of the researcher. There has been a shift in the last five years, and new spiritualities provoke a less scornful attitude in the academy than when I began my research. For the purposes of this study, this means approaching my subject (whether in reading an emic text, attending a *Course* conference or speaking to a *Course* student) with an attitude as free as possible from many of the preconceived notions of New Age spiritualities prevalent in religious studies circles. It could be compared to asking a jury member in a trial which has received universal media coverage to enter the trial with a mind open only to the evidence in the court. Assumptions about new spiritualities in the public culture as well as in the many critiques (scholarly, religious and popular) have been confusing and often negative. Besides the charge that they are “amorphous”, these would include, for example, the accusations that New Age spiritualities are shallow and lacking in “engaging commitment” (York, 1994: 21), narcissistic and self-indulgent (Lasch, 1985: 165), childish (Bruce, 1996: 33), commercialising (Heelas, 1996: 202) and increasingly prosperity oriented (Heelas, 1992: 141-161; 1999: 60-67). New Age ideas are said to be heterodox and unsophisticated (Bednarowski, 1994: 66), their use of great religions, such as Hinduism, trivialising (Wilber, 1987: 12) and, perhaps most serious, their healing practices dangerous to ill people (in Rose, 1996: 303-304).

An unhelpful notion common in academia until recently was to view these new spiritualities only as sociological (or psychological) phenomena rather than as areas of religious creativity. Too many past studies have refused to look seriously at New Age spiritualities as significant contributors to contemporary religious and cultural debate and innovation.

Second, I am conscious of myself as a researcher who is a member of the Church of England. I must, therefore, listen with particular care to the implicit and explicit critiques of institutional, traditional religion voiced by devotees of new spiritualities. Much writing has been devoted to polemical responses to the criticism of those in holistic spiritualities. A truly reflexive methodology demands that the researcher listen carefully when answers to ultimate questions given by traditional religious institutions are deemed to be inadequate. These critiques of the mainstream by New Age spiritualities may offer new insights into contemporary cultural issues in the West which may demand fresh, innovative thinking.

A third point about myself as researcher is that I have been enriched in my thinking by friendship and dialogue with Hindus. This brings with it the attendant dangers of seeing Hindu influence where perhaps another researcher would find none, as well as the related one of reflecting uncritically the nuanced but genuine feelings many Asians have about the way New Age spiritualities have appropriated aspects of their traditions.

A final point in applying Bourdieu's insights to the methodological assumptions of this study involves balance. As noted above, Bourdieu believed that a researcher could come a little closer to accuracy in research through finding a balance between theory, practice and methodology, and by allowing each to inform and critique the other. I have used a mixture of methods: analysis of the texts, a quantitative survey of students of *A Course in Miracles*, participant observation of *Course* meetings, conferences and study groups over

a five year period, qualitative research through unstructured interviews with *Course* students and consumers of spiritual self help books based on the *Course*. Whilst no researcher can claim to achieve complete objectivity, it is hoped that this mixture of methods will build a balancing corrective to the twin dangers of ethnocentrism and epistemocentrism on the part of the researcher. Perhaps, in the end, the problem of the situatedness of researcher, method and theory can never be solved (see Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979). However, awareness of the problem is a first step towards gaining a truer understanding from an etic perspective of the dynamics of those within a religious discourse. The following section explains how the components of the methodology are used in this study of the development of the religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles*.

Analysis of Written Sources

Part Two of the thesis analyses the channelled text, *A Course in Miracles*, as well as texts describing the genesis of the *Course* (Chapters Four and Five). The analysis of the text of the *Course* finds key themes which are later exploited and made accessible through the spiritual self help texts analysed in Part Three. The final chapter of Part Two (Chapter Six) analyses the “in house” texts written by *Course* devotees, showing how divergent interpretations of the *Course* developed, as well as power struggles between various interpreters of *Course* ideas, as the process of routinisation began.

Part Three (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine) analyses popular self help texts derived to a greater or lesser degree from *A Course in Miracles*. The popularity and bestselling status of many of these texts is a visible pointer toward the growing influence of holistic

spiritualities in popular culture today. There are now large successful publishing houses given over entirely to New Age, Neo-Pagan and other spiritual publications (for example, Llewellyn, Aquarian, Element and Gateway Publications). The well-established publisher, Harper Collins, bought a particular imprint, Thorsons, devoted to publishing books on new spiritualities: in 2001 it was described by *The Economist* as Britain's largest self help publisher (13 May 2001: 35). Most cities and towns in the U.K. now have esoteric bookshops, often combined with health food shops and sometimes attached to healing centres. Sainsbury's, Tesco and other supermarket chains have moved into what is perceived to be a lucrative market and by featuring 'well being' shelves to attract those who would normally go for these items to a health food shop.

Popular bookshops such as W.H. Smith, Waterstones and Borders are increasingly stocking and selling New Age related books on shelves marked 'spirituality', 'body, mind and spirit', and 'spiritual self help'. Thorsons reported that the sales of self help books using spiritual techniques "exploded" in 2000-2001 and claimed to have a broad readership: "Even women in their seventies are taking up yoga", according to Belinda Budge, publishing director of Thorsons, and she predicted that there would be a "boom in spirituality" (*The Economist*, 13 May 2001: 35). This thesis argues that the large body of spiritual self help literature on the shelves of all types of book shops is evidence that, through the medium of self help manuals, New Age spiritualities are no longer confined to the margins of society; they have become a cultural and practical resource for people in all walks of life (see Heelas, 1996: 5).

It is easy to denigrate the spiritual self help books on at least two counts. First, the banal, popular nature of the subject matter and the book titles can give the impression at best of superficiality and at worst of a vulgar trading on the hurts of vulnerable people for commercial gain. One author of many New Age self therapy books, for example, offers help and promises success for those with mental problems, insomnia, obesity, indigestion, parenting difficulties, addictions and romantic problems (Chopra, 1997). Titles such as Sondra Ray's (1990) *How to Be Chic, Fabulous and Live Forever* have caused Heelas to wonder whether this aspect of the New Age "deviates from what might be thought of as genuine self-spirituality" (1999: 70-71).

Second, critics have questioned the dogmatic, over-simplified mechanics of the therapies offered in the literature: take these seven steps and the results are assured; or do that for ten minutes a day and gain this outcome. The emphasis on techniques is seen as the opposite of the receptivity and reverent sense of mystery that are usually linked with spirituality (Bregman, 1996: 271-272).

However, it can also be argued that close attention should be paid to the problems and issues that come from popular culture and the responses which they evoke, even though one may be uncomfortable with some of the vocabulary and the packaging. The fact that the literature is selling suggests that the self help manuals are influencing a wide swathe of contemporary culture and students of religious studies ignore it at their peril. The American religious studies historian, Mary Farrel Bednarowski has pointed out how 'Grass-roots theology' has produced numerous religious movements, some of which

survive: “Mormonism, Adventism and Christian Science are good examples of that phenomenon in American religious history” (1994: 66).

This section would not be complete without an argument for the importance of the analysis of written materials. Analysis of texts may provide the researcher with a more accurate presentation of the beliefs within a religious discourse than will the empirical techniques of interview, participant observation and survey. Devotees of a religion often have a less systematically ordered idea of their beliefs than what is found in published material. Furthermore, the tension between desired objectivity and the hermeneutic role of the researcher can never be absent.

Quantitative Research

The difficulty of finding and questioning students of *A Course in Miracles* was solved by contact with the Miracle Network in the UK. The editor of its magazine, *Miracle Worker*, allowed me to place a questionnaire in its July/August 2002 edition. The survey seeks to learn what sort of people are students of *A Course in Miracles*, how deeply it affects their lives, whether they supplement study of the *Course* with spiritual self help literature, how they view traditional religions, whether they mix *Course* spirituality with other spiritual resources and how they view themselves within mainstream society.

In constructing the survey, reflexivity entailed trying to use the categories of thought of *Course* students. At the time, I was attending a weekly ‘Introduction to *A Course in Miracles*’ which met in the home of the teacher. In the penultimate session I was allowed

to use the eight member group as a pilot for the questionnaire. It was quickly apparent that some of the questions devised had made little sense to them and they were helpful in suggesting words and categories which helped me to get closer to asking for the information which I wanted. At a later stage, the magazine editor suggested other small changes of wording in order to make the questions understandable to *Course* students.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has been defined as a method which focuses on “exploring, in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996: 60). It aims for depth rather than breadth. When conducting interviews, I was conscious that, even in unstructured, in depth encounters, the interview was not always a true conversation but a “deliberately created opportunity by the interviewer to talk about something that the interviewer is interested in but which may not be of the same interest to the person being interviewed” (Dingwall, 1997: 59). I tried to offer space for *Course* students to speak of what was most important to them and not to force them into categories convenient for the thesis.

Bourdieu gave three warnings about research through unstructured in depth interviews. First, as a “discourse of familiarity” it takes much that is important (the ‘warp and woof’ of the respondent’s everyday life, for example) for granted. Second, because it is an “outsider-oriented discourse” it will tend to remain at the level of the general. Third, the discourse of informants tends to reflect (in response to preordained questions) a “semi-

theoretical disposition” (in Jenkins, 1992: 53). In spite of this, Bourdieu argues that reflexivity can give validity to qualitative research. He calls for a theorising of limits of social knowledge (as opposed to scientific knowledge). The results of qualitative research which once might have been viewed as objective ‘facts’ should now be taken as multivocal interpretations of the informant as well as of the researcher (in Barnard, 1990: 58).

Participant Observation

As a researcher I have been ‘spoilt for choice’ because of the many active organisations and study groups following *A Course in Miracles* in the UK. For five years I have attended seminars, weekly study groups, workshops and conferences run by organisations following *A Course in Miracles*. During the course of the research I have been aware of the necessary tension between the researcher’s aim for a degree of objective knowledge and the need for the researcher to maintain a hermeneutic role. On the one hand, I have tried to give a true account of the religious discourse that has developed around *A Course in Miracles* as expressed by the devotees themselves in texts, meetings and interviews. On the other hand, the discipline of religious studies demands that the researcher use models, comparisons, categories and language appropriate to scholarship on its own terms. Scholarly research must give an etic account which permits a critique of emic material showing its relationship to its etic context. What interested me from an etic perspective, was how the narrative and text of the *Course* and the personal narratives of *Course* devotees illustrated the development of a new religious discourse, its strategies of

legitimation, and movement into routinisation, fresh revelation and finally the formulation of an eschatological dimension.

Chapter One located the religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles* in the context of the channelled texts of the 1960s and 70s. Chapter two reviewed emic and etic literature upon which this study builds, and Chapter Three discussed methodological issues involved in research into a religious discourse. Part Two will analyse the text of *A Course in Miracles* as well as the tradition which grew up around the scribing of the *Course*. It will argue that *Course* tradition construction makes links with Weber's study of how religions develop legitimation strategies for their followers, and sheds new light on the process of routinisation of charisma.

Part Two

A Course in Miracles: Legitimation Strategies in Religious Discourse Development

Chapter Four

The Story of the *Course*: Charisma and the Construction of Tradition

The History of the Course

A Course in Miracles is a set of channelled texts. In his overview of the New Age, Wouter Hanegraaff refers to *A Course in Miracles* as the closest thing which the New Age network has to a widely revered ‘sacred scripture’ (1996: 37-38). The Swedish philosopher of religion, Olav Hammer refers to the commentaries on the *Course*, the devotional literature – now over a hundred volumes - which it has spawned and a 1,108 page concordance to the *Course*, and comments that “these are distinct signs that *A Course in Miracles* has entered the process that leads to the creation of a canonical scripture” (2004: 450). Richard Smoley, author of *Inner Christianity: A Guide to the Esoteric Tradition*, writes that the *Course* is:

...a powerful means of spiritual transformation. Although it is sometimes misrepresented as a feel-good nostrum, actually it teaches a rigorous form of mental discipline that, if scrupulously observed, would lead one to exclude all thoughts of hate and negativity. Anyone who carried out its teachings in full would be a saint (2002: 44).

Published in 1976,¹⁵ the *Course* consists of 1200 pages in three books: the *Text*, the *Workbook for Students* containing a lesson for each day of the year, and the *Manual for Teachers*. In addition to these central texts, there are two supplements to the *Course*, published as one book: *Supplements to ‘A Course in Miracles’: Psychotherapy and the*

¹⁵ The Criswell edition, a reduced photocopy of the original manuscript, was published in 1975.

Song of Prayer. These supplements are believed to have been channelled to the scribe of the *Course* by the same author. Another volume, *The Gifts of God*, contains poetry by the scribe of the *Course* and is not seen as canonical material. However, the final fourteen page poem, 'The Gifts of God', is believed to be the final message from the author of the *Course* received by the scribe, and therefore is considered part of the 'canon'.

The Importance of the *Course* Narrative

Students beginning to study the *Course* are usually shown a video or told the story of how *A Course in Miracles* came to be written. Book tables at *Course* meetings and workshops feature several books which tell the story of the scribing of the *Course*.¹⁶ In addition to these books, many commentaries and books interpreting the teaching of the *Course* have a section telling the story of how the *Course* came to be written.¹⁷ There are at least two reasons for the great importance attached to the story of the *Course*. First, the manner in which the material was believed to have been channelled is seen to give legitimation and authority to the teachings contained in the *Course*. Second, the story of how the *Course* came to be written down is thought to provide a living example of the principles taught in the *Course*. In the words of Kenneth Wapnick, who helped to edit the *Course* for publication, "One of the interesting things about how *A Course in Miracles* came to be written is that the very process of its being taken down, and the story around it, provide a perfect example of...the basic principles of the *Course*" (1999: 3). Another *Course* commentator, Robert Perry, writes, "The story of how *A Course in Miracles* came

¹⁶ For example, D. Patrick Miller (1997); Robert Skutch (2001 [1984]); Kenneth Wapnick (1975); Wapnick (1991). See also the video 'The Story of *A Course in Miracles*' (1987).

¹⁷ *A Course in Miracles* is published with a preface which tells the story of how the *Course* came to be (1996: vii-xiii). See also, Wapnick (1983: 1-24); Robert Perry (1987: 11-19); Wapnick (1997: 3-5); Perry (2004: 7-24).

into the world is as unusual and unconventional as what the *Course* teaches. Indeed, the two can be seen as mirror images of each other. Somehow, the way the *Course* came to be is a reflection of what it teaches. Remarkably, the story of its birth is a *parable* of its teaching” (2004: 7 – italics in the original).

The Official Version of How the *Course* Began: Schucman and Thetford (1965-1972)

The story is well known to *Course* students. Two people are responsible for writing *A Course in Miracles*: Dr. Helen Schucman (1909-1981) and Professor William Thetford (1923-1988). Schucman was, at the time, research psychologist and Associate Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City; Thetford was her department head. Both are thought to be unlikely candidates for bringing to the world esoteric wisdom believed to have been channelled from the biblical Jesus. In 1958, Thetford was head of the Psychology department at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. Thetford hired Schucman as a research psychologist in the department. Schucman, a militant atheist from a non-observant Jewish New York family, did not believe in paranormal phenomena and viewed the hearing of voices as pathological behaviour. Thetford, equally non-religious, led a department torn by professional jealousy and strife. Within the department, the worst relationship seemed to be that of Thetford and Schucman (Miller, 1997: 9-15).

Schucman later described the job as “ghastly”: the department lacked adequate space and funding, the “upper echelon” of the university regarded it as a liability, and the work was carried out in an “atmosphere of suspicion and competitiveness” greater than any she had

known (Wapnick, 1999: 79; Skutch, 1984: 31). On her arrival in the department, Schucman noticed that Thetford looked “haggard, in need of someone to talk to”. On some level Schucman felt she had been “sent” to help him (Wapnick, 1999: 80). In spite of the context of the support both felt for one another, however, there was a hostility which defied rational explanation. An onlooker noted that they could not say “hello” to one another in the morning without friction and tension (Wapnick, 1999: 80). They seemed to bring out the worst in one another. Whether they were working on a grant proposal or deciding where to eat lunch, they could not reach an agreement. Thetford was a quiet, thoughtful man; Schucman was assertive and abrasive (Skutch, 1984: 31-32).

In June of 1965, before the weekly meeting of their research project, Thetford spoke to Schucman with uncharacteristic passion. As she later described it, Thetford “took a deep breath, grew slightly red-faced, and delivered a speech. It was hard for him...because the words sounded trite and sentimental even as he said them...he had been thinking, and had concluded...‘There must be another way’” (Wapnick, 1999: 83). In retelling the story of Thetford’s speech to Schucman, most *Course* literature reads, “There must be another way”. However, Thetford himself, speaking on the promotional video produced by the Foundation for Inner Peace in 1987, remembers saying “There must be a *better* way”. In another reference to the speech later in the video he says, “There must be *another* way”, and in a third mention of the speech he says “When I said, ‘There must be *another* and *better* way’” (1987 – italics mine). According to what has become a legend in *Course* circles, however he worded it, Thetford suggested specifically that they try a different approach in the research meeting that day. He would not get angry nor attack anyone in

the meeting; he would try to look for good in what each person said. He would cooperate, not compete. Thetford was surprised at Schucman's response. "I jumped up, told Bill with genuine conviction that he was perfectly right, and said I would join in the new approach with him" (Wapnick, 1999: 84).

Thetford and Schucman's "joining together" to find "a better way" is seen by *Course* teachers as an example of the narrative illustrating *Course* teaching. The idea of "joining together" is a *Course* principle: healing never takes place in isolation in *Course* teaching, but always involves two people "joining together" (Wapnick, 1983: 4). In the words of the *Course*, "Salvation is a collaborative venture...God will come to you only as you will give Him to your brothers" (*Text*, 1996: 562). On a deeper level, Thetford and Schucman's "joining together" illustrates the belief that no one will return to their true identity in God until everyone does. Everyone is believed to have "one mind"; "joining together" with another person makes this truth a reality (Perry, 1987: 12). "Brother you need forgiveness of your brother, for you will share in madness or in Heaven together. And you and he will raise your eyes in faith together, or not at all" (*Text*, 1996: 422).

Schucman and Thetford's "joining together" is also an example of what the *Course* speaks of as a "holy instant" (*Text*, 1996: 301). In the words of the *Course*, "The holy instant is the Holy Spirit's most useful learning device for teaching you love's meaning"(ibid.: 312). Its enables "you to suspend judgement" and its purpose is to join two people (ibid.: 562). The *Course* teaches that a "holy instant" takes place when two people let go of entrenched patterns of thought and leave a space for something new.

Afterwards, it is believed that they do not return completely to how they were before. Whatever new has entered their lives takes on a life of its own, influencing them (and others, given *Course* teaching that all human kind have one mind) in surprising, significant though sometimes imperceptible ways: “The ark of peace is entered two by two, yet, the beginning of another world goes with them. Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn its special function in the Holy Spirit’s plan, now that it shares His purpose. And as this purpose is fulfilled, a new world rises in which sin can enter not....” (ibid.: 433).

In her unpublished autobiography, Schucman wrote, “Neither of us did very well at the meeting that afternoon...nor can I truthfully say that we are wholly successful even now, so many years later. I can say, however, that we have kept on trying....” (Wapnick, 1999: 84). Whilst the atmosphere in the department gradually became better as Thetford worked for better relationships, the relationship between Thetford and Schucman never fully healed and eventually became worse. However, during the period after this speech there was improvement. Later, this feature of Schucman’s and Thetford’s relationship, that indeed it worsened until her death in 1981, is emphasised in *Course* narratives. Wapnick emphasises that both Thetford and Schucman in their final years “were each firmly convinced that the other was the cause of all problems and failures: past, present and future” (Wapnick, 1999: 321; see also 368). Their failure to apply *Course* teaching to their own relationship is often cited as proof of the supernatural nature of the revelation brought by them to the world, a revelation which had little to do with their human personalities and their relationship. Wapnick writes, “Helen’s ego was so dominant that

in no way could she herself have written *A Course in Miracles*, and so Someone [sic] else must have" (1999: 371). *Course* teacher Robert Perry writes, "Helen's resistance to the *Course* is legendary among *Course* students" (2004:12). Wapnick, referring to the period when the *Course* was edited, uses similar language: "Helen's now almost legendary anxiety surrounding the *Course* was probably never in fuller force" (1999: 348). Perry considers the possibility that the *Course* came from Schucman's unconscious, which could tap into broader influences than what she had personally encountered, or perhaps "even into the actual realities of which the *Course* speaks" but dismisses this idea and concludes that Schucman's resistance to *Course* teaching suggests that the *Course's* author is the biblical Jesus as the channelled material implies:

It was not only the role of scribe that Helen resisted: she also had tremendous difficulty with the *Course's* teachings. They represented a fundamental challenge to her entire way of being. Along with her razor-sharp intellect came a judgemental temperament. She felt constantly victimized, was preoccupied with physical illness and was insistent that she was the one in control of her life. The *Course's* teachings called her to leave all of these things behind, to give up her judgements, control and sense of victimization. Yet by all accounts, she did not have much success in doing so" (ibid.: 13).

Perry concludes, "It is unmistakable who the author is claiming to be...Jesus of Nazareth...the author not only believes he is Jesus, he also believes that history's image of him has instilled fear in people, and he wants to change that image" (2004: 16).

Soon after Thetford's speech about "another way", between June and September of 1965, Schucman began to experience dreams, visions and mental pictures. Unlike normal dreams, Schucman did not have to be asleep to experience them. The dreams, highly spiritual, involved many historical periods. In them, Schucman was sometimes acting the part of a priestess and Thetford sometimes appeared too, showing that they had had a

relationship in many past lives (Perry, 2004: 8-10; Miller, 1997: 40-41; Wapnick, 1999: 85-166). In the most famous of these dreams, portrayed in the promotional video about the *Course* (1987), Schucman is seen floating down a river in a boat. She uses a hook to bring up buried treasure from the river bed and pulls up a large chest containing a manuscript holder labelled “Aesculapius”, the Greek god of healing (Wapnick, 1983: 7-9). Later Schucman would identify the binder which held together the manuscript of *A Course in Miracles* as being identical to the manuscript binder in the dream and would view the dream as a prophecy of her work as scribe of the *Course* (Miller, 1997: 41). During this time Schucman also had several psychic experiences and intuitions about friends which proved to be true and which enabled her to help them (Wapnick, 1983: 9). Thus *Course* narratives emphasise the charismatic quality of Schucman as a means of giving legitimation and authority to what later became a new religious discourse. Although an unwilling participant in what an Associate Professor of Psychology would deem to be pathological behaviour, she is assigned the role of charismatic receiver of supernatural revelations: she receives visions which predict the future, which help to heal friends and clients and the narratives overtly link her with ancient Greek mythologies as well as with biblical personalities and themes. Her reluctance to participate and her inability to derive help from the channelled teaching is presented in *Course* discourses as further proof of the supernatural nature of the revelation.

In Schucman’s final dream, she comes upon an old scroll in a desert cave. Opening the scroll, she sees three panels. On the middle panel she reads the words “God is”. As she opens the scroll to read the right and left panels, a voice explains, “If you look at the left

panel you will be able to read about everything that happened in the past. And if you look at the right panel you will be able to read about everything that will happen in the future” (Wapnick, 1999: 112). After an inner struggle, she decides to keep the scroll rolled so she can read only the centre panel which says “God is”. Schucman wrote later:

I rolled up the scroll to conceal everything except the center panel. “I’m not interested in the past or the future,” I said with finality. “I’ll just stop with this.” The voice sounded both reassured and reassuring. I was astonished at the depth of gratitude that it somehow conveyed. “Thank you,” it said, “You made it that time.” And that, it seemed, was that (Perry, 2004: 10).

This story illustrates *Course* teaching about time: that it is unreal, an illusion; that the only time known by God is the “spacious present” or “the eternal present: time is a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion....Yet there is a plan behind appearances that does not change” (*Workbook*, 1996: 291). The *Course’s* concept of time is non-linear and holographic. There is no past or future with God, only “being” (see Wapnick, 1990).

This part of the story of the *Course* shows Schucman’s experience illuminating another *Course* teaching: that each person has a specific function to perform in order to realise the “oneness” that is God. It may take a surprising form and it may uncover unknown abilities: “Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn its special function in the Holy Spirit’s plan, now that it shares His purpose. And as this purpose is fulfilled, a new world rises in which sin can enter not....” (*Text*, 1996: 433). In Perry’s words,

It has been designed *for* us, not *by* us. It does not wait for us to fashion it but merely to accept it. We do so by making a single, genuine decision to see another person’s interests as the same as our own (as Helen did by joining Bill in his search for a better way). By making this decision, we enter into a pact with God, even if we don’t believe in God. We unleash forces beyond our control that will conspire to carry us into our function. Yet we cannot fulfil our function alone. We need companions (like Bill) who will stand by our side, and we need guidance from a heavenly presence (like Jesus) to steer us through stormy waters that we could not navigate alone. And,

most importantly, we need to surrender our abilities to God rather than using them to puff up our own ego. We need to stop with the centre panel, just as Helen did (2004: 10-11 - italics in original).

In the period following the succession of dreams, visions and intuitions, Schucman became accustomed to hearing an “inner voice” which gave advice, often about her relationship with Thetford, or simply advice for Thetford. Wapnick suggests that Schucman had become “well aware that the voice belonged to Jesus, but she often did her best to keep his identity in the background of her mind” (1999: 179). The implications of comments such as Wapnick’s highlight the authority assigned to the material coming ‘through’ Schucman: it had something like a divine origin and conferred special spiritual authority upon the recipient of the channelled material. I say “something like” divine origin, in the light of the *Course’s* teaching that Jesus is no different from any human except that he ‘proved’ the unreality of death through his ‘resurrection’.

Schucman wrote a series of letters to Thetford passing on the advice she had received. On the evening of 21 October 1965, Schucman again heard the now familiar voice. Having complained about being “exploited” as a conduit for messages for Thetford, she noted, “Jesus: Ask Bill please to help you get over being mean about it *fast*” (in Wapnick 1999: 179 – italics in the original). From the notes which she took at this time, it is clear that she understood the voice to be that of Jesus, even before the dictation of the *Course* began. Schucman wrote,

I did not understand the calm but impressive authority with which the Voice dictated. It is largely because of the strangely compelling nature of this authority that I immediately referred to the Voice with a capital “V”. The particular combination of certainty, wisdom, gentleness, clarity and patience that characterized the Voice made that form of reference seem perfectly appropriate” (in Wapnick, 1999: 179).

Schucman's use of the capital 'V' for voice speaks for itself of the authority, even divinity, she wished the reader to believe the source of the channelled material possessed. Later that same evening of 21 October, the voice began to give her specific instruction: "This is a course in miracles. Please take notes." After taking down a page of dictation, Schucman stopped and telephoned Thetford saying that she felt frightened of the new tone of the voice. Thetford encouraged her to continue to take the dictation and to meet him in the office early the following morning to discuss what had happened and to see if they could make sense of the dictation. This first dictation which Schucman transcribed became the Introduction at the beginning of *A Course in Miracles*, loved, memorised and often quoted by *Course* students:

This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time. The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, and what is all-encompassing can have no opposite. This course can therefore be summed up very simply in this way: **Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists.** Herein lies the peace of God (*Text*, 1996 [1975]: 1 – bold type in the original).

Thetford, moved by the passage, encouraged Schucman to continue to write down the dictation as it came to her. This was the beginning of seven years of collaboration between Schucman and Thetford which produced the manuscript that became *A Course in Miracles*. Schucman would take down dictation from the voice, read it to Thetford in his office the next day, and Thetford would type from Schucman's dictation (Miller, 1997: 12-19; Perry, 2004: 11-12; Skutch, 1984: 54-74; Wapnick, 1999: 179-180). This introductory section was followed by 'fifty miracle principles' mixed in with advice specifically for Schucman and Thetford. This advice concerned their work and their

professional and personal relationship, many passages beginning, “Tell Bill that....” (in Wapnick, 1999, 247-299). Since the immediate impetus for the supernatural events that had overtaken Schucman had been the result of her and Thetford’s resolution to improve their relationship (“to find a better way”), as well as to improve relationships within the Psychology Department at Columbia University, it may seem logical that much of the early personal material which was later removed by Wapnick’s editing was addressed to Thetford and Schucman about their relationship. I shall at the end of this chapter suggest other possible reasons for the receipt of so much personal material and its removal from the text of *A Course in Miracles*.

Wapnick has written that, early on, Schucman’s anxiety about receiving dictation from a voice was so great that the writing was “ungraceful” and “terse”. Schucman’s early experience of the voice was like an elder brother; later, after Chapter Five, the material came to sound like a lecture (1999: 180). As noted, *Course* teachers view Schucman and Thetford’s “joining” to find a better way to solve departmental strife as an illustration of a central *Course* principle: that when two people join together for a common goal, whether or not they are religious, something of genuine spiritual significance happens (Perry, 2004: 11; Wapnick, 1999: 186).

As to why Schucman was given spiritual teaching which claimed to come from the biblical Jesus, she wrote in her unpublished autobiography:

I was given a sort of mental “explanation” in the form of a series of related thoughts that crossed my mind in rapid succession and made a coherent whole. According to this “information”, the world situation was worsening at an alarming pace. People all over the world were being called back to help, and were developing what to them

were highly unexpected talents, each making his individual contribution to an overall, prearranged plan. I had apparently agreed to take down a course in miracles [*sic*] which the Voice would dictate to me as part of the agreement, and my doing it was actually my reason for coming. It did not really involve unexpected abilities, since I would be using abilities I had developed very long ago, but which I was not yet ready to use again...and that was why I would have so much trouble doing it. However, people were reaching a point where they were losing more than they were gaining. Thus, because of the acute emergency, the usual slow, evolutionary process of spiritual development was being by-passed in what might be called a “celestial speed-up”. I could sense the urgency that lay behind this explanation, whatever I might think of the content, not to mention my not understanding it. The feeling was conveyed to me that time was running out (in Wapnick, 1999: 181).¹⁸

Again, it is impossible not to note the special authority and spiritual role assigned to Schucman by this passage: times are perilous, divine intervention of a special type is required and Schucman has been chosen to be the vehicle of this special divine intervention. Whilst a core teaching of the *Course* renounces all ‘specialness’ and forms of separation, the reader is offered in this passage the opportunity to bypass normal “spiritual development” in favour of the *Course* which will offer the devotee a “celestial speed-up”. Schucman thus assigns herself the traditional role of charismatic recipient of unmediated divine revelation; but at the same time she claims to have been unhappy with the role of scribe for the Voice, asking “Why me? I’m not even religious. I don’t understand the things that have been happening to me and I don’t even like them. They make me nervous. I’m just about as poor a choice as you could make.” This reluctance, as noted, heightens the authority of the divine intervention through her. In her unpublished autobiography, also edited by Wapnick, she wrote that the Voice answered, “On the contrary, you are an excellent choice, and for a very simple reason. You will do it” (in Wapnick, 1999: 181).

¹⁸ For a slightly different rendering of Schucman’s explanation about the “celestial speed-up”, see Skutch, 1984: 60.

In describing the process of this dictation, Schucman wrote, “I would feel it coming on almost daily. The timing never conflicted with work or social activities, starting when I was reasonably free to write without interference. I wrote in shorthand¹⁹ in a notebook that I soon began to carry around with me, just in case.” Schucman claimed that there was nothing automatic about the writing: she frequently refused to take dictation, sometimes for as long as a month. However, these episodes left her depressed and she returned to it. If she was too tired and fell asleep during dictation, it usually came to her before breakfast the following morning and sometimes she even transcribed dictation on her way to work (Wapnick, 1999: 182). Wapnick compares the process to Schucman having a tape recorder in her mind and being able to turn it on and off at will, with no seeming effect on the flow or quality of the material (1999: 183).

Whilst maintaining her professional stance as an atheist, Schucman came to regard the scribing of *A Course in Miracles* as her life’s work, while Thetford referred to it as a “sacred trust.” Thus, Schucman found herself in the strange situation of giving large portions of her time to something she professed not to believe in, “a situation as ridiculous as it was painful”. The voice claimed to come from the biblical Jesus and Thetford teased Schucman, “You must believe in him, if only because you are arguing with him so much”. As Schucman wrote,

I could neither account for nor reconcile my obviously inconsistent attitudes. On the one hand, I still regarded myself as officially an atheist, resented the material I was taking down, and was strongly impelled to attack it and prove it wrong. On the other

¹⁹ Most stories of the *Course* refer to Schucman taking down the dictation in shorthand which she had learned before becoming an academic. However, pictures showing notebook pages of Schucman’s transcription of the dictation (for example, Wapnick, 1999: 197) show notes taken in English with only a few shorthand symbols. It is possible that these are early notes and that only when the enormity of the task became apparent did she use a form of shorthand used by secretaries.

hand I spent considerable time in taking it down and later in dictating it to Bill, so that it was apparent that I also took it quite seriously (Wapnick, 1999: 186).

Wapnick sees this inner dichotomy in Schucman as further evidence of *Course* teaching illustrated by the *Course* story. He sees Schucman's resistance to the *Course* as an example of what psychologists call 'the dynamic of dissociation' where one splits apart the two parts of the self that are in seeming conflict, thus allowing them to coexist in the mind. In *Course* teaching, the two selves are the two parts of the mind containing the ego and the Holy Spirit. When brought together, the ego must disappear, as darkness disappears in the presence of light. The ego's defence system protects its thought based on fear by dissociating the love that threatens its existence (1999: 187).

During the first year of this collaboration, Schucman and Thetford appeared to benefit from the *Course* teaching on forgiveness and love. By December of 1966, however, the period of forgiveness and honesty in their relationship seemed to end and the old patterns of blame and guilt reappeared. As noted, each was convinced that the other was responsible for all problems. Their relationship to the scribed material also became less positive, especially for Schucman. There were fewer and fewer personal instructions for their relationship; the tone of the voice seemed more impersonal and after chapter five, much of the prose was in iambic pentameter (Wapnick, 1999: 310-311). Wapnick writes that when he met them in the autumn of 1972 right after the *Course* was completed, their relationship was at an all-time low and "it only seemed to worsen from there. It was almost as if Helen were determined to prove Jesus' *Course* was ineffective at best, and deleterious at worse, enabling her to feel even more justifiably bitter about her life" (1999: 193). Again, in constructing the 'story' of the *Course*, a tradition was created

which used the ineffectiveness of *Course* teaching for Schucman to prove the other-worldly provenance of the channelled material.

In spite of their deteriorating relationship, Schucman and Thetford carried on with the established routine of taking dictation and typing up the manuscript which became *A Course in Miracles*. When Schucman inquired of the voice as to when she would know the work was finished, Thetford, recalling these events in the *Course* promotion video (1987) tells how the voice replied that she would know it when she heard the word, 'Amen'. After three years, the word came in the first sentence of what became the final paragraph of the *Text*:

And now we say "Amen". For Christ has come to dwell in the abode You set for Him before time was, in calm eternity. The journey closes, ending at the place where it began. No trace of it remains to hide the face of Christ from anyone. Thy will is done, complete and perfectly, and all creation recognizes You and knows You as the only Source it has. Clear in Your likeness does the light shine forth from everything that lives and moves in You. For we have reached where all of us are one, and we are home, where You would have us be (*Text*, 1996: 669).

Thetford speaks of nine months passing after this final passage was recorded, during which Schucman became increasingly restless until she began again to take dictation. This time the form of the material was 365 lessons, one for each day of the year. This became *The Workbook for Students*, written between May 1969 and February 1971. Finally, after a pause of over a year, Schucman scribed the third volume of the *Course*, *The Manual for Teachers*, from April 1972 to September 1972 (Wapnick, 1999: 317). According to the many published versions of the *Course* narrative (see footnotes 16 and 17), there is the assurance that the *Course* today stands as Schucman heard it "except for some personal material that came at the beginning" (for example, Perry, 1987: 16).

Two More Key Figures in *Course* History: Wapnick and Skutch

The month the dictation ended, September 1972, Thetford read an article, 'Mysticism and Schizophrenia' by Kenneth Wapnick. Wapnick was a Jewish psychologist who had converted to a monastic form of Roman Catholicism through the influence of the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton. He was a clinical psychologist by training who had been Director of a school for disturbed children and had served as Chief Psychologist at Harlem Valley State Hospital. Having read Wapnick's article, Thetford arranged a meeting with Wapnick shortly before the latter was to leave for Israel to join a monastery. Before joining the monastery, Wapnick was shown the manuscript of *A Course in Miracles*. He immediately recognised that the *Course* was to be his life's work because it seemed to integrate psychology and his own desire for God (1999: 323).

Wapnick became a close friend of Schucman and Thetford. He convinced them that much work needed to be done on the *Course* to give it uniform punctuation, paragraphs, section divisions and generally better editing. According to Wapnick, "personal and professional material still remained and seemed inappropriate for a published edition. The first four chapters did not read well because the deleted personal material left gaps in the remaining text and required minor word additions to smooth the transitions". Schucman and Wapnick worked on the editing of the *Course* together. Wapnick said she did this with fierce intensity at times, but at other times fell asleep as the editing proceeded (1999: 347-349). Schucman's reluctance to acknowledge public authorship of the *Course*, linked with the continued hostility between Schucman and Thetford until her death in

1981 before it became a world-wide publishing phenomenon, caused the process of routinisation of charisma to take place earlier than might be expected in a religious discourse. Wapnick, as the final editor of the *Course* became its chief interpreter and de facto leader, inasmuch as the early *Course* community could be said to have had a leader. Wapnick himself suggests this: "Helen always maintained that the *Course* was for very few, for five or six" (1999: 366). Thetford, he writes, after his retirement from Columbia University in New York, moved to California and simply "became assimilated into the West Coast 'community' of *Course* students until his death in 1988" (ibid.: 366). Wapnick describes how Thetford "attended weekly and even daily groups on *A Course in Miracles* in both the San Francisco and San Diego areas, the two West Coast places where he lived. In these meetings, he assumed no teaching function, a role with which he never felt personally comfortable. Bill commented that he felt he and Helen had completed their assignment" when they handed the *Course* over to Judy Skutch who first published it (ibid.: 366-367). Wapnick comments, "Helen's and Bill's inability to forgive each other, let alone identify with *A Course in Miracles*, made such a leadership role impossible" (ibid.: 367). The implication is that the "leadership role" fell by default to Wapnick as the final editor of the *Course*. However, when I spoke to Judith Skutch in September 2005, she suggested that Thetford, to whom she was specially close during his final California years, felt he had never been given proper credit for his role in the genesis of *A Course in Miracles*. Furthermore, Skutch dismissed the idea that Schucman did not understand the *Course*, and insisted that Schucman was her own first *Course* teacher: "I met with her every day for a year to study the *Course*. I then met the following year daily with Gerald Jampolsky and Marianne Williamson who had been helping me in

the office and taught them the *Course* as Helen had taught it to me” (Interview, 7 September 2005). Wapnick admits that during the pre-publication period as Schucman withdrew from all contact with the *Course*, Thetford “began to identify more and more with Skutch and her presentation of the *Course*” (ibid.: 364). Regardless of the differing details coming from Skutch and Wapnick, it is clear that the role of teacher and interpreter of the *Course* in the communities as loosely structured as those linked by the *Course*, confers leadership powers. Wapnick traces his leadership role from having done the final editing of the *Course* with Schucman, whilst Skutch also claims a teaching lineage from Schucman having been taught the *Course* by her. Skutch in turn passed on the teaching, as she had received it from Schucman, to Jampolsky and Williamson, the first two writers of spiritual bestsellers based on the *Course*.

In spite of Skutch’s reminiscences, Wapnick suggests that he established his teaching authority over the *Course* during these earliest times of editing. He writes without guile, “A strange aspect to our editing recurred every once in a while, when after reading a particularly difficult passage Helen would turn to me in laughter, explaining that she did not have the remotest idea what the words meant. And so I found myself in the rather unusual situation of explaining the *Course* to the person who on another level understood what it was saying more clearly than anyone else possibly could. Thus began my first experiences of teaching this material” (1999: 351). Whilst the early death of Schucman brought on the process of routinisation of charisma, it is clear from Wapnick’s writings that he saw the mantle of leadership passed to himself even before the publication of the *Course*. Another implication of Wapnick’s assuming the role of ‘teacher’ is that, given

the nature of *Course* teaching, for example, that no one is special – not even Jesus – the teaching and interpreting role is that which confers authority within the spiritual community of *Course* devotees. Thus, as Chapter Six will show, the question of who, out of the many *Course* teachers emerging from the 1980s onwards, is *the* legitimate *Course* interpreter took on urgency by the turn of the millennium for the thousands of students of *A Course in Miracles*.

In May 1975, Thetford met the fourth and final person who figures largely in the *Course* history, Judith Skutch. A larger than life character from a prominent New York Jewish family, she taught parapsychology at New York University. With her then husband, Robert Skutch, she had established the Foundation for Extrasensory Investigation. The foundation's purpose was to provide funding for research into paranormal phenomena. In spite of her large network of socialite, New Age and Jewish friends who met in her apartment overlooking Central Park, Skutch writes that she was at a low point in her life in 1975. One night, she cried out in her bedroom, "Won't someone up there please help me" (Perry, 1987: 17). In my interview with Skutch she spoke of family problems which had driven her into this state described in *Course* narratives. In *Course* stories, when she met Thetford and Schucman and "read the first words of the *Course*, a wave of gratitude washed over her, tears ran down her face and she knew that this was the answer to her prayer, this was her map home" (Perry 1987: 17). Like Wapnick, Skutch became convinced that *A Course in Miracles* was to be her life work. The Skutches changed the name of their organisation to Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) because Schucman felt uncomfortable with esoteric paranormal phenomena. They published the first edition of

the *Course* in 1976. This edition consisted of *The Text, Workbook for Students* and *Manual for Teachers* published as separate volumes in a set.

Schucman and Thetford: The Final Years (1975-1988)

Whilst Schucman supervised the first edition of the *Course*, choosing the colour and design of its cover (Skutch Interview, 2005), she and Thetford soon distanced themselves from the public life of the publication. At Schucman's request, it was published anonymously. Thetford moved to California after he retired from Columbia in 1978. He attended *Course* study groups and practised the daily discipline of the *Course*, but, as noted, refused to assume a teaching or leadership role. After her retirement from Columbia University, Schucman became a recluse, seeing fewer and fewer people. She was often angered by people who claimed to have been helped by the *Course*. During the final months of 1980 and the beginning of 1981, Schucman's physical and emotional state worsened. The friends who attempted to visit her were shocked at her "dishevelled appearance, her disturbing thoughts" and her preoccupation with herself (Wapnick, 1999: 471). In her final year she left her apartment only to see her doctor. In 1981 she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. During the final months, Wapnick writes that he had "long ago abandoned any thought that on the level of Helen's conscious mind there would be any healing regarding her relationship with Bill, Jesus, or the *Course*" (1999: 470). Schucman died on 9 February 1981. Thetford died in California seven years later of a heart attack.

The Post Schucman/Thetford History of the *Course*

Meanwhile, a new edition of *A Course in Miracles* for Great Britain was launched in May, 1985 in Westminster Abbey by Lillian Carpenter, wife of the Dean at that time and herself a *Course* teacher. By the mid 1990s over a million and a half copies had been sold. In 1996 the copyright was given to Viking who promised to market it more professionally. However, leadership at Viking changed soon afterwards and the marketing campaign floundered (Interview, Skutch, 23 September 2005). Skutch's Foundation (FIP) took on the task of translating the *Course* into the major languages of the world.²⁰ In 1982 Wapnick and his wife Gloria formed the Foundation for *A Course in Miracles* (FACIM) as the official teaching arm of the original publishers. FACIM became a lakeside residential teaching centre in Roscoe, New York in 1983, and in 1995 their teaching centre was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents (Wapnick and Wapnick, 1987: 15). In 1999, the copyright was transferred from Viking to FACIM and in 2001 the Wapnicks moved FACIM to Temecula, California where they established a non-residential centre, teaching through the internet, writing and lectures (Interview, Patrick, 25 August 2005). Meanwhile hundreds of organisations grew up to support students of the *Course* and to emphasise one or another aspect of *Course* teaching. By the turn of the millennium there were thousands of *Course* study groups around the world as well as websites and publications of *Course* organisations, and hundreds of popular self help texts based in part or wholly on the *Course*. At the time of writing, there are over a dozen *Course* organisations in the UK running workshops, conferences, study groups and websites. All are loosely linked through the Miracle Network in London, directed by Ian

²⁰ The FIP website (www.fipdata.org) claims that the *Course* is now available to 90% of the world's population.

Patrick who edits *The Miracle Worker* magazine. In October, 2004, The Miracle Network celebrated its tenth anniversary with a weekend conference in London in which most British *Course* groups participated.

Whilst the *Course* remains largely unknown outside esoteric circles, it is also likely that most people have unknowingly encountered or been influenced by its teaching and spirituality in one guise or another. This happens most frequently through the self help books inspired in whole or part by the *Course*. These books are found on the 'spirituality', 'self help' and 'body, mind and spirit' shelves of popular bookshops such as Waterstones, WH Smith and Borders. Many of them have reached the top of bestseller lists on several continents and now have lives (and organisations) of their own quite apart from *Course* organisations.

Research Difficulties: All Roads Lead to Wapnick

Apart from quotations from Thetford speaking in the *Course* promotional video, Robert Skutch's short book, *Journey without Distance* (1984), Patrick Miller's *The Story of the Course* (1997) and my conversation with Judith Skutch, the above *Course* narrative comes almost exclusively from the writings of Kenneth Wapnick. However, in an interview given to *New Realities* magazine in 1984, Thetford appears to deny that the *Course* was edited in any significant way. In response to a question as to whether the *Course* was edited, Thetford replied, "It is true there has been editing of capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing and section titles in the *Text*. However, these changes were minor and the *Workbook* and the *Manual for Teachers* also appear exactly as they were

taken down by Helen” (September/October 1984: 7). It is significant that, speaking eight years after the publication of the *Course*, Thetford does not mention the role of Wapnick. However, Wapnick also admits to having edited Schucman’s unpublished autobiography. Wapnick writes that Schucman herself confessed to him that her unpublished autobiography was not an accurate account of her life as she had made changes for the sake of style and literary convention. The problem is compounded by the fact that Wapnick, on his own admission, helped her to edit out what he believed were distortions and to correct inaccuracies in this unpublished autobiography. It is impossible not to view even the material from Schucman’s unpublished autobiography as Wapnick’s understanding of Schucman. In Wapnick’s words,

It was mutually understood by us that her unpublished autobiography was hardly a true and accurate account of her life, being rather an overtly stylized, literary rendering – her public stance – that did not truly reflect the deeper level of Helen’s feelings and experiences. Our one attempt to correct the inaccuracies and edit out the distortions, while an improvement in some places, proved in many others to be even worse than the original. Recounting certain events in her life – especially those of a religious nature, and even more specifically, those events surrounding *A Course in Miracles* – aroused tremendous anxiety in Helen, and her discomfort directly led to an almost fierce over-editing that affected the faithfulness of her life’s retelling. It was out of this context, therefore, that I said to Helen that I would write her story, as well as the related events – inner and outer – that preceded, accompanied, and followed her taking down the *Course*. Helen agreed that this was a good idea (1999: 1-2).

Wapnick claims he feared that “sensationalism and mythologizing would obscure the truth of Schucman’s life” and he foresaw the “need for a biography I would write – as I truly held her in my heart – that would more closely reflect Helen’s experience: a life dedicated to bring forth the message of Jesus, and yet a life that was in truth, in Helen’s conscious experience at least, an absence from felicity” (1999: 2). That book, *Absence from Felicity* (1999) is Wapnick’s construction of Schucman’s life, scribing and relationship to the *Course*. From his earliest involvement with Schucman and Thetford,

he appears to have been concerned in shaping the text of *A Course in Miracles* as well as the religious discourse that he realised would develop from it.

Thus, when authors quote from Schucman's unpublished autobiography (as do Perry, Miller and others), they are quoting from writing edited, corrected and changed by Wapnick. *A Course in Miracles* itself was shaped and edited by Wapnick, together with Schucman. But by his own admission, this was sometimes done while she slept, or with Schucman claiming not to understand the material without Wapnick's teaching role. Wapnick relates that, when Schucman became anxious over the process of editing her autobiography and felt they were over-editing, Wapnick assured her that he himself would write her life story (1991:1). He did this in *Absence from Felicity* (1999). Thus, the researcher is largely left with Wapnick's understanding of Schucman, Thetford and their collaboration.

I was able to speak to Jon Mundy in June of 2000 when he lectured in the UK. Mundy knew Schucman, Thetford and Wapnick during the period after the *Course* was written and photocopied, but before Judith Skutch's Foundation published it. However, Mundy was quick to say that he did not know Schucman as well as Wapnick did, and he defers to Wapnick. Still, Mundy undoubtedly exerted an influence on Schucman: it was he who encouraged her to finish channelling the booklet *Psychotherapy, Purpose, Process and Practice* (1976). Mundy confirmed that by the time the first conference on the *Course* was held in New York City in 1978, Schucman already believed the *Course* was being misunderstood and she did not attend (Interview 8 June 2000).

Court Cases: A Fresh Look at the History of the *Course*

Since the year 2000, another source of information about Schucman, Thetford and *A Course in Miracles* has emerged. To the dismay of many in the *Course* community, several court cases ran throughout the 1990s over the copyright of *A Course in Miracles*. The key figures in these court cases were Judith Skutch and Kenneth Wapnick. Skutch, the original publisher had set up FIP. Wapnick, the present publisher was backed by his organization FACIM. Skutch and Wapnick brought cases against groups and individuals quoting from the *Course* without Wapnick's permission. The court cases began when *Course* teachers such as Marianne Williamson, Robert Perry and others quoted from the *Course* without permission from Wapnick, holder of the copyright. In her 1992 book, *A Return to Love*, which became a bestseller, Skutch told me that Marianne Williamson had so thoroughly absorbed the *Course* that she interspersed *Course* quotations with *Course* paraphrases and her own prose (Interview, 23 September 2005). Further court cases were brought against Robert Perry and his organisation, The Circle of Atonement, as well as others who quoted from the *Course* without Wapnick's permission, forbidding them to publish. By 2004 all cases had been settled out of court, except the case between FIP and FACIM on the one side and on the other side Endeavor Academy, a *Course* organisation thought to be heretical by some in the *Course* community.

Endeavor had originally launched several defences, one claiming that the *Course* could not be copyrighted since it had no human author. In 2004, however, Judge Robert Sweet

rejected all Endeavor's defences except one, that of prepublication distribution.²¹ The hearing held in May and June of 2004 was to decide if there had been sufficient distribution of the *Course* to place it in the public domain before it was copyrighted. For the copyright to stand, Wapnick and Skutch were asked by the court to prove that prepublication of the *Course* had been 'limited' and not 'general'. The court defined 'limited' as being to a select group, for a limited purpose and without the right of diffusion, reproduction, distribution or sale.

The story which came out of the court hearings in 2004 brings the *Course* narrative up to date. It is significant also in revealing how in the 1990s hermeneutical controversies (begun as early as the *Course* conference in New York in 1978) continued to develop between devotees with differing interpretations of the *Course*. More importantly, the copyright court case brought to public awareness a *Course* narrative different from that in the standard *Course* hagiographies, all of which have come through the filter of Kenneth Wapnick's interpretation. The court cases also called attention to the existence of several early (pre-Wapnick) versions of *A Course in Miracles* which throw light on Schucman and Thetford's collaboration and understanding of the *Course* before Wapnick and Schucman edited the final version.

Before this, the closest a researcher could get to an independent view of Schucman and Thetford was Robert Skutch's 1984 story of the *Course*, *Journey without Distance*.

²¹ The United States District Court Southern District of New York, Penguin Books USA, Inc., Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*, Inc. and Foundation for Inner Peace, Inc., Plaintiffs 96 Civ. 4126 (RWS) against New Christian Church of Full Endeavor, Ltd and Endeavor Academy, Defendants. The full trial transcript can be found at www.unitingthesonship.com/Background/trial_August%20Update. (Accessed 24 August 2004).

Written after his divorce from Judith Skutch, it relies on interviews with Thetford and contains lengthy quotations from him (1984: 3-8); it is also based on his personal knowledge of Schucman. When Wapnick published the first edition of *Absence from Felicity* in 1991, he wrote that one purpose for the book was to correct distorted accounts of Schucman and the origin of the *Course*. It is possible he is referring here to Skutch's account (Wapnick, 1991: 3). The 2004 court hearings revealed greater details of the *Course* narrative, reminding the public of several versions of the *Course* which evolved before the published one known to devotees.

The Trial *Course* Narrative: The Influence of Edgar and Hugh Lynn Cayce

FIP and FACIM presented their court defence of the copyright beginning in May 2004. According to the court transcript, Helen Schucman had been dismayed, before the scribing, by a series of dreams, visions and other paranormal experiences. She related these to Thetford who was already interested in such phenomena. He took her to visit Hugh Lynn Cayce, the founder of the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE). Hugh Lynn Cayce had set up ARE to promulgate the teachings of his father, Edgar Cayce. Edgar Cayce, who lived from 1877 to 1945, is revered by many as the father of modern channelling and was probably the most famous American psychic of the twentieth century. After correctly diagnosing cures for himself and others while in a trance, Cayce developed a belief in reincarnation and related people's illness to their past lives in ancient cultures. Cayce also gave predictions of future events (Sugrue, 1945). His pronouncements were taken down in shorthand by a secretary, then typed up, producing a

large body of published material.²² The flood of publications and consequent requests for healing advice possibly contributed to his sudden death in 1945.

According to the court transcript, Schucman and Thetford met with Hugh Lynn Cayce seeking advice before Schucman began to record the *Course*. They found him supportive, and after returning to New York, Schucman began to record the “rapid” dictation from the inner voice. It is hard to believe that Schucman’s writing down in shorthand the dictation of the voice was not influenced by the association she and Thetford had recently had with Hugh Lynn Cayce.

‘Text and Urtext’

The twenty-nine stenographic notebooks recorded by Schucman are the original written version of *A Course in Miracles*. As Wapnick has written, Schucman did not read to Thetford everything she had taken down. She felt that some of the material was meant for her alone.²³ The notebooks are kept by Wapnick and only he knows what Schucman did not dictate from the notebooks.²⁴ He quotes about thirty pages from the undictated material in *Absence from Felicity*, for example: “Remember a miracle is a spark of Life. It shines through the darkness and brings in the light. You must begin to forget and remember” (1999: 223). Robert Perry, writing in 2005, argues, “I believe that Helen’s

²² For a biography of Cayce see Sugrue (1970 [1945]). See also Bro (1989) and Stearn (1968).

²³ Kenneth Wapnick, ‘The Urtext and the Early Chapters of the Text of *A Course in Miracles*’. This is from the beginning of a 32-part cassette tape series entitled ‘Classes on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*’.

²⁴ Wapnick writes that Schucman and Thetford “appointed” him archivist of all the material related to *A Course in Miracles*, including Helen’s original notebooks and all subsequent typings of the *Course* manuscript. This material has been copyrighted by Wapnick under the title ‘The Unpublished writings of Helen Schucman, Volumes 1-22’. These writings include Schucman’s autobiographies, correspondence between Schucman and Thetford, and Schucman and Wapnick, Schucman’s dreams, undergraduate and graduate school term papers (1999: 11).

choices of what not to dictate to Bill cannot be considered infallible. Hence, there may well be material that never made it out of her shorthand notebooks (the first version of the *Course*) that should have made it into the published *Course*".²⁵

The second version of the *Course* is the script which Thetford typed from Schucman's dictation, called by them the 'Urtext'.²⁶ The script of the Urtext was 1500 pages and was placed in seven black thesis binders. As noted in court, Schucman was embarrassed by her scribing and considered it her guilty secret. She did not want her co-workers, professors in the psychology department at Columbia Medical Center, to know about the existence of the *Course*. Schucman and Thetford feared that their professional reputations at Columbia would be adversely affected if their professional peers found out about the *Course*. Both Schucman and Thetford wrote and copyrighted academic articles but never placed a copyright notice on the manuscript of the *Course*.

In spite of their embarrassment, Schucman and Thetford showed the material to individuals who they believed would be sympathetic or interested in psychology, spirituality and consciousness. An examination of the Urtext bears out in many ways Wapnick's description of it over the years. It is more lively, but reads less elegantly than the published *Course*; there are no section and chapter breaks in the text; its punctuation,

²⁵ Robert Perry, 'The Earlier Versions and the Editing of *A Course in Miracles*' (2005: 2), published on the Circle of Atonement website: <http://www.circleofa.com/article/EarlierVersions.htm>.

²⁶ The Urtext is available on several websites, for example: <http://ca.geocities.com/drhomp74caz>. Pages cited are from this electronic version. See also: <http://www.velocity.net/~timbic/jacim/cframes/tocframeset.htm>
<http://www.urtext.forplanetearth.com/>
<http://courseinmiracles.com/>
<http://velocity.net/~timbic/jacimindex.html>
<http://www.unitedbeings.com/acim/index.html>

paragraphing and capitalisation are idiosyncratic. Some of the material appears as a conversation between Schucman and Jesus. It is true, as Wapnick's accounts record, that there is material which refers strictly to the personal problems of Schucman and Thetford. A comparison of the Urtext and the published *Course*, however, reveals that about 30,000 words were removed during Wapnick's and Schucman's editing. Most of the removed material comes from the first five chapters and a decreasing amount from chapters six to nine. This is much more than *Course* devotees had understood to be the case. The language of the early chapters of the Urtext is generally less spiritual and it uses less Christian vocabulary. Much of the material that has been removed is couched in psychological language with references to Jung, Freud, neo-Freudians, therapy, statistics, behaviourism, mental retardation, the Oedipal complex and fixation (Urtext, 71-72).

Course students have also been surprised to find in the Urtext a different model of the mind from that portrayed in the published *Course*: in the Urtext, the mind has three, not two levels. There is the conscious mind: above it is the superconscious (heavenly knowledge) mind and below it is a two-layer subconscious mind (one dominated by fear and the other having miracle-working ability). The conscious mind is seen to receive input from all three levels, with the fear-dominated layer of the subconscious mind trying to block the positive impulses coming from the superconscious and the miracle-working layer of the subconscious. The Urtext teaches that when these miracle-working and fear-dominating impulses arrive at the conscious mind, it must choose between them. "Miracles come from the subconscious level. Revelations come from the above conscious

level. The conscious level is in between and reacts to either sub- or super-conscious impulses in varying ratios” (Urtext, 14).

Many *Course* students and scholars view this teaching as important and are puzzled that it has been removed. Robert Perry is concerned that practical advice about what he calls ‘life issues’ has been removed. This includes teaching on sex, homosexuality, selection of partners, the role of the teacher, parents and children. While some of the material spoke to personal situations of Schucman and Thetford, much of the discussion was abstract. For example, an original miracle principle was “Miracles are a blessing from parents to children” (Urtext, 23).²⁷

Perry also questions the removal of religious material: discussions about angels, fallen angels, Lucifer, reincarnation, karma, spirit possession, speaking in tongues, witchcraft, auras, Christian Science, meditation, prayer, commentary on the teachings of Edgar Cayce as well as miscellaneous specific references to the Holocaust, daylight saving time, sex crimes, kleptomania, bankruptcy, gambling, alcoholism, eyesight problems, cryogenics, wars, money, voting, exams, ESP and the psychological significance of names (Perry, 2005: 9). Generally, teaching that relates to specific subjects has been removed leaving the abstract text which *Course* students continue to find difficult to understand.

²⁷ Robert Perry, ‘Earlier Versions of the Editing of *A Course in Miracles*’ (2005: 8) published at <http://www.circleofa.com/articlens/EarlierVersions.htm> (accessed 9 May 2005).

Third Edition: The Hugh Lynn Cayce Version

The third edition the *Course* has been called the Hugh Lynn Cayce version (HLC). It is believed to have been edited by Thetford and typed by Schucman, and given to Cayce to solicit his feedback. Regarding the manuscript, they wrote to Cayce, “We look forward to any further comments or suggestions which you may wish to offer, individually or collectively” (Wapnick, 1999: 114). This HLC version²⁸ of the *Course* was kept in a locked room at the Cayce Foundation and not made available to the public until, prompted by the court cases, it was published on the internet in January of 2000.²⁹

Fewer changes can be found between the Urtext and the HLC than between the Urtext and the present *Course*. However the existence of earlier versions of *A Course in Miracles* distressed *Course* devotees. Robert Perry wrote,

We had one version of our revered book, and we knew that this version was almost exactly as its scribe, Helen Schucman, heard it, straight from Jesus....Then everything changed. In January of 2000, an earlier version of the *Course*, called the Hugh Lynn Cayce Version, was disseminated on the Internet. Later in that same year, an even earlier version, called the Urtext, also became available on the Internet. Both versions showed that the *Course* had gone through far more extensive editing than anyone had suspected. While before we felt the comfort of knowing that our scripture, unlike so many others, was free of human influence, we now began to wonder how much of the *Course* was altered by human editors. We also wondered which was the “true” version. (2005: 1).

In presenting their defence, the lawyers for Wapnick and Skutch tried to show that the distribution of the *Course* from the beginning had been limited and not general, naming the few individuals to whom it had been given, who were told to treat it as confidential.

²⁸ The HLC version has also been called *Jesus' Course in Miracles* to give it the appearance of superiority over the published *Course*.

²⁹ The HLC version is available at: <http://www.ca.geocities.com/dthomp74caa>

Beginning in the autumn of 1973, Wapnick and Schucman worked together to edit the entire *Course*, spending about fourteen months revising the manuscript. The editing was completed in February 1975. However, Mundy also testified that he had received the manuscript from Schucman and Thetford in 1974 and was told not to show it to anyone.

On 29 May, 1975, Dr. Douglas Dean, a physicist engineer, introduced Schucman, Thetford and Wapnick to Judith Skutch. Dean and Skutch were given uncopyrighted copies of the *Course* at the same time. Dean had little relationship with either Schucman or Thetford before or after receiving the *Course*. After a lunch meeting with Schucman and Thetford, Skutch testified that she was taken to their offices, where the blinds were pulled down, and the door locked. With Wapnick present, Skutch was given permission to take the seven thesis binders home in a shopping bag to read. On her way home she rang Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, a Stanford-educated psychiatrist, to tell him about the *Course*. She showed it to her husband, Robert Skutch, a businessman and writer who became vice-president of FIP.

In June 1975, Skutch testified, she took the manuscript to California and photocopied a copy for James Bolen, publisher of *Psychic Magazine*, after receiving permission from Thetford and Schucman. Bolen made three copies of the work which he shared with his publishing partners. In June 1975 Skutch also gave a copy of the manuscript to Jampolsky with instructions not to distribute it to anyone. After the California trip, because of the bulkiness of the manuscript, Schucman and Thetford agreed to have the print reduced and photocopied. Skutch testified that she gave the *Course* to Dr. Edgar

Mitchell to seek his advice about whether it was worth publishing. Mitchell, a former astronaut and the sixth man to walk on the moon, was the founder of the Institute of Noetic Science.

During the 2003 hearings, Skutch named each individual who had been given a copy. She testified that each was known to her and had been instructed to keep it confidential. However, it was difficult for her to maintain this stance. For example, Skutch gave or lent a manuscript copy to a professor of religion, Paul Steinberg. Steinberg had a cousin who was a printer. He was asked to print copies which were studied by his employees and family.

In July 1975, Schucman, Thetford and Skutch spent a month in California to meet the many who were interested in the *Course*. By this time, there were hundreds in the San Francisco area (where Skutch had a second home) who had copies of the *Course*, some photocopied so many times that they were scarcely legible. Dr. Eleanor Criswell, a professor of psychology at the Humanistic Psychology Institute in California, ran a small printing company and she offered to put the manuscript in a more useful format. In August 1975, Criswell took the manuscript to a Copy Kat copy centre in Berkeley to be reproduced. The book was not put in a new format but reduced again in size by photo-offset and bound in a four volume soft cover set of one hundred copies. This became known as the Criswell edition and, for the first time, bore the copyright notice indicating the copyright was held by FIP. The copyright was registered by the Copyright Office on 4 December 1975. A second and third Criswell edition followed the first.

In 1976, the FIP itself began to publish *A Course in Miracles* in three hard cover volumes. In 1985 FIP published the *Course* in a single softcover volume and in 1992 FIP published the second edition of the *Course* in a single hardcover volume. Each edition had a copyright designation affixed. In December 1995, FIP entered into a five-year licensing agreement with Penguin, giving Penguin the licence to publish and distribute the *Course* in English in all territories except the United Kingdom (where it was published by Penguin Viking). In 1998, FIP released the copyright to Wapnick's FACIM. Finally the copyright reverted to FACIM from Penguin in 2000 when the five year agreement expired.

Judge Robert Sweet noted that the plaintiffs were unable to present any written evidence of any limitation upon the use of the *Course* when it was distributed before the publication of the Criswell edition. The judge inferred from this that any verbal restrictions placed on distribution of the *Course* by Schucman and Thetford were for personal reasons. Robert Skutch's book bears out this finding. He writes that when Schucman and Thetford were asked to go to California with Skutch to talk about the *Course*, they agreed to go because California was 3000 miles from their hospital and it would not damage their professional reputations to speak about the *Course* so far from New York (1984: 111).

Judge Sweet referred to *Course* hagiographies which told how Schucman and Thetford were in the habit of giving the *Course* to people they considered "worthy or ready" for it,

not just to a select group. Extensive photocopying of the *Course* in the San Francisco area in 1975 eliminated the possibility that the distribution was selective. The judge ruled that distribution for a limited purpose meant that it could be shown only to individuals for comment or criticism. However, from the FIP's own website and literature it is clear that individuals who received manuscripts and photocopies were often strangers to Schucman and Thetford. The judge concluded that distribution was not limited to a select group. Finally, the judge ruled that the way in which early copies of the *Course* were distributed did not "preclude recipients from reproducing, distributing or selling any copies". He noted that, according to *Course* narratives, "hundreds of people acquired copies in California and people were running off copies as fast as possible". He concluded that by the summer of 1975, Schucman, Thetford, Wapnick and Skutch "intended to make the work as available as possible without limitation".

During the hearings, Skutch admitted that not all the stories told in official hagiographies and taped interviews given by herself about the early life of the *Course* were true. Details as set out in their literature for over twenty five years were "embellished", she confessed, in order to generate enthusiasm for *A Course in Miracles*. In FIP's promotional video, 'The Forgotten Song' (1987) Skutch speaks of how photocopies of the *Course* exploded "exponentially". In court Skutch admitted the authenticity of her voice on various tapes to propagate the *Course* but recanted these statements about early wholesale distribution of the *Course*. Specifically she denied her earlier statements: 1) that Schucman and Thetford did not object to the *Course's* distribution in California; 2) that hundreds of people acquired *Course* copies in California; and 3) that people were running off copies as fast

as possible. She called these statements “oratorical hyperbole”. She also claimed that her former husband, Robert Skutch, had been mistaken in his *Course* history, *Journey without Distance* (1984: 113) where he refers to hundreds of copies being given away. She said there was no spontaneous copying of the manuscript: the *Course* was not available for whoever wanted it. Indeed she claimed that copies which had been given out had been copyrighted. The defence lawyer for Endeavor, however, was able to establish that the copies given to Gerald Jampolsky, Jon Mundy and Hugh Lynn Cayce had been non-copyrighted manuscripts. Judge Sweet of the Southern District Court of New York ruled against FIP and FACIM on 24 October 2004. A subsequent appeal failed.

The Significance of the Trial

The trial is significant to a study of the history of *A Course in Miracles* for several reasons. First, it shows that the “official” accounts of the origin of the *Course* are not reliable in every particular. They are in some respects “embellished”, having been written to portray the authors in a particular light and often with the benefit of hindsight.

Second, it emphasises the number of people who had close contact with Schucman and Thetford during the period that the *Course* was being channelled, most notably Hugh Lynn Cayce, and the influences which may have affected the process.

Third, it reveals details of the process which so often unfolds when a text is regarded by devotees as channelled or inspired. First, it is written down. Second, a prominent editor emerges. Third, it is published. Fourth, different versions are propagated. Fifth, following

, the death of the original recipients, hermeneutical battles take place between devotees who regard the text as inspired revelation. Lastly, there is the attempt by one or two who were “there at the beginning” to set their seal permanently on the way that the message is handed down to posterity.

Finally, the trial underscores the importance and influence of *A Course in Miracles* as one of the few channelled texts coming out of the 1970s to have been widely published, much translated and carefully studied. The wide interest which the trial aroused is eloquent testimony to the pervasive influence which the *Course* has had and continues to have over a wide variety of people in holistic spiritualities.

The Source of *A Course in Miracles*: The Sceptic’s Case

What is the researcher, the religious devotee or the average secular reader to make of the claim that Schucman and Thetford produced a spiritual classic believed to have come from a source outside their own consciousness? Beyond the question of the implied authorship of Jesus, *Course* teachers, and *Course* literature, stress that Schucman and Thetford could not have been responsible for the authorship of the *Course* themselves.

This is thought to be true particularly of Schucman for two reasons: 1) She was too ego bound to have been the author of a work, the content of which she so thoroughly disagreed with (Wapnick, 1999: 10; Judith Skutch in FIP’s promotional video). 2) As an atheist from a lapsed Jewish family, she could not have had the knowledge to write a work which quotes from (or alludes to) the Bible over 800 times, which displays

knowledge of Christian Science and New Thought, Gnosticism, Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity and Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophies. The impossibility of the authorship of Schucman is seen as proof of the authenticity of *A Course in Miracles* as a channelled text.

It is possible, however, by looking more carefully at the lives, backgrounds and activities of Schucman and Thetford, to argue that both of them had the wherewithal to produce the text of *A Course in Miracles*. What the researcher cannot ascertain is how much influence was exerted on the manuscript by Wapnick as he and Schucman did the final editing of the *Course*. However several points can be made about the possible influence of Schucman and Thetford on *A Course in Miracles*.

The Myth of Schucman as a Jewish Atheist

Robert Skutch describes Schucman's early childhood and family life as lonely and overshadowed by a search for God. She was born Helen Cohn into an affluent lapsed Jewish family in New York City in 1909. Her father was a successful chemist who provided the family with a comfortable life. Even during the depression in the years following 1929, the family had a ten-room apartment near Central Park, a cook, a maid and a governess. Her parents seem elusive, cold figures and Wapnick's account of Schucman's early life agrees with Skutch's portrayal. Schucman lived as a child at one end of the apartment, sharing with her governess a bedroom, sitting room and bathroom. At the other end of the apartment lived her parents and a brother who was fourteen years older than her. Until she was six, Schucman spent most of her time with the governess.

On the few occasions when she approached her parents for conversation, they seemed preoccupied and puzzled that she wanted to talk to them (Skutch, 1984: 11).

One of her earliest memories was of her governess' ritual performed each night. In Schucman's words, "Before Miss Richardson got into bed, she would kneel down and sort of whisper to herself for a while....Miss Richardson explained that she was a Catholic, and every night before she went to bed she said the rosary" (Skutch, 1984: 12). Schucman asked if she could have one but was told it was only for Catholics and her parents would not approve. It would be their secret. Schucman writes:

She and I had another secret too. This one had to do with where we went on Sunday mornings. Instead of going to the park, we went over to the other side of the city so nobody would see us. Then we went to one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen. Miss Richardson told me it was a Catholic church but since I was not a Catholic I was not allowed to go inside. I stayed inside the hallway until she came out again. While waiting though, I could see the flowers and the candles and the statues through the little space between the two large swinging doors that opened into the church. Once I sneaked around to a little chapel on the side....I made up my mind that when I grew up I would be a Catholic so I could go inside and be part of what Miss Richardson was doing (Skutch, 1984: 13).

One day Schucman decided to ask her parents if she could have a religion:

I crept down the long hall to the living room where my father was sitting alone reading a newspaper. I watched him from the door-way for quite a while before I went inside. Father looked up and seemed surprised. "Is anything the matter? Isn't Miss Richardson in?" When I told him she was, he said "Oh well, your mother isn't here, and I don't think she'll be back for a while." He picked up his newspaper, and seemed to think the conversation was over. I hung around. I didn't know him well and was uncertain how to begin, but knew I had to find out about my religion (Skutch, 1984: 13-14).

When Schucman asked if he believed in God, he said that he didn't. She asked if that meant that she could not have a religion and he replied that each person must decide for himself. "It was evident he was not interested, but I kept hanging around. Finally when he

saw I really had something on my mind, he put down his newspaper and asked me to sit down, after which we had perhaps the only real talk we ever had” (Skutch, 1984: 14). When she asked him for a Jewish prayer which she could recite at night he told her one beginning, “Lord God of Israel”; she remembered only this first part, but repeated it each night as she went to bed (ibid.: 14).

When she was older, she writes of trying to attract her mother’s attention by feigning stomach pains which resulted in a needless appendectomy. Her mother, also a seeker after religious experience, became interested in Theosophy for a short time. While Schucman was in hospital her mother spent time with her for the first time and told her about Theosophy: “She tried to explain Theosophy to me...she looked calm and happy as she told me about it, and a sort of glow came over her face. I tried to understand what she was saying” (Wapnick, 1999: 25). Her mother taught her a Theosophical prayer: “It was simple and fairly short and she said it to me until I knew it by heart. She said she was glad I was interested in religion and urged me to ask God to help me. She was certain He would show me the way. She said when we got home we would say the prayer together every evening. I said I thought that would be very nice” (ibid.: 25-26).

By the time Schucman was twelve, her mother had become a Catholic. While her parents were spending a summer in Europe, her mother took her to Lourdes. The grotto impressed her deeply, as did the statue of the Blessed Virgin and the piles of crutches and braces left by those who had been healed. She bought a rosary and a statue of the Virgin and had them blessed by a priest. Later that night, Schucman asked God for a miracle.

She prayed, “Please God, I’m not a Catholic, but if all this is true, would you send me a miracle so I can believe in you?” (Skutch, 1984: 18). The miracle she wanted was to see a meteor in the sky. She closed her eyes and said three Hail Marys and decided that if there were a meteor in the sky when she opened them she would consider that a miracle. “I did not really expect to find a meteor, but I closed my eyes and said three Hail Marys anyway. When I opened my eyes, the sky was full of shooting stars. I watched in stunned silence, and then whispered, ‘It’s my miracle. God really did send it. Look, oh look! It’s my miracle’” (Skutch, 1984: 17-18). Later, she rationalised the miracle, thinking that meteor showers were common at that time of year. It is clear, however, that from the age of twelve, Schucman was deeply involved in Roman Catholic ritual and continued to be so for the rest of her life. After her marriage to Louis Schucman, a Jewish atheist, she only attended midnight mass after he had gone to bed. Wapnick writes that, on the evening of her death, Schucman’s husband insisted that Wapnick come that very night to their apartment and remove all of Schucman’s Catholic medals and rosaries as well as copies of the *Course* (1999: 473). Even in the anger and distress of her last years she confided to Wapnick on several occasions that “Jesus had told her that when she died, he would come for her personally” (1999: 472). This belief implies separateness, a subject and object, and it cannot be reconciled with *Course* teaching. The story also points to Schucman’s interest from an early age in the concept of miracles.

After returning from Europe, Schucman’s brother married. In the smaller household, Schucman became close to the housekeeper, a devout Baptist. She told Schucman that although her church believed in hell, she herself felt God was really friendly and arranged

things so that they “always came out all right in the end” (Skutch, 1984: 19). This reassured Schucman, who was troubled by the Catholic belief in hell. She began to read the Bible every evening with the housekeeper and to attend the Baptist church with her. Schucman found the exuberant singing and obvious joy in the Baptist church impressive. “The minister told us about God and Heaven and Salvation. He said over and over again that all we needed was faith” (ibid.: 20). Soon Schucman secured her parents’ permission to be baptised in a Baptist church by immersion. Again, Schucman hoped the ceremony would leave her with a mystical assurance of her acceptance with God, but was bitterly disappointed when she felt no different afterwards:

By the time I got home I was feeling quite bleak. Nothing was different. I’d been baptized, but nothing was changed. I still couldn’t see God. I continued going to church just in case I hadn’t given my baptism time enough to take. Then I went infrequently and finally not at all. I simply did not have enough faith (ibid., 21).

After this, Schucman decided to pursue intellectual ideals, doing English at university and developing a love for Shakespeare as well as for Platonism and logic. During this period, before her marriage to Louis Schucman, she conceived of the ambition to become a famous author, indeed an internationally famous author. Skutch views this as a strange goal for her as she found writing difficult; she was sensitive about her writing, often hiding her efforts even from her creative writing professor because she felt they were not perfect enough (ibid.: 22).

Schucman’s autobiography, as much as can be known, reveals a person who had a life-long obsession with finding God, and an expectation for having her relationship with God authenticated through some sort of mystical miraculous experience. Thus a case can be

made that, far from being an atheistic academic, she was a person of great spirituality all of her life (albeit much of the time angry with God), and specifically a closet Catholic (with early evangelical influences – she loved and read the King James version of the Bible to the end of her life). Whilst I do not want to resort to armchair psychology, it seems possible to me that her intellectual atheistic pose in academia may have been related to the rejection she felt from her parents. An overt belief in God and spiritual experience might bring the same rejection from her academic peers, with whom her relationship was never easy. She had wanted to become an internationally famous author. This happened with her scribing of the *Course*, but again her fear of rejection caused her to insist that it be published anonymously.

The Influence of Thetford

William Thetford, unlike Schucman, had a religious background: he came from a Christian Science family. Although the family rejected the church after the death of Thetford's sister, his early childhood was in a family practising Christian Science. Doing doctoral studies at the University of Chicago, Thetford was one of Carl Rogers' first graduate students in 1945. Rogers taught that "unconditional positive regard" was an essential prerequisite for client-centred therapists. In the interview referred to, Thetford remembers how he came to see that Rogers was teaching that total acceptance in relationships meant expressing perfect love, a theme that found expression later in the *Course* (*New Realities*, September/October 1984: 4). Thetford became an agnostic, but, unlike Schucman, never concealed his interest in esotericism and psychic phenomena. After he took up his position at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre, he began to read

widely in the mystical literature of the world. He was “deeply impressed” at this time with the writings of Vivekananda and his exposition of Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophy (ibid.: 11). Later, he noted the similarities between the ontology of the *Course* and that of Advaita Vedanta with its belief in the world as illusion (*maya*) and the need to realise oneness with God (Brahman). It is impossible to know whether Thetford influenced the content of the *Course*. We know that he had long discussions with Schucman, often on walks in Central Park and tried to encourage her to be open to psychic phenomena (FIP Video, 1987). He also typed the *Course* from her dictation. One can only argue that the influence of Thetford cannot be ruled out: he was keen on esotericism, had studied Vedanta, had a large library on mysticism, provided the enthusiasm to drive the scribing process and gave Skutch the impression that he had not been given proper credit for the genesis of the *Course*. Skutch also confirmed to me that during this period Schucman was romantically obsessed with Thetford and would have done “almost anything” to please him (Interview, 7 September 2005).

The Influence of Edgar Cayce

As noted above, Thetford and Schucman went to visit Hugh Lynn Cayce before the scribing of the *Course* began. A key concept of Edgar Cayce was that of ‘The One Mind’, represented by a twelve pointed star. The points on the star represent individual conscious minds while the star in its wholeness represents God, the one universal mind (Reed, 1990: 54). ‘One mindedness’ came to be an important concept in *A Course in Miracles*. It is difficult not to note the similarities in the method of channelling used by Cayce and Schucman. The Cayce material was dictated and taken down in shorthand and later typed

and published. It seems likely that through reading some of the Cayce literature and visiting Hugh Lynn Cayce, Schucman and Thetford would have been made aware of how the process of channelling took place.

The Relationship of Schucman and Thetford

The *Course* narratives leave the researcher puzzled about the relationship between Thetford and Schucman. In the FIP promotional video, Thetford says that Schucman wanted more of a relationship with him than he was able to give to her. Miller refers to Thetford's homosexuality. He lived with a male lover in New York for ten years, and Miller suggests that his personal life was troubled during the California years (1997: 50). Wapnick also mentions Thetford's homosexuality but suggests that he was never sexually active and remembers Schucman calling Thetford 'asexual'. Wapnick writes that Thetford's lack of sexual interest in her was perceived by Schucman as Thetford "thwarting her desire to control him sexually" (1999: 81).

All *Course* narratives emphasise the hostility, bitterness and anger in Schucman and Thetford's relationship which only grew worse as the *Course* scribing took place. The pictures of them in Miller, Wapnick and Skutch's books show two people beaming at the camera, holding hands, clearly supporting one another. When Thetford was given a new building for his department, he placed his and Schucman's offices next to one another, but far from the rest of the department. It is difficult to understand the hostility and bitterness when the narrative makes clear that they were co-dependent on one another professionally and personally.

If Schucman was romantically involved with Thetford, as Skutch claims, but the feelings were not reciprocated, it is possible that Schucman developed an interest in esotericism because Thetford was clearly interested in it. As noted, much of the material removed from the early scribing (now found in the Urtext) is about sex. In one removed passage, 'Jesus' tells Schucman:

“You and Bill both chose your present sex partners shamefully, and would have to atone for the lack of love which was involved in any case. You selected them precisely BECAUSE they were NOT suited to gratify your fantasies. (Urtext, 37 – capitals in original).

There were also the many dreams Schucman had before the scribing began in which she and Thetford had been together in many past lives. It is therefore possible that the initial impetus to scribe the *Course* came from Schucman's involvement, even obsession, with Thetford. Schucman's emotional involvement with him might also help to explain the bitterness between her and Thetford which increased until the end of her life.

Conclusion

To suggest that Schucman and Thetford could have been responsible for the material in *A Course in Miracles* is not to denigrate the *Course* as a sacred channelled text for its students. Schucman and Thetford were psychologists and educators. The channelled material came as a 'course' couched in psychological vocabulary, drawing on Advaita Vedanta, Christian Science, Platonism and Christianity, in the Shakespearean prose loved by Schucman. As noted, it contains over 800 biblical quotations or allusions in the language of the King James' version of the Bible, also cherished by Schucman. In the

Urtext (291) 'Jesus' tells Schucman: "You must have noticed how often I have used your own ideas to help you". In view of the breadth of emic definitions given regarding the possible sources of channelled literature in Chapter One, the suggestion that the material in the *Course* can, to a great extent, be traced back to books, experiences and people we know exerted an influence on Schucman and Thetford is not to imply that *A Course in Miracles* is not a channelled text in the way its students understand it. The 'habitus' of Schucman and Thetford influenced the text that developed from their collaboration.

This chapter has examined the 'story of the *Course*', which became a powerful legitimating device for *Course* students. The following chapter will analyse the text of *A Course in Miracles*.

Chapter Five

Revelation and Rationalism: Textual Analysis of *A Course in Miracles*

Introduction: *Course* Theory and Praxis

The prose of *A Course in Miracles* has been described as beautiful, poetic and lofty, eloquent, as well as dense, abstract and unintelligible. At one extreme is Colin Tipping, a *Course* teacher, author and founder of the *Course* organisation, Radical Forgiveness. I was surprised to hear him refer to the *Course* almost disparagingly: “The *Course* says what we all know is true, but says it in such a way that no one can understand it.” He then explained how his book, CD and worksheets simplify *Course* teaching to make it comprehensible for anyone (Interview, 14 February 2003). In contrast, Robert Perry, another *Course* teacher, author and founder of the *Course* organisation, Circle of Atonement, treats the text of the *Course* with the reverence that is given by believers in many religious traditions to their scriptures. He argues that the words themselves have intrinsic and practical importance, and that it is wrong to view the *Course* primarily as spiritual teaching, “a collection of insightful inspirational ideas, to be read, quoted and discussed” (2004: xxix). For Perry, providing people with a new metanarrative to replace old ones is useless. He acknowledges that *Course* organisations, study groups, books and online chat rooms do speak of how to try to “live the *Course*”, but says that much of this is speculative and the main emphasis is on discussing *Course* concepts (ibid.: xxix). Perry argues that the *Course* should be seen as a “clearly marked path”, and offers his readers a practical model which aims for “complete fidelity to the words of the *Course*” (ibid.: xxxi)

The researcher into *Course* spiritualities must explore both approaches and allow the disparate voices of *Course* devotees to be heard on their own terms. The assumption, however, that much of the text³⁰ of the *Course* is too difficult or strangely written to understand, and must therefore be mediated through books about the *Course*'s themes and teachings, is questionable. Whilst it is evident that those with a background in psychology warm most quickly to the *Course* and grasp its teachings, a careful analysis of the structure and words of the text reveals that it has been carefully crafted and, possibly, was meant to speak to the reader in its own terms without any mediation from outside. The *Course* is filled with word plays and puns. It constructs a self-consistent metaphysical system founded on two levels of reality. It offers an alternative metanarrative comparable to that of the biblical fall-redemption scheme. Its closely worked out structure reveals an inexorably evolving spiral of teaching which combines themes and contrasts words to form a practical narrative centred around the theme of 'choice'.

The Metaphysical System of *A Course in Miracles* : Monism

The *Course*'s metaphysical system is often summed up by devotees with a quotation from the Introduction (*Text*, 1996: 1 – emphasis in original):

**Nothing real can be threatened.
Nothing unreal exists.**

Herein lies the peace of God.

³⁰ References to the 'text' of the *Course* are to the words of the entire *Course*: *Text*, *Workbook for Students* and *Manual for Teachers*. References to *Text* refer to the first of the three volumes of the *Course*.

The *Course's* metaphysical system is founded on the idea of two levels of reality, the real and the unreal, as implied in this first page of the Introduction to the *Text*. Level one is God, indescribable in human terms, but defined as all-encompassing love. Level two is the physical world of bodies and the natural earthly environment. Level two can be defined simply as the place where there is a belief in the possibility of separation from God. This belief in separation causes the opposite of love which is fear. In the paragraph preceding the above quotation about the real and unreal, the Introduction states the *Course's* purpose:

This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time. The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite (*Text*, 1996: 1).

The belief in the possibility of separation brought with it the belief in the opposite of love - fear - which in turn led to the belief in sin and guilt which "block the awareness of love's presence", which is one's "natural inheritance" (*ibid.*: 1). The *Course* defines all negative impulses as being a part of level two and therefore unreal. At the heart of the *Course's* metaphysical system is the bedrock belief that the only reality is God and God's love from which it is impossible to be separate: "What is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (*ibid.*: 1).

Thus, the metaphysical system of *A Course in Miracles* is monistic. Reality begins and ends with God; God is the only reality: "We say that 'God is' and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless" (*ibid.*: 323).

God is believed to be pure, abstract, formless, changeless love, outside the realm of time and space. “Divine Abstraction takes joy in sharing” (ibid.: 70). “...when time is over and no trace remains of dreams...then the Voice is gone, no longer to take form but to return to the eternal formlessness of God” (*Clarification of Terms*, 1996: 90). The *Course* refers to the separated self as the ‘ego’: “Everyone makes an ego for himself which is subject to enormous variation. He makes an ego for everyone he perceives” (*Text*, 1996: 56-57). Even the use of the word ‘outside’ (of time and space) does not do justice to the *Course*’s radical teachings about the all-encompassing nature of God, for nothing can be ‘outside’ of God. If something or someone is perceived to be less than the perfect love and purity of God, this is shown to be a logical impossibility; nothing can exist beyond God’s all-encompassing infinity. The *Course* states “Oneness is simply the idea God is. And in His Being, He encompasses all things. No mind holds anything but him” (ibid: 323). In the *Course* scheme, then, reality is not a realm of time and space, a place where things exist separate from each other; reality is not the world we perceive with our senses.

In *Course* metaphysics, the world people believe they inhabit, the world of form, time and space, is a dream of which God knows nothing. The *Course* teaches that physical form cannot be of God because all forms are separate and God is one and all encompassing: “Look at the world, and you will see nothing attached to anything beyond itself. All seeming entities can come a little nearer, or go a little farther off, but cannot join” (ibid.: 542). Since any form of separateness is less than God’s whole, the physical individual and the realm of nature are seen to be part of level two and unreal. Yet the

mind of an individual is seen as the creation of God, or in *Course* vocabulary, “an extension” of God. “When God gave Himself to you in your creation, He established you as host to Him forever” (ibid.: 307). Thus, as minds, people try to overcome separation and gather in pairs, families and communities and social groups. *Course* cosmology shows people as minds trapped in physical bodies, in conflict with the body’s limitations and in conflict with the physical world itself. “Would you be hostage to the ego or host to God? Every decision you make is for Heaven or for Hell and brings you the awareness of what you decided for” (ibid.: 307). To believe in the physical world is to be a ‘hostage’ to the ‘ego’; the correct ‘choice’, by contrast can make one a ‘host’ to ‘God’. The choice offered is between ‘Heaven’ (level one) and ‘Hell’ (level two).

Course Metaphysics and Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta

William Thetford, as noted in Chapter Four, commented on the similarity of the *Course*’s ontology with that of Advaita Vedanta which he had learned through the study of the teachings of Vivekananda, the Hindu ‘missionary’ to the West at the beginning of the 20th century. Thetford, never comfortable with the view that the *Course* was a channelled message from Jesus, often said, “The *Course* stands on its own, regardless of authorship” (*New Realities*, 1984: 5). Thetford preferred to see it as restatement of Advaita Vedanta spirituality, which he believed to be the perennial philosophy behind all great religious traditions. At least superficially, there are many points of contact between *Course* metaphysics and the ontology of Advaita Vedanta.

One of the earliest statements of a radical monistic spirituality is found in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. This text begins with the famous statement “OM. This eternal Word is all: what was, what is and what shall be and what beyond is in eternity. All is OM”. Gaudapada, one of the earliest teachers of *Vedanta* argued that if the Transcendent One only is real, then it logically follows that everything else is unreal. Gaudapada’s special contribution to Vedantic thought was *maya*, the idea that the external world of sense and experience is an illusion, a dream (see Reyna, 1962: 12-13). Although the Vedas had used the word *maya* differently³¹, Gaudapada was the first to use it to mean the unreality of the material world; this corresponds to the *Course*’s view of the physical world as illusion. The inevitable corollary of this concept of *maya* was that logical thought and sensory perception are untrustworthy agents for experiencing union with the Transcendent (Devanandan, 1950: 20-24; 87-90).

Building on Gaudapada’s work, the 8th-9th Century Hindu philosopher Shankara constructed a coherent system of thought whereby the Transcendent One, Brahman, could be directly experienced at a level beyond reason and sensory experience. The *Course* seems to refer to this direct experience with the words, “Revelation unites you directly with God” (*Text*, 1996: 7).

Shankara’s Advaita differed from other systems of Vedanta in his belief that ignorance (*avidya*) was the cause of the false awareness of this world of distinctions as separate from Brahman (Lott, 1980: 42-43). As the Indian scholar Sri Aurobindo noted, “With the

³¹ See *Rig Veda* I.32.4; *Rig Veda* II.11.5; *Rig Veda* VI.61.3 for negative connotations attached to *maya* and *Rig Veda* I.167.2; and *Rig Veda* III.61.7 for positive meanings.

veil of avidya...we have the mind separated and limited, and perceiving only the particular...this ignorance is further deepened by man's self-identification with matter" (in Reyna, 1963: 45). This finds a parallel to the *Course's* teaching on the 'choice' to believe in the error of separation which leads to the opposite of love, namely fear, sin and guilt and the perception of the physical world as 'real'. In both systems, it is the belief in the possibility of separation from God which is the source of all error. Like the *Course*, which seeks to 'remove' the blocks to the awareness of God's love (*Text*, 1996: 1), Shankara taught that the 'removal' of ignorance (*avidya*) can bring a mystical experience of oneness with Brahman and liberation from the rebirth cycle (*samsara*) (Reyna, 1962; 14).

How did Shankara teach that ignorance could be removed? He argued that ritual and right action (*karma*) are ineffective because actions involve distinctions and therefore must be false. For Shankara, liberation could only be achieved by pure consciousness, unmediated by sensory and mental powers, of the knowledge (*vidya*) of Brahman as one and of the Self's identity with Brahman (*Vedantasutras*, 1890: 176;). To remove ignorance and arrive at right knowledge, Shankara used what some have called the doctrine of 'falsification'. By contradicting worse views, one arrives at better views (Lott, 1980: 69-70). This process is not unlike the process set out in the *Text* whereby contrasting words are used for the two levels encouraging the reader to 'choose' the better of the two. Shankara's logical step by step process of 'falsification' also links closely with the *Workbook's* programme of 'unlearning' false views about oneself and the world, taking the reader step by step back to the knowledge of the oneness of God and level one.

Shankara frequently used this text from the *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.2.1): “Being only was this in the beginning, one, without a second”. For him it proved that the only reality is the one Brahman “without distinctions”. Shankara wrote:

There can exist nothing different from Brahman, since we are unable to observe a proof for such existence....Nor can there exist, apart from Brahman, something which has no beginning since scripture affirms that ‘Being only this was in the beginning, one, without a second’. The promise moreover that through the cognition of one thing everything will be known renders it impossible that there should exist anything different from Brahman (*Vedantasutras*, 1890: 176-177).

This passage from Shankara’s commentary on the *Chandogya Upanishad* links closely with the *Course*’s description of God: “The first in time means nothing, but the First in eternity is God the Father, Who is both First and One. Beyond the First there is no order, no second or third, and nothing but the First” (*Text* 1996: 279).

In Shankara’s scheme, all positive views finally are seen to be inadequate because they rely on attributes of Brahman. Brahman is without attributes, incomprehensible, beyond description, ultimately expressed only by the double negative, ‘not this, not this’ (*’neti, neti*’) repeated in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (*Vedantasutras*, 1890: 166-171; 332-337). The *Course* does not attempt to define God and teaches that level one is beyond comprehension. It refers to God as ‘love’ but qualifies this by teaching that the meaning of ‘love’ is beyond the scope of the *Course*: “The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught” (*Text*, 1996: 1).

Just as the *Course's* step by step logic takes the reader only to the 'borderland' (*Text*: 1996: 446) which points to oneness with God, so Shankara taught that logic and inferential argument can only be pointers on the path to pure consciousness of mystical union with Brahman. When the devotee reaches the final stage where he is ready to be liberated, it is a word of scripture which brings final liberation. Often it is the famous text "That [Brahman] Thou art" (*Chandogya Upanishad* VI.8.7) which brings mystical consciousness of the oneness of the Self with Brahman and the illusoriness of everything else (see Lott, 1980: 71). In the language of the *Course*, "This is the journey's end....Knowledge makes no attack upon perception. They are brought together, and only one continues past the gate where Oneness is" (*Text*, 1996: 447). Shankara described mystical union with Brahman as: 1) mystical knowledge coming from unmediated contact with the Transcendent One, 2) pure consciousness from which earthly images and concerns have vanished and 3) an ultimate sense of bliss (Brockington, 1981: 111-112). The *Course* description of the awareness of one's true identity as part of the Sonship echoes Shankara's description: "Divine Abstraction takes joy in sharing" (*Text*: 1996: 70); "...when time is over and no trace remains of dreams...then the Voice is gone, no longer to take form but to return to the eternal formlessness of God" (*Clarification of Terms*, 1996: 90).

To deal with the physical world in which people live their lives, Shankara posited two levels of reality: first there is Brahman who is identical with the universal Self (*atman*) and thus never separate from it; and second there is the lower level where individual selves exist and worships personal gods such as Krishna (Lott, 1980: 72). *Course*

metaphysics, as noted, is founded on two levels of reality, the real and unreal; and the lower level of the unreal becomes the arena in which to unlearn false perceptions and make the 'choices' that remove the "barriers to the awareness of love" (*Text*, 1996: 1). It should be noted that Shankara's two levels are different from those of the *Course* in that Shankara would have viewed any personal god as a part of the lower level. However, Ramanuja, another Vedanta scholar, taught a modified theism (Brockington, 1981: 134-135) which may be closer to the two levels of the *Course*.

A New Metanarrative

The *Text* also offers the reader a metanarrative not unlike the biblical 'fall' story.

We have discussed the fall or separation, but its meaning must be clearly understood. The separation is a system of thought real enough in time though not in eternity....The fruit of only one tree was "forbidden" in the symbolic garden. But God could not have forbidden it, or it could not have been eaten...The "forbidden tree" was named the tree of knowledge. Yet God created knowledge and gave it freely to His creations. The symbolism here has been given many interpretations, but you may be sure that any interpretation that sees either God or his creations as capable of destroying Their Own purpose is in error. Eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is a symbolic expression for usurping the ability for self-creating. This is the only sense in which God and His creations are not co-creators. The belief that they are is implicit in the "self-concept" or the tendency of the self to make an image of itself (*Text*, 1996: 50).

This fall-redemption theme is compared with Jesus' parable of the prodigal son who makes the choice to return to his father. The *Course* metanarrative is also compared to Jesus' earthly life, his birth (leaving level one, God) and suffering: "You have nailed yourself to a cross and placed a crown of thorns upon your own head" (ibid.: 209). In this narrative, the crucifixion is the low point. At the low point the student is urged to make the choice to turn from crucifixion: "You will not find peace until you have removed the nails from the hands of God's Son, and taken the last thorn from his forehead" (ibid.:

209). The trip back to God involves undoing the crucifixion: “Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you. For the undoing of the crucifixion of God’s Son is the work of the redemption, in which everyone has a part of equal value” (ibid.: 209). Finally, the resurrection is the means of the return to level one, but can only happen when the student perceives the resurrection in everyone, thus combining the metanarrative with the *Course* themes of ‘joining’ and non-duality:

I am *your* resurrection and *your* life. You live in me because you live in God. And everyone lives in you, as you live in everyone. Can you, then, perceive unworthiness in a brother and not perceive it in yourself? And can you perceive it in yourself and not perceive it in God? Believe in the resurrection because it has been accomplished, and it has been accomplished in you. This is true now as it will ever be, for the resurrection is the Will of God, which knows no time and no exceptions. Make no exceptions yourself, or you will not perceive what has been accomplished for you. For we ascend into the Father together, as it was in the beginning.... (ibid.: 208 – italics in original).

In *Course* ontology all humankind began in the realm of the real, in union with God who is defined as love. In truth, no one has left this position (since it is impossible to be apart from that which is all-encompassing) but humankind has come to believe in separation from God: “What you believe is true for you. In this sense the separation *has* occurred, and to deny it is merely to use denial inappropriately...the sense of conflict is inevitable, since you have placed yourself in a position where you believe in the power of what does not exist” (ibid.: 32 – italics in original).

This idea of separation, therefore, provides *A Course in Miracles* with the *raison d’être* for its alternative metanarrative derived from the biblical fall-redemption model. During a ‘mad moment’, the Son of God came to believe in the possibility of separation from God. This moment of ‘madness’ caused him to forget his true reality as God’s perfect creation,

and to enter the unreal dream world of level two. The *Course* paints a picture of separate wills striving against each other and against the whole. God's creation consists not in the physical universe; God does not know of its existence. Since it is not of level one, it does not exist except in the mind of the dreamer. God's creation is God's Son. Creation *per se* is synonymous with the Son. All minds are part of the Sonship of God and thus are one: "It should be noted that God has only one Son. If all His creations are His Sons, every one must be an integral part of the whole Sonship. The Sonship in its Oneness transcends the sum of its parts. However, this is obscured as long as any of its parts is missing. That is why the conflict cannot ultimately be resolved until all the parts of the Sonship have returned. Only then can the meaning of wholeness in the true sense be understood" (ibid.: 33). Jesus is seen to be the Son of God in the same way that all minds are, except that through his resurrection, he proved that death cannot ultimately hurt our true mind identity which is the Son of God, the creation of God.

The *Course* Metanarrative and the Biblical Fall-Redemption Paradigm

As noted above, there is evidence that the *Course* metanarrative derives from the biblical fall-redemption paradigm. This is true in at least two ways. In the biblical scheme, the fall from perfection and communion with God by his creations, Adam and Eve, takes place in the first book, Genesis. Adam and Eve are removed from the garden for disobedience to God; they have 'fallen' from grace. In the New Testament Christ's death and resurrection are seen to 'redeem' all that has gone wrong as a result of the fall, leading to redemption of the world as predicted in the final book of Revelation. Within

this greater narrative are smaller narratives which follow the same general outline of a fall and a return to grace. For example, there is the story of Joseph the favoured son of Jacob who becomes a slave in Egypt, who reaches a low point in prison, and eventually becomes second in command of the kingdom of Egypt, rescuing the people from famine (becoming a 'saviour'). Jesus' birth, death and resurrection could be seen as another example within the larger metanarrative. The *Course* uses the grand metanarrative of the Son of God believing in the possibility of separation from God in a "mad moment", causing him to create this world of illusion (level two) of fear, sin and guilt. The *Course's* 'curriculum' teaches the student the way back to God and level one. Second, like the Bible, the *Course* also uses small narratives within the grand metanarrative to reinforce the teaching: it speaks of falling asleep, dreaming and reawakening; a journey which descends into madness and ascends back to sanity; it speaks of going from light to darkness and back to the light of God.

Schucman loved the King James version of the Bible and during periods of her life (possibly through most of her life) read it daily. This was a discipline she learned from the Baptist cook in her parents' home, who continued to work for her after she married. There are over 800 references to biblical passages or allusions to biblical themes in the *Course*. The *Course* uses biblical narrative in at least four ways.

First, it quotes from the Bible positively to buttress an argument. An example of this is where the *Course* quotes I John 4.18: "Perfect love casts out fear" (*Text*, 1996: 14). Second, the *Course* quotes from the Bible when it wants to correct the biblical teaching.

An example of this is the quotation of Galatians 6.7: “God is not mocked”. In this passage, Paul teaches that God is not mocked because what a person sows he will also reap. The *Course* corrects this teaching to mean that “God would be mocked if one of His Sons were to be separated from God” (*Text*, 1996: 461). Thirdly, there are places where the quotation is changed slightly to give a different meaning: “In this world you need not have tribulation because I have overcome the world. That is why you should be of good cheer” (*Text*, 1996: 56). This changes the meaning of Jesus’ words in John 16.33: “In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world”. Fourth, as noted, there are passages in key places which allude to well known biblical themes, and there is the biblical vocabulary used throughout the *Course*. This use of biblical vocabulary and the allusions to the fall-redemption narrative serve to remind the student that an alternative metanarrative is offered to the reader; it heightens the sense that the *Course* should be seen as the scripture of a tradition.

Analysis of the *Text*: Contrasting Words Offering ‘Choice’

The *Course*, perhaps deliberately playing on words, is a text not for learning but for *unlearning* the untruths people believe about their true identity. Each time a false belief about oneself is chosen to be unlearned, a “block to the awareness of God’s love” is removed (*ibid.*: 1) and the individual has taken a step on the journey back to God. The *Course* teaches that the separation never happened, that in a monistic system, separation is an impossibility and belongs to level two, the unreal. “We cannot be separated. Whom God has joined cannot be separated, and God has joined all His Sons with Himself. Can you be separated from your life and your being? The journey to God is merely the

reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever” (ibid.: 150).

The *Course* shows the student a practical path back from the effects of the false belief in separation. Thus, as noted in the previous section, the *Course* offers a parallel system for the biblical fall-redemption model, which is depicted in several ways: a descending (into the belief in separation from God) and an ascending back to the reality of God and level one; a journey into the darkness of level two and back into the light of God and level one; a forgetting of the true reality of level one and a remembering of one’s identity as God’s perfect Son; in Freudian terms, a denial of the reality of level one and a projection of one’s false identity in level two followed by the choice to deny the error of belief in a false identity of unreality, brings a return to level one. In every model, there is the descent from level one, at the low point of which a person *chooses* to view herself perfect and holy as God created her, and the ascent back to her true identity as part of the universal Sonship of level one.

As the teaching proceeds through the thirty-one chapters of the *Text*, certain words are used again and again and combined with new words to be woven into spirals of one of the above narratives to show the contrast between level one (God, the real) and level two (physical existence, the dream, the unreal). By showing the contrast between level one and level two through contrasting adjectives and verbs, an ever more compelling case is given to the reader to choose the journey back to level one. The repetition of the theme of choice becomes an empowering device for the reader. As the contrasts are presented

chapter after chapter, the reader is urged to believe that she has the power of choice as to how every situation in life, whether mundane or significant, is viewed.

The stage is prepared for the *Course's* spiral of contrasts in the Introduction where the two levels are laid out. "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (ibid.: 1). The Introduction also introduces the reader to the principal contrast between level one and level two: these contrasts are 'love' (level one) and 'fear' (level two). Finally, the Introduction shows the impossibility for the existence of level two with "What is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (ibid.: 1).

Chapter One begins by introducing the idea of 'miracles' with fifty 'miracle principles'. The first of these lays the foundation for the *Course* teaching on non-duality: "There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal" (ibid.: 3). In level one, there are no gradations and no differences, no singularities: all is of a piece. The twelfth miracle principle contains the first set of contrasts in Chapter One. The spiritual (level one) is contrasted with the body (level two); the verb 'creates' is identified with level one and 'makes' with level two: "Miracles are thoughts. Thoughts can represent the lower or bodily level of experience or the higher or spiritual level of experience. One makes the physical and the other creates the spiritual" (*Text*, 1996: 3). This contrast between the spiritual and the physical and between the 'making' of unreality and the 'creating' of reality is fundamental to *Course* ontology and is used throughout the *Text*.

The key word 'choose' is introduced in the first paragraph after the fifty miracle principles in Chapter One. In this paragraph a contrast is made between 'revelation' (level one) and 'miracles' (level two), showing that there is no need for miracles in level one. The important word 'fear' is now linked with 'doubt', another attribute of level two: "Revelation induced complete but temporary suspension of doubt and fear. It reflects the original form of communication between God and His creations....Miracles are genuinely interpersonal, and result in true closeness to others. Revelation unites you directly with God. Miracles unite you directly with your brother" (ibid.: 7).

Further into Chapter One, the 'abundance' of level one is contrasted with the belief in 'scarcity' of level two (ibid.: 11). 'Scarcity' introduces a theme that will run through the *Course*, sometimes called 'nothing' versus 'everything', at other times called 'littleness' versus 'grandeur' (ibid.: 306). An example of how the *Course's* spiral of teaching is constructed can be seen in the way the principle of 'scarcity' of level two is combined with the next set of contrasts: "'Darkness' is lack of 'light' (or a scarcity of light) and 'sin' is lack (or scarcity) of 'love'" (ibid.: 11). Thus several strands have been interwoven into a teaching spiral: the principal opposites of the Introduction, 'love' and 'fear' are now linked with 'sin' and are further linked with the principle of 'scarcity' as opposed to the all-encompassing 'everything' (or abundance) of level one (ibid.: 315).

Perhaps most importantly, the principle of 'choice' is introduced in Chapter One and becomes a *leitmotif* throughout the rest of the *Text*: "You are free to believe what you choose, and what you do attests to what you believe" (ibid.: 7 – emphasis in original).

Later, 'choice' is linked with the 'abundance' of level one, and with 'miracles': "...the mind can elect what it chooses to serve. The only limit put on its choice is that it cannot serve two masters...The miracle is a sign that the mind has chosen to be led by me in Christ's service. The abundance of Christ is the natural result of choosing to follow Him" (ibid.: 13).

Towards the end of Chapter One, more teaching is given on the principal contrast of the *Course*: the 'fear' of level two and the 'love' of level one. "All aspects of fear are untrue because they do not exist...in sorting out the false from the true, the miracle proceeds along these lines":

*Perfect love casts out fear.
If fear exists,
Then there is not perfect love.*

But:

*Only perfect love exists.
If there is fear,
It produces a state that does not exist.*
(ibid.: 14 – italics in original)

The final section of the first chapter contrasts the 'freedom' of level one with the 'slavery' and 'tyranny' of level two, and this set of contrasts is linked with the *Course* theme of the 'oneness of the Sonship' and the impossibility of anyone making the journey back to God without the rest of humankind: "As long as a single 'slave' remains to walk the earth, your release is not complete. Complete restoration of the Sonship is the only goal of the miracle-minded" (ibid.: 15).

This section has looked at Chapter One in detail because all of the foundational themes of the *Course* are set out in it. The final page of the chapter emphasises this: “Some of the later parts of the course rest too heavily on these earlier sections not to require their careful study...as you study these earlier sections, you will begin to see some of the implications that will be amplified later on” (ibid.: 16).

In Chapter Two, a belief in ‘lack’, the scarcity principle (level two), is again contrasted, this time with God’s completeness or ‘no emptiness’ (level one). ‘Fear’ (like ‘sin’ in Chapter One) contrasts with and is again defined as a ‘lack of love’ (ibid.: 17-18). Later in the chapter, ‘nothing’ and ‘everything’ are contrasted and the concept of denial is introduced: the ‘denial of error’ is the ‘defence of truth’. Nothing (level two) cannot co-exist with ‘everything’, the all-encompassing reality of God (level one): this is shown to be an ontological impossibility (ibid.: 32). Again, the ‘wholeness’ of the all-encompassing God (level one) is contrasted with belief in the possibility of ‘separation’, the false belief of level two (ibid.: 33).

In Chapter Three, ‘knowledge’ (level one) is contrasted with ‘perception’ (level two): perception involves the perceiving of something where there is an ‘other’ and therefore is part of the unreal world of separation and a denial of God’s all-encompassing wholeness: ‘knowing’, like ‘being’ is God’s reality. These contrasts lead on to further contrasts, repeated elsewhere, between ‘light’ (level one) and ‘darkness’ (level two) and ultimately between ‘life’ and ‘death’. Death is defined as the belief in the ultimate illusion involving separation (level two) (ibid.: 48-51).

In Chapter Four, the temporary ‘existence’ of level two, something with a beginning and an end, is contrasted with the eternal ‘being’ of the spirit in level one which is shown to be permanent and unshakable: ‘existence’ is unreal and ‘being’ is real (ibid.: 60). This reminds the reader of the Introduction: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists” (ibid.: 1).

In Chapter Five, ‘eternity’ and ‘time’ are contrasted. Eternity is an idea of God (level one) while time is a belief of the ego, also known as the lower mind (level two). The only time which God recognises is the eternal present (ibid.: 79). In the same chapter, the ‘reality’ of God (level one) is contrasted with the ‘illusions’ of the dream world of physical existence on earth (level two). On the level of reality (level one) the mind can “create reality” or it can “make illusions” (level two). The reader is reminded of the contrast between ‘create’ and ‘make’ of Chapter One, and is urged to make the ‘choice’ to live either on level one, that of the real, or on level two, the dream world of illusions (ibid.: 84).

In Chapter Eight, the *Course* presents the student with the ‘choice’ between the ‘freedom’ of level one and the ‘imprisonment’ of level two (ibid.: 139). In Chapter Fifteen, the contrast is between the ‘total freedom’ of level one and the ‘total bondage’ of level two: “You will not succeed in being partial hostage to the ego, for it keeps no bargains and would leave you nothing. You must choose between total freedom and total bondage” (ibid.: 326).

The empowering theme of 'choice' is built up through repetition throughout the thirty one chapters of the *Text*. In Chapter Twenty-five, the act of 'choosing' is placed within *Course* ontology by showing that it is linked to 'perception', a level two word which contrasts with the 'knowledge' of level one: "Perception rests on choosing; knowledge does not. Knowledge has but one law because it has but one Creator" (ibid.: 524). In Chapter Twenty-six, the reader's journey has reached the 'borderland' between this world and Heaven:

There is a borderland of thought that stands between this world and Heaven. It is not a place, and when you reach it, it is apart from time...This is the journey's end. And yet there is a contradiction here in that words imply a limited reality, a partial truth, a segment of the universe made true. This is because knowledge makes no attack upon perception. They are brought together, and only one continues past the gate where Oneness is. Salvation is a borderland where place and time and choice have meaning still, and yet it can be seen that they are temporary, out of place, and every choice has been already made. ...Salvation stops just short of Heaven, for only perception needs salvation. Heaven was never lost, and so cannot be saved. Yet who can make a choice between the wish for Heaven and the wish for hell unless he recognizes they are not the same? This is the learning goal this course has set. It will not go beyond this aim. Its only purpose is to teach what is the same and what is different, leaving room to make the only choice that can be made....Where all reality has been withdrawn from what was never true, can it be hard to give it up, and choose what *must* be true? (ibid.: 446-448 – italics in original).

The final chapter of the *Text*, Chapter Thirty-one brings the theme of 'choice' to its final emphasis with the title 'Choose Once Again'. Here the contrast between the two levels is between God's 'power' of level one, and human 'weakness' of level two (ibid.: 667). The choice offered is not the bleak existential choice for individual authenticity in the face of all the evidence against such a choice. This final chapter seems to argue against this existential outlook which was popular during the 1960s and 70s when Schucman scribed the *Course*. Instead the reader is urged to choose that which is the only logical possibility

and is offered God's power to make the choice in favour of God's reality. Throughout the *Text*, the individual's power of choice has been repeated and linked with key *Course* themes. Now its empowering attributes are emphasised: "Do you not see that all your misery comes from the strange belief that you are powerless (that is, without the power of choice)? Being helpless is the cost of sin. Helplessness is sin's condition; the one requirement is that it demands to be believed. Only the helpless could believe in it" (ibid.: 461).

This final chapter brings together earlier *Course* themes and emphasises again that the greatest temptation is the one to believe that one "is a body, born in what must die, unable to escape its frailty and bound by what it orders him to feel...would you be this if Christ appeared to you in all His glory, asking you but this? Choose once again if you would take your place among the saviours of the world, or would remain in Hell, and hold your brothers there" (ibid.: 666).

Given the *Course*'s teaching on the impossibility of 'separation', each choice for God's 'reality' against the ego's 'illusion' affects others beyond what one can comprehend. Thus, each time a choice is made for God's reality, one becomes a 'saviour' of the world and each time the opposite choice is made, the choice helps to hold others in the 'bondage' of level two illusion: "Neither your brother nor yourself can be attacked alone. But neither can accept a miracle instead without the other being blessed by it, and healed of pain" (ibid.: 460). The 'choice' theme is here linked to the theme of 'joining': no one will make the journey back to level one until all make it together.

The final choice offered in the last chapter is again between Christ's 'power' (level one) and human 'weakness' (level two):

You always choose between your weakness and the strength of Christ in you. And you choose what you think is real. Simply by never using weakness to direct your actions, you have given it no power. And the light of Christ in you is given charge of everything you do. For you have brought your weakness into Him, and He has given you His strength instead. Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before, you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty...Christ calls to you and gently says, "My brother, choose again". He would not leave one source of pain unhealed, nor any image left to veil the truth....Learn then, the happy habit of response to all temptation to perceive yourself as weak and miserable with these words: I am as God created me. His Son can suffer nothing. And **I am His Son** (ibid.: 666-667 – emphasis in original).

This paragraph again links the familiar themes and words: the 'real', 'strength', 'light', 'happiness' and 'truth' of level one set against the 'weakness', 'trials', 'pain' and the verb 'perceive' of level two, and again affirms the individual's power to 'choose'. The final paragraph of the *Text*, repeating the contrasts between 'time' and 'eternity', 'illusion' and 'reality', 'light' and 'darkness' and emphasising the oneness of non-duality, describes the end of the journey back to level one:

And so we say 'Amen'. For Christ has come to dwell in the abode You set for Him before time was, in calm eternity. The journey closes, ending at the place where it began. No trace of it remains...Not one illusion is accorded faith, and not one spot of darkness still remains to hide the face of Christ from anyone. Thy Will is done, completely and perfectly, and all creation recognizes You, and knows you as the only Source it has....For we have reached where all of us are one and we are home, where You would have us be (ibid.: 669).

The prose is reminiscent of the last book of the Bible which draws down the curtain on the panorama of the biblical fall-redemption narrative. The above passage might remind the reader of Revelation 21.3: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be

their God". The reader therefore is subtly reminded that the *Course* offers an alternative metanarrative, not God coming to earth to 'dwell' with humankind, but Christ coming to 'dwell' in the abode the reader has set for him.

Coping Strategies in the *Workbook*: Overcoming the Obstacles to God's Love

A Course in Miracles teaches that God's love is the natural inheritance of all humans. Whilst it does not acknowledge the presence or possibility of evil, the *Course* does recognise "obstacles to God's love and peace" (ibid.: 1). Having reviewed some of the contrasts described in the *Course's* metaphysical system between level one (God/reality) and level two (the physical world of separation and illusion), perhaps the greatest contrast between level one and two is the first one set out, that of love (level one) and fear (level two), for it is this contrast which is seen to have given rise to the others. Whilst God is described as beyond human understanding, the word 'love' is most often used to describe Him.

The one emotion in which substitution is impossible is love. Fear involves substitution by definition, for it is love's replacement. Fear is both a fragmented and fragmenting emotion. It seems to take many forms, and each one seems to require a different form of acting out for satisfaction. While this appears to introduce quite variable behaviour, a far more serious effect lies in the fragmented perception from which the behaviour stems. No one is seen complete. The body is emphasised, with special emphasis on certain parts, and used as a standard for acting out a special form of fear. You who believe that God is fear made but one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It has become so splintered and subdivided and divided again, over and over, that it is now almost impossible to perceive it once was one, and still is what it was. That one error, which brought truth to illusion, infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made. Your whole world rests upon it. Everything you see reflects it, and every special relationship that you have ever made is part of it....You do not realise the magnitude of that one error for everything. It was so vast and so completely incredible that from it a world of total unreality had to emerge...Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, be not afraid of it (*Text*, 1996: 372-375)

– italics in original).

This passage of the *Text* has been quoted at length because it highlights the *Course's* diagnosis of the central problem of the human condition: the substitution of 'fear' for 'love'. While the *Text* emphasises the individual's freedom to 'choose again' between the contrasting features of level one and two, the *Workbook*, containing a lesson for each day of the year, offers a daily practice of the principles of the *Text*. This daily discipline of mind training involves the unlearning of 'illusion' and the learning of 'truth' which opens the way for the 'miracle' of the shift from living in the 'illusory' level two, back to the 'reality' of level one. The word 'miracle' does not refer to external *supernatural* intervention to change the natural course of events. Miracles are rather shown to be, in another play on words, "natural" – "when they do not occur something has gone wrong." "Miracles are habits and should be 'involuntary'" (ibid.: 3). They are brought about by one's decision to change one's perception of a situation. The *Course* explains miracles in this way; "The miracle does not awaken you from the ego's dreams of separation and victimisation, but merely shows you who the dreamer is. It teaches you there is a choice of dreams while you are still asleep" (ibid.: 593).

The *Workbook* leads its students through a progression of daily mind training for each day of the year. Some of the daily lessons give advice about how to practise the mind training throughout the day and suggest strategies for the mind training to continue into the reader's sleep at night. (*Workbook*, 1996: 56) If the central themes of the *Text* revolve around the contrasts between the two levels of illusion and reality, the *Workbook's* central tool to help the student back to level one is through the practice of

‘forgiveness’, introduced in the *Text* in Chapter Twenty-six where it is linked to ‘healing’ (ibid.: 548-553).

Early *Workbook* lessons help the student to ‘unlearn’ false assumptions and to ‘learn’ to exercise the power of ‘choice’. Lesson One, for example, states “Nothing in this room means anything...this table does not mean anything....” etc. (*Workbook*, 1996: 3). Lesson Two continues the idea: “I have given everything I see in this room all the meaning that it has for me” (ibid.: 4). Perhaps, subtly, this *Workbook* lesson is trying to wean the reader off the *Course*, and towards the ‘truth’ to which it points. The logic of Lesson One and Two might lead one to say “This book (the *Course*) does not mean anything”. Lesson Three reinforces the theme of letting go of normal rational, sensual perception: “I do not understand anything I see in this room....The point of the exercises is to help you clear your mind of all past associations, to see things exactly as they appear to you now, and to realise how little you really understand about them” (ibid.: 5).

By Lesson Sixty-two, positive learning has begun: “Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world...remember that in every attack you call upon your own weakness, while each time you forgive you call upon the strength of Christ in you” (ibid.: 104). Here the spiral of teaching from the *Text* continues in the *Workbook* lessons, as the reader is reminded of the contrast between ‘weakness’ (level two) and ‘strength’ (level one), this time linking the contrast with the teaching of ‘forgiveness’. Another theme from the *Text*, the oneness of all minds (or non-duality) is carried through in this lesson: “Let us be glad to begin and end this day by practising today’s idea, and to use it as frequently as possible

throughout the day...it will help those around you, as well as those who seem to be far away in space and time, to share this happiness with you” (ibid.: 104).

As the student progresses through the year in the *Workbook*, some lessons are used to review and summarise past themes: Lesson 120, for example, is simply “For morning and evening review: ‘**I rest in God. I am as God created me.** I lay aside all sick illusions of myself and let my Father tell me Who I really am.’ On the Hour: ‘**I rest in God.**’ On the half hour: ‘**I am as God created me**’” (ibid.: 213 – emphasis in original).

The final lessons of the *Workbook* try to take the reader over the threshold to level one which is beyond words:

Our final lessons will be left as free of words as possible. We use them but at the beginning of our practicing, and only to remind us that we seek to go beyond them. Let us turn to Him Who leads the way and makes our footsteps sure. To Him we leave these lessons, as to Him we give our lives henceforth...He is the only way to find the peace that God has given us....We come in honesty to God and say we did not understand and ask Him to help us to learn His lesson, through the Voice of His Own Teacher (ibid.: 485-486).

The ultimate *Workbook* lesson, perhaps in another play on words, appears to turn the tables, making the student the teacher and the *Course*’s author the learner:

This holy instant would I give to You.

Be You in charge. For I would follow You,

Certain that Your direction gives me peace (ibid.: 486 – emphasis in original).

This final lesson, referring to the holy instant, appears to take the reader back to level one, where the author of the *Course* and the reader have achieved oneness and are beyond level two, the realm of time and space.

Following the final lesson of the *Workbook*, a one and a half page Epilogue appears to remind the reader again of the biblical paradigm. It begins with the sentence, "This course is a beginning, not an end" (ibid.: 487). Some of the language is reminiscent of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples in John's Gospel, for example: "You are not alone. No one who calls on Him can call in vain. Whatever troubles you, be certain that He has the answer and will gladly give it to you, if you simply turn to Him and ask it of Him. He will not withhold all answers that you need for anything that seems to trouble you....You need but ask it of Him and it will be given you (ibid.: 487). This passage brings to mind Jesus' words in John 16.23-24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you...ask, and you will receive that your joy may be full."

Paragraph three of the Epilogue again seems to allude to Jesus' last discourse: "No more specific lessons are assigned, for there is no more need of them. Henceforth, hear but the Voice for God and for your Self when you retire from the world, to seek reality instead. He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do...." (ibid.: 487). It is possible that this is an echo of "I still have many things to say to you...but when He, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth...and he will show you things to come" (John 16.13). The final sentence of the Epilogue is, "His love surrounds you, and of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless" (ibid.: 487), reminiscent of Jesus' promise in the discourse, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14.18). Thus, the *Text* ends with an allusive reference to the book of Revelation, and the

Workbook closes with the words of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples in the gospel of John. Both allusions remind the reader that this is a narrative with the power of scripture for its readers.

The *Manual for Teachers*: A Reversal of Roles and 'Saving the World'

The last volume of *A Course in Miracles* is the *Manual for Teachers*. As is hinted in the final lesson of the workbook, and perhaps again playing on words, the role of teacher and student is reversed: "The role of teaching and learning is actually reversed in the teaching of the world...It seems as if the teacher and the learner are separated, the teacher giving something to the learner rather than to himself...The *Course*, on the other hand, emphasises that to teach is to learn, so that the teacher and learner are the same" (*Manual*, 1996: 1). This is the shortest of the three volumes, containing only seventy pages. The Introduction reinforces previous teaching on the centrality of 'choice': "To teach is to demonstrate...the question is not whether you will teach, for in that there is no choice. The purpose of the course might be said to provide you with a means of choosing what you want to teach on the basis of what you want to learn" (*Manual*, 1996: 1)

The theme of 'salvation', along with 'choice' recurs in the *Manual*: "Except for God's teachers there would be little hope of salvation, for the world of sin would seem forever real" (*ibid.*: 2). Likewise, "The content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, "God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation" (*ibid.*: 3). Linked with the word 'salvation' is the word 'saviour': "It does not matter who the teacher was before he heard the Call. He has become a saviour by his answering...He has therefore

found his own salvation and the salvation of the world. In his rebirth is the world reborn” (ibid.: 3). The use of the words ‘salvation’, ‘saviour’, and ‘rebirth’ give the *Manual* a Messianic feel which is less obvious in the *Text* and *Workbook*. Although this feature could be said to be implicit in the *Text* and *Workbook* through the teaching about ‘joining’ and all achieving ‘oneness’ together, in the *Manual*, the reader is explicitly urged to become the ‘saviour’ of the world.

A section of the *Manual* teaches about the attributes of the teacher of God: trust, honesty, tolerance, gentleness, joy, defencelessness, generosity, patience, faithfulness and open-mindedness (ibid.: 9-16). This reminds the reader of Paul’s list of the “fruit of the spirit” in Galatians 5.22-23: “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”.

A section on healing recapitulates earlier teaching that sickness is an illusion, a decision on the part of the reader to ‘choose’ to believe that illness (level two) is possible. ‘Choice,’ ‘weakness’ and ‘strength’ from earlier *Course* teaching are woven together: “Healing is accomplished the instant the sufferer no longer sees any value in pain. Who would choose suffering unless he thought it brought him something of value to him?...For sickness is an election; a decision. It is the choice of weakness, in the mistaken conviction that it is strength” (ibid.: 17). The teaching on healing is as radical as earlier teaching empowering the reader to ‘choose’: “Healing must occur in exact proportion to which the valuelessness of sickness is recognised. One need but say, ‘There is no gain at all to me in this’ and he is healed” (ibid.: 17) and “Healing is always certain. It is

impossible to let illusions be brought to truth and keep the illusions. Truth demonstrates illusions have no value” (ibid.: 20). The function of the teacher of God is not to change the mind of the patient. The teacher comes to the patient “to represent another choice which they had forgotten. The simple presence of a teacher of God is a reminder. His thoughts ask for the right to question what the patient has accepted as true. As God’s messengers, His teachers are the symbols of salvation” (ibid.: 19).

Halfway through the *Manual for Teachers*, as the ‘salvation’ theme is developed, the reader senses a shift as ‘the Word of God’ is referred to along with ‘the world’. Earlier teaching has affirmed the non-existence of the world. The *Manual* now asks the question “How is peace possible in this world?” (ibid.: 29) The answer is as follows:

His Word has promised peace. It has also promised that there is no death, that resurrection must occur, and that rebirth is man’s inheritance. The world you see cannot be the world God loves, and yet His word assures us that He loves the world. God’s Word has promised that peace is possible here, and what He promises can hardly be impossible. But it is true that the world must be looked at differently, if His promises are to be accepted. What the world is, is but a fact. You cannot choose what this should be. But you can choose how you would see it. Indeed you must *choose* this (ibid.: 29 – italics in original).

As level one and two are inevitably pitted against one another, the reader senses a shift in emphasis: “Ask yourself whether your judgement or the Word of God is more likely to be true. For they say different things about the world, and things so opposite that it is pointless to try to reconcile them. God offers the world salvation; your judgement would condemn it...God’s Word assures you that He loves the world; your judgement says it is unlovable. Who is right? For one of you is wrong” (ibid.: 29). The reader is asked to ‘choose’ to ask a different question about ‘peace’ and the ‘world’: “It is no longer, ‘Can

peace be possible in this world?’ but instead, ‘Is it not impossible that peace be absent here?’” (ibid.: 20).

The twenty-nine sections of the *Manual* are headed by questions. Section Twelve’s title, for example, is “How Many Teachers of God are Needed to Save the World?” (ibid.: 31) continuing the theme of the “salvation of the world”. The sections become more eschatological as the *Manual* progresses towards the final section. Section Fourteen asks, “How will the World End?” (ibid.: 36) and Section Fifteen asks “Is Each One to Be Judged in the End?” (ibid.: 38). Section Twenty-four asks “Is Reincarnation so?” (ibid.: 60).

The answer to this last question is consistent with earlier teaching about level two existence. “There is no past or future and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times. Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense. Our only question should be, ‘Is the concept helpful?’ If it is used to strengthen the recognition of the eternal nature of life it is helpful” (ibid.: 60). The reader, however, is brought back to central *Course* teaching: “The emphasis of this course always remains the same – it is at this moment that complete salvation is offered you, and it is at this moment that you can accept it...atonement might be equated with total escape from the past and total lack of interest in the future. Heaven is here...heaven is now” (ibid.: 61)³².

³² To the question “Are ‘psychic’ powers desirable?” the *Manual* teaches that there are no ‘unnatural’ powers and an appeal to magic can be a desire for power. However, psychic powers can be ability developed for good to help achieve the ‘salvation of the world’. Conversely they can be used to “call upon the devil” (*Manual*, 1996.: 63).

Continuing the eschatological theme, the final two questions in the *Manual* ask “What is Death?” (ibid.: 66-67) and “What is Resurrection?” (ibid.: 68-69). Death is seen as “the symbol of the fear of God” (ibid.: 66). The ‘reality’ of death is “rooted in the belief that God’s Son is a body. And if God created bodies, death would indeed be real. There is no point at which the perception of the real world and that of the world of illusions becomes more sharply evident...Teacher of God, your one assignment could be stated thus: Accept no compromise in which death plays a part” (ibid.: 67). Defining the ‘resurrection’ the *Manual* states, “Very simply, the resurrection is the overcoming or surmounting of death. It is a reawakening or a rebirth; a change of mind about the meaning of the world...it is the lesson in which learning ends, for it is consummated and surpassed with this. It is the relinquishment of all other purposes, all other interests, all other wishes, and all other concerns. It is the single desire of the Son for the Father...Here the curriculum ends...The whole reversal is accomplished. Nothing is left to contradict the Word of God” (ibid.: 68).

The *Manual* ends with a poetic stanza with a messianic tone, perhaps echoing Jesus’ ‘great commission’ to his disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the world...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28.19-20):

And now in all your doings be you blessed.
God turns to you for help to save the world.
Teacher of God, His thanks He offers you,
And all the world stands silent in the grace
You bring from Him. You are the Son He loves,
And it is given you to be the means
Through which His Voice is heard around the world,
To close all things of time; to end the sight

Of all things visible; and to undo
All things that change. Through you is ushered in
A world unseen, unheard, yet truly there.
Holy are you, and in your light the world
Reflects your holiness, for you are not
Alone and friendless. I give thanks for you,
And join your efforts on behalf of God,
Knowing they are on my behalf as well,
And for all those who walk to God with me.

AMEN

Clarification of Terms: the Last Word

At the end of the *Course* volume, after the *Manual for Teachers*, is a short final book, the *Clarification of Terms*. The format follows the preceding volumes with an ‘Introduction’ a body with numbered paragraphs and an ‘Epilogue’. The ‘Introduction’ begins with a mirror image in reverse of the first words in the Introduction to the Text, “This is a course in miracles”. The Epilogue begins, “This is not a course in philosophical speculation, nor is it concerned with precise terminology. It is concerned only with Atonement, or the correction of perception. The means of the Atonement is forgiveness. The structure of ‘individual consciousness’ is essentially irrelevant because it is a concept representing the ‘original error’ or the ‘original sin’. To study the error does not lead to correction, if you are indeed to succeed in overlooking the error. And it is just this process of overlooking at which the course aims” (*Clarification*, 1996: 77). The final part of the *Course* thus begins with a reference to the original sin, reminding the reader of the beginning of the fall-redemption narrative in Genesis.

The 'Introduction' to the *Clarification of Terms* also emphasises the priority of practice over theory: "A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed" (ibid.: 77).³³ Having used a strategy of contrasting words to describe level one and two, the *Course* now teaches that all words are necessarily a part of level two, as the act of description involves separation, gradations, differences: "This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed. It is not concerned with what is beyond all error because it is planned only to set the direction towards it. Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols" (ibid.: 77).

To aid the reader toward the goal of the *Course*, however, the *Clarification of Terms* is given. Terms clarified are: 'Mind-Spirit', 'Ego-Miracle', 'Forgiveness-The Face of Christ', 'True Perception-Knowledge', 'Jesus-Christ', and 'Holy Spirit' (ibid.: 79-90).

The 'Epilogue' to the *Clarification of Terms* uses the metaphor of a journey, its beginning and end, reminding the reader of the *Course's* metanarrative, the journey from

³³ In suggesting that "a universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary", Schucman is in agreement with some religious studies scholars. For example, in a lecture given at the University of Chester, Professor Ron Geaves, argued that mystical experiences in many religious traditions share a common core of experiences, if not beliefs: 1) the narrowing of the field of consciousness so as to direct all the faculties to one centre; 2) the process of mental purification with the ideal of eliminating negative thoughts and emotions; 3) a conscious or contemplative attentiveness during the performance of daily or mundane activities; 4) restraint on physical and sense activity, often resulting in dietary restrictions, fasting, celibacy and restrictions upon unnecessary speech; 5) attempts to achieve inner stillness through meditation, contemplation or prayer; 6) non-possessiveness which results in either the restriction of material possessions or the renunciation of the idea of ownership; 7) ethical and moral behaviour embracing the ideal of amity which restricts reactionary or retaliatory behaviour; 8) daily mental disciplines that attempt to maintain the focus of the practitioner in the 'here and now'; 9) meditations or reflections upon the 'reality' of existence; 10) a common life – living within like-minded communities of practitioners; 11) negation of the ego (Lecture, 3 June 2003). The first, second, third, fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth and eleventh points of Geaves' taxonomy are reflected in *Course* practice as prescribed in the daily *Workbook* lessons.

level one down to level two and back to level one: “Forget not once this journey is begun the end is certain” (ibid.: 91). It is a journey ‘home’: “...the Son is still, and in the quiet God has given him enters his home and is at peace at last” (ibid.: 92). As in the Epilogues to the previous volumes, biblical allusions remind the reader of the fall-redemption model: first, using the metaphor of the journey, “We had lost our way but He has found it for us” reminds the reader of Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15.4-6). Second, there is reference to the curtain into the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple being torn at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion (Matthew 27.51; Mark 15.38; Luke 23.45): “Who stands before a lifeless image when a step away the Holy of the Holies opens up an ancient door that leads beyond the world” (ibid.: 91). Perhaps evoking memories of the culmination of the fall-redemption paradigm promised in Romans 8.22-23 (the rebirth of the whole creation), the final paragraph speaks of Christ and the world being ‘reborn’: “Let us go out and meet the new born world, knowing that Christ has been reborn in it, and that the holiness of this rebirth will last forever” (ibid.: 92).

Thus each volume of the *Course* ends with prose designed to evoke the memory of the biblical metanarrative reminding the student that an alternative scriptural metanarrative is offered to the reader.³⁴ Just as the *Text* ends with prose reminiscent of the book of Revelation, the *Workbook for Students* with allusions to Jesus’ final discourse to his disciples, the *Manual for Teachers* with a poetic stanza evocative of Jesus’ last commission to his disciples, so the *Clarification of Terms* ends with the biblical images of the lost sheep found and brought ‘home’ and the rebirth of all creation.

³⁴ Also considered part of the canon are two booklets scribed by Schucman, *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice* and *The Song of Prayer*. A book of Schucman’s poems was published posthumously, one of which is also thought to be a part of the canon of *A Course in Miracles*.

Revelation and Rationality

Textual strategies of legitimation for the religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles* rest largely on the text's conscious harking back to two well established ancient religious traditions: the metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta superimposed upon a metanarrative derived from the biblical fall/redemption narrative. The latter is heightened by over 800 quotations or allusions to biblical material in the vocabulary of the King James Bible. However, as with established religions, the *Course* religious discourse also appeals to another traditional strategy of legitimation identified by Weber, namely the appeal to rationality. Whilst many holistic spiritualities appeal to rationality by suggesting that quantum physics or holography "prove mysticism", the *Course* appeal to rationality rests largely on the internal evidence of the text, its 'watertight logic', consistency of argument and lofty prose. The following chapter will show in greater detail how the *Course* religious discourse followed Weber's schema for strategies of legitimation, and sheds new light on the process of routinisation of charisma.

Chapter Six

Authority, Routinisation and the Evolution of an Orthodoxy?

Debates and Schism in the *Course* Community

It was Robert Perry, founder of the *Course* organisation The Circle of Atonement who first publicly acknowledged schism within the community of *Course* students. Writing in *Miracles Magazine* in 1993, Perry wrote about liberalism and conservatism in the *Course* community and he identified Kenneth Wapnick as the leading conservative in this debate (1993: 2). Wapnick's approach to the *Course* was described by Perry as 'purist' and conservative. In the context of *Course* controversies, this means at least three things.

First, Wapnick sees the *Course* as unique. He believes it should not be mixed with other spiritualities. This means that he cannot approve of the 'pick and mix' approach of many devotees of holistic spiritualities. The Director of Publications for his Foundation (FACIM), Rosemarie LoSasso, wrote to the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. in 1991 protesting that the library was wrong to catalogue *A Course in Miracles* under the category 'New Age' because the *Course* "is in sharp disagreement with New Age thinking". LoSasso listed five examples of what she deemed to be significant beliefs of *Course* spirituality which were in conflict with New Age thinking:

- 1) the non-dualistic metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the physical universe (including the body) was not created by God and came about as an attack on God; 2) *A Course in Miracles* does not support 'prosperity consciousness' which is so prominent in New Age thought; 3) *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the only problem in the world is guilt as opposed to New Age emphasis on people's positive experiences; 4) *A Course in Miracles* does not teach that 'we are God' but that God is our Source, we have been created by him; 5) Unlike New Age thought systems, *A Course in Miracles* draws on

Freudian principles, the Neoplatonic tradition and themes common to early Christianity and the Gnostic systems of the second and third centuries (Letter, 19 January 1991).

Wapnick also views the *Course* as incompatible with Christianity, Hinduism and all other thought systems and religious traditions. He does not argue that the *Course* is the only way to God, but that it is a unique path and one which will save the devotee time (perhaps thousands of years) in the spiritual journey. In his welcoming letter on the FACIM website, Wapnick writes, “The *Course*’s understanding of forgiveness as the road to inner peace and the remembrance of God is unique among world spiritualities and our expectation is that this website will help you to decide whether the spiritual path of *A Course in Miracles* is for you” (www.facim.org – accessed 4 June 2004).

Second, Wapnick does not believe the *Course* should be used to give insight into moral or ethical questions or even for daily guidance about specific matters. He says, “The *Course* is strictly a mind-training system....It is meant to be lived in the world, but since it says that there is literally no world, only a dream of one, the *Course* is not interested in trying to improve the dream. It only wants to change the mind of the dreamer. When that happens the dream will automatically change in some way, but it is the mind of the dreamer that is the focus of the *Course*” (in Miller, 1997: 117-119). This stance has led critics to argue that he encourages *Course* students to abdicate social and environmental responsibility.

Third, Wapnick takes an uncompromisingly intellectual approach to the *Course*. He emphasises the importance of study. Wapnick has written a dozen academic books

explaining *Course* principles. *His Love Does not Condemn* (1989) compares and contrasts the *Course* with Platonism, Christianity and Gnosticism. He patterned the teaching institute at his Foundation after Plato's academy. At the back of many of his (and his third wife Gloria's) books published in the 1980s and 1990s are a few paragraphs about the Foundation's teaching institute.

Our thinking has always been inspired by Plato (and his mentor Socrates), both the man and his teachings. Plato's Academy was a place where serious and thoughtful people came to study his philosophy in an atmosphere conducive to their learning, and then return to their professions to implement what they were taught by the great philosopher. Thus, by integrating abstract philosophical ideals with experience, Plato's school seemed to be the perfect model for our teaching center. We therefore see the Foundation's principal purpose as being to help students of *A Course in Miracles* deepen their understanding of its thought system...." (Wapnick and Wapnick, 1987: 115-117).

On the liberal side of divide, are those who, by contrast, were comfortable with the New Age label. These would include Thetford and Judith Skutch and her Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) which first published the *Course* and now oversees translations of it. Thus, there is a sense in which the tension between the two approaches was present from the beginning. Schucman was uncomfortable with any form of esotericism, and was appalled at the New Age movement of the 1970s, whether it manifested itself in colourful dress, "touchy feely" behaviour, free love or talk about "energies" and "spirit entities". Skutch was still a part of the New Age network when she became involved with Schucman, Thetford and Wapnick. Skutch's Foundation, which predated the publishing of the *Course*, was called The Foundation for Parasensory Investigation. Only when Schucman refused to allow the *Course* to be published by a Foundation with an esoteric name did Skutch change the name to The Foundation for Inner Peace (Skutch, 1984: 119). In contrast to Skutch, Schucman dressed immaculately, was a highly respected academic at

Columbia University and loved the language of the King James Bible and Shakespearean verse. She was annoyed when eager young New Agers approached her to share how they had been helped by the *Course*. It is possible to speculate that the bitterness between her and Thetford, which increased after the publication of the *Course*, was based as much on her unrequited love for Thetford as on his eagerness to join New Age groups, take part in esoteric practices and allow the *Course* to be a part of a milieu which she despised. When Wapnick arrived and edited the *Course* with her, his scholarly approach and background in Roman Catholicism might have been a welcome antidote to Thetford's view of the *Course* (Interview, Skutch, 23 September 2005). Wapnick hints that he and Schucman did not altogether approve of how *Course* spirituality developed after it was published by Skutch's FIP. He writes,

What became increasingly noticeable was the vacuum left by Helen's and Bill's fading leadership was increasingly filled by Judy [Skutch]....In the absence of Helen's supervision and guidance at the beginning of its public life, the *Course* has developed in a much less focused direction than it would have otherwise gone. Judy, I believe represented an alternate 'plan' for the *Course*'s growth in the world and one which involved its becoming quite popular, with approximately 700,000 sets sold as of September 1991 and 1.4 million as of July 1999 (Wapnick, 1999 [1991]: 365).

Today Wapnick is on the board of directors of Skutch's Foundation (FIP) and Skutch is a director of Wapnick's Foundation (FACIM) which held the copyright until it was lost in the court case with Endeavor Academy in 2003. However, their relationship is said to be an uneasy one, and Wapnick is thought to be unhappy with FIP's programme of *Course* translations as he believes the world is not yet ready for the *Course* (Interview, Perry, 8 May 2004). When I asked Skutch about the court case, she suggested that, whilst she had backed Wapnick and testified in court on his behalf, it had been a futile gesture as FACIM's copyright was about to expire in any case.

There is a subtle difference in the literature and websites of Skutch's Foundation (FIP) and Wapnick's. Whereas Wapnick's FACIM website emphasises that the *Course* is a unique path, in the welcoming letter to Skutch's FIP website, she writes that the *Course* teaches a universal spirituality: "Although it uses Christian terminology, it deals with universal spiritual themes. It is another look at the perennial philosophy in a form that is practical to our everyday lives" (www.acim.org – accessed 4 June 2004). Skutch locates *Course* spirituality as a restatement of a "perennial philosophy" underlying the religious traditions of the world; Wapnick presents the *Course* as a new and unique path, albeit one which incorporates insights from Freud and Christianity (as corrected by Jesus himself), Plato and second century Gnosticism. Furthermore, Wapnick rejects the idea that there is any real correspondence between Christianity, New Thought, Christian Science or Vedanta and the *Course*, in spite of the Theosophy, Christian Science and Roman Catholic phases of Schucman's mother, the Roman Catholic and evangelical Baptist influences on Schucman from family servants, Thetford's family background in Christian Science and Thetford's enthusiastic study of Advaita Vedanta (see Hammer, 2004: 449).

Second, Skutch's stance also locates her with those who see the *Course* as having practical application in this world and Skutch herself has been involved with liberal Democratic causes in America (Interview, Skutch 23 September 2005). By this criterion, Ian Patrick, Miracle Network Director in London, is also located on the liberal side of the divide. On the front of each issue of *Miracle Worker* is the doctrinal statement: "The *Course* contains a synthesis of the teachings which lie at the core of the world's great

religions, together with sophisticated psychological insight. It emphasises the practical application of its principles” (e.g. May/June 2006:1). In his question and answer column in the magazine, Patrick sometimes gives practical advice about specific ethical problems by applying *Course* principles. Patrick also invites well-known New Age teachers such as William Bloom, who has no connection to *A Course in Miracles*, to write in *Miracle Worker* (e.g. September/October, 2001: 1-2). In February of this year (2006) Patrick taught his first presentation of the *Course* in Londonderry, N. Ireland and later in the month held a weekend workshop in Belfast. In his write up of these meetings in the *Miracle Worker* he related the *Course* teaching to the ‘troubles’ as Protestant and Catholic participants took part in a “powerful and meaningful forgiveness exercise” (March/April, 2006: 5). It should be noted, however, that although Patrick, unlike Wapnick, views the *Course* as consonant with other holistic spiritualities and as a restatement of a perennial philosophy, within *Course* circles he remains close to Wapnick. Whilst to date he has been unable to persuade Wapnick to come to the U.K. for meetings sponsored by the Miracle Network (Interview, 25 August 2005), he supported Wapnick’s position in the copyright court cases and he teaches from Wapnick’s *A Talk on ‘A Course in Miracles’* (1983) in his eight week ‘Introduction to the *Course*’ series, which he runs three or four times a year. Even more so than Patrick, Marianne Williamson consciously mixes *Course* principles with teachings from established religious traditions and esoteric ideas. One of her books is an urgent call for social action (1997). Her work with cancer and AIDS patients applied *Course* principles to help those with life threatening illnesses. Since 2000 she has led a campaign for a cabinet Department of Peace in the U.S. government. A common theme in her writing and

lectures is a concern to save the world: she writes of longing to see the world “redeemed, brought back, healed and made whole” (1996 [1992]: 296).

Third, liberals tend to take a popularising approach rather than an academic approach to teach *Course* principles. Jampolsky has involved himself in the ‘dream’ by working with dying children and their families. His son Lee has founded a centre and written self help books for those caught up in drug and other addictions. Jampolsky’s books are perhaps the most easily-read, most humorous and light hearted of all self help books inspired by the *Course*. He writes simply, and his books are illustrated with cartoons and sound-bite-like phrases. Having read of Thetford’s love of puns, his fear that the *Course* was being taken too seriously and of his closeness to Jampolsky in California, I asked Skutch if Jampolsky’s first book, *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* may be as close as a researcher today can come to understanding Thetford’s approach to the *Course*. Skutch replied, “Bill didn’t simply help Jerry write that book. Bill wrote it himself. The ideas and energy came from Jampolsky, but the writing was Bill’s” (Interview, 23 September 2005).

An Evolving Orthodoxy?

The controversy over whether an orthodoxy is emerging centres around the person of Kenneth Wapnick. Wapnick commands special respect within the *Course* community as the final editor (with Schucman) of the *Course*. As noted, Wapnick claims to have taught the meaning of the *Course* to Schucman herself at times during the editing process, thus, in a sense, establishing himself as the first teaching authority of *Course* spirituality (1999 [1991]: 328-349). Wapnick’s Foundation (FACIM) identifies itself as the teaching arm of

the original publisher of the *Course* (ibid.: 133-135). When he expounds *Course* teaching, it sometimes appears not as his personal interpretation, but as the true interpretation. This is especially true when he uses phrases like “what the *Course* really says” and “what Jesus actually meant was” (1997: 167, 169, 239; see also Miller, 1997, 121-122). This leaves the impression that there is an official *Course* orthodoxy to be guarded and defended as well as an ‘orthodox’ telling of the *Course* story known only to him. Liberal interpreters of the *Course* argue that there is no single interpretation; if there are a million students of the *Course*, there will be a million interpretations. This impression was reinforced in the 1990s, when lawyers for Wapnick’s FACIM filed a court case against Robert Perry’s Circle of Atonement, forbidding him and other Circle authors to publish their commentaries and devotional books on the *Course*.

Hugh Prather, a close friend of Thetford during his final California years, wrote an article during the height of the copyright battles, of his memories of Thetford’s attitude to the *Course*:

Bill thought it amusing that many ‘official’ details about how the *Course* came about were not what he recalled, even though he was by that time the only one alive who had been there from the beginning. For instance, once he laughed and said: “Now they’re saying the *Course* came over a period of ___ years. I always thought it was ___ years” [*sic*]. My purpose is not to correct historical details and, for that reason I am not getting into them. ‘Getting into details’ instead of getting into God is what causes all the trouble. Although Bill disagreed with some of the ‘facts’ that were being recorded about his and Helen’s lives, and some of the actions that were being taken in the name of the *Course*, he *did not* feel the need to impose his position on *other people*. (*Miracle Worker*, November/December 1999, 1 – italics in original).

Prather also remembers the atmosphere when he met Thetford, Wapnick, Skutch and Jampolsky in California in 1978:

Although there was an underlying sense of family and mutual support, several of them seemed to be wrestling with two contrasting attitudes toward the *Course*. One was that the *Course* needed protecting and promoting. In those days, this point of view was still quite weak because the original thinking when the *Course* was being turned over to the Foundation for Inner Peace, was that “the *Course* is for everyone” and shouldn’t even be copyrighted, which of course would mean that no one organisation could control it....This attitude was most clearly embodied in Bill Thetford’s light-hearted and humorous perspective that the *Course* could take care of itself, that it merely pointed to a Truth that could never be contained in words and that no harm could come from doing what it says, which is: forget it and turn to God. For example, I know of two separate times when Bill advised people who were arguing about what the *Course* meant to “tear the page out,” because he said, “nothing should come between you and your brother.” Until Bill died, the *Course* rocked gently on a sea of flexibility and good humour....I naively thought that the *Course* was going to be the first spiritual teaching to escape becoming a tool of separation. Even though separation had overtaken the teachings of Muhammad, the Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tzu, the Prophets and even ‘The Big Book’ (AA), how could it happen, I said to myself, to the only teaching that contained *nothing* but oneness and forgiveness? It could happen and it has happened (ibid.: 2)

Prather appeared to be voicing the distress of many in the *Course* community as well as implicitly criticising Wapnick in the conclusion of his article:

It is virtually impossible to do the first lesson in the *Workbook* (“Nothing in this room means anything”) without saying, “This book does not mean anything”. But if we really believed that, how could we possibly fight about who should control it or what that control should look like? We can try to control the controllers of the book, or we can turn to God. We can be preoccupied with who is and who is not allowed to make money from the book, or we can turn to God. We can argue about which ego can interpret the book best, or we can turn to God (ibid.: 2).

Routinisation: The Hermeneutical Battles of Perry and Wapnick

After the copyright court cases ended, organisations with various interpretations of the *Course* continued to flourish. The most prominent hermeneutical battle now appears to be between Robert Perry and his organisation, Circle of Atonement, and Wapnick and FACIM. Whilst Wapnick has kept a dignified silence since losing the copyright to *A Course in Miracles*, Robert Perry and his colleagues have published articles on their

website (www.circleofa.com), in Patrick's *Miracle Worker* and in books explaining how their understanding of the *Course* differs from that of Wapnick. I began this chapter quoting Perry's accusation that Wapnick was a conservative and a "purist". However, the recent writings from the Circle of Atonement would suggest that there is a sense in which Perry's interpretation is more conservative than that of Wapnick. Both would fall into the conservative camp in their understanding of the *Course* as a unique path and not a version of a perennial philosophy, and both would be conservative in their devotion to serious study of the text. However, Perry accuses Wapnick of reducing the *Course* to a series of simple concepts and then repeating those concepts again and again: "The result is that students have taken in elements of his framework without remembering or knowing where those elements came from...they believed he was the authority on the *Course* and had the final word....They might not have found Wapnick's presentation persuasive if there existed a true market place of ideas" (Perry, Mackie and Watson, 2003: x). Central to the differences between Wapnick's understanding of the *Course* and that of the Circle of Atonement is that the Circle take the *Course* literally whilst Wapnick takes most of it metaphorically (Mackie, 2003: 161). Wapnick's often repeated phrase, "Accept no compromise in which duality plays a part", according to Circle criticism, means that "only the rare passages that, in his opinion, reflect the *Course's* non-dualistic metaphysical foundation should be taken literally, but anything in the *Course* that suggests duality – such as God knowing about the separation, spirit interacting with the world – is to be regarded as metaphor...It is meant to be regarded as a comforting 'fairy tale' directed to those on the lower rungs of the spiritual ladder" (Mackie, 2003: 161).

The Circle's view of the Holy Spirit provides an illustration of the differing approaches between the two organisations in many areas. The Circle believes the *Course* literally when it states that the Holy Spirit is always there to help the student. "Again and again we are told to let go of our judgment and allow the Holy Spirit's judgment replace it. An entire section of the *Manual for Teachers* (M-10) is devoted to this topic. While the Holy Spirit's most important role is to guide our perception of the world, the *Course* is clear that he is to specifically guide our actions in the world as well" (Mackie, 2003: 113). By contrast, the Circle represents Wapnick (rightly, in my view) as having a different view of the Holy Spirit. In Wapnick's scheme, the Holy Spirit does not do anything actively in the world nor in our minds; He is not a real Being and thus cannot act in any way. When I attended Patrick's 'Introduction to the *Course*', I asked him during one session whether the Holy Spirit was in the world (in the 'dream'). Patrick replied that this was difficult to answer because God and the Holy Spirit know nothing of the 'separation' or of this world of our projection; yet the Holy Spirit is our memory of oneness with God (11 March 2002). Wapnick does not deny that the *Course* depicts the Holy Spirit doing things in the world but he denies that these statements are to be taken literally. "He offers various reasons for why the *Course* doesn't literally mean the things it says about the Holy Spirit, reasons that are based on the underlying assumption that the *Course* can't possibly mean these things, given its overall thought system" (Mackie, 2003: 113). Perry views this as the foundation of all differences between Circle teachers of the *Course* and Wapnick. He writes, "Wapnick's metaphysics and logic carry more authority than the *Course* and thus have the apparent right to reshape the *Course*" (Perry, 2003: 100). For Perry and his colleagues, the *Course* is not primarily a metaphysical system to be understood, but a

rigorous path laid out to be followed in the sequence given: *Text*, *Workbook* and *Manual for Teachers*.

It is clear from present hermeneutical battles that the role of *Course* teacher and interpreter carries with it power (in Weber's use of the word). The role of chief interpreter is sought after and it is possible to see other *Course* writers lining up behind Wapnick and Perry. Gary Renard (see Chapter Nine) places himself in the lineage of Wapnick. Marianne Williamson, by contrast, writing in the Foreword to Perry's *Path of Light* (2004), appears to place the mantle of chief interpreter on Perry's shoulders: "Today, with a plethora of commentary on the *Course*, it is important not just for me but for all who care about its wisdom to discern whose work presents the most powerful insight. I have always felt that Robert Perry is a writer whose understanding of *A Course in Miracles* is a teaching in its own right. As someone who wrote one of the earliest popular treatises on the *Course*, *A Return to Love*, I have always felt it is Perry who guides the *Course* student to the next step" (in Perry, 2004: xv). Another *Course* commentator writes on the frontispiece of the same book, "My expectation is that *Path of Light* will become the definitive guide to *A Course in Miracles*". Still another writes, "Robert Perry is simply the best *Course* scholar writing today. He thoroughly and accurately represents what the whole *Course* says and doesn't just focus on certain 'pet' passages which he believes represent the 'central' teaching while disregarding the rest" (in Perry, 2004: v). It is difficult not to hear implied criticism of Wapnick's 'orthodoxy' in these commendations.

Heresy: Endeavor Academy

The fear of the imposition of a *Course* orthodoxy is heightened by the existence of a *Course* community, Endeavor Academy in Wisconsin, which has been labelled as unorthodox and cult-like by other *Course* organisations, as well as by authorities in new religions such as James Lewis who teaches nearby at the University of Wisconsin. In an email to me on 5 April 2003, Lewis wrote, “While I am extremely wary of labelling a new religious group as a cult, I do feel that the folks at Endeavor exhibit cult-like characteristics”. Its leader, Charles Anderson, has identified himself as the ‘Master Teacher’ and some who have left the residential community speak of verbal and physical abuse (Miller, 1997: 66-67).

Endeavor have established an outpost, The Miracles Reunion Centre, in Laag Soeren in Holland, and a group from Wisconsin and Holland ran a conference in Chester in October 1999, which I attended (see Chapter Ten). Anderson’s assistant, Ted Poppe, lectured, but it was difficult to understand the thrust of his teaching because sarcastic remarks about Wapnick and FACIM seemed paramount. Booklets written by the Master Teacher and videos of him teaching were freely given to all attending the conference. Having watched the videos and read the booklets I have not been able to understand the central ideas of their teaching, nor am I able to understand why group members find the Master Teacher attractive and compelling, as they clearly do. The group appear to elide the Bible with the *Course*, using them interchangeably with statements like, “The words of Jesus Christ from the New Testament and *A Course in Miracles* are taught in this booklet” and “Practice of the *Course* will make the New Testament real in your life” (*The Paradox of*

Eternal Life, n.d.: 1; 3). In another booklet, *Jesus Christ of Nazareth and the Third Patriarch of Zen and You*, Anderson seems to equate *Course* spirituality with Buddhism (n.d.: 6), the Rig Veda (n.d.: 1) and Jesus' teachings in the gospels (n.d.: 7). It is not difficult to sympathise with Wapnick's concern over this group's use of quotations from *A Course in Miracles* and the facile eclecticism of its teaching. Their list of publications (in 1999) included 33 videos featuring the Master Teacher, nine workbooks and eleven booklets by the Master Teacher. "A full range of audiotapes, booklets and videos in other languages" are offered as well.

Authority and Routinisation

In many ways, the narrative which has become 'tradition' for *Course* devotees appears to run counter to Weber's schema for the legitimation of religious authority. Schucman, the 'founder' in the sense of being the charismatic figure who received the original revelation for the group, refused to acknowledge authorship of the *Course* and insisted it be published anonymously. This request has been scrupulously honoured up to the present time. Yet this 'anonymous' printed on the cover page is something of a nonsense since FACIM's publication of *A Course in Miracles* has always been prefaced with a brief 'story' of how the *Course* came to be scribed by Schucman. The vacuum created by Schucman's hostile attitude towards Thetford and the *Course*, and Thetford's refusal for perhaps different reasons to take on a leadership role, meant that from the earliest history of the *Course*, the role of teacher and interpreter became that which conferred power and gave the discourse legitimacy within the community of devotees. Whilst the court cases ended Wapnick's control of the copyright of *A Course in Miracles*, the battle for the role

of the 'correct' interpreter has become an increasingly important feature of the life of the *Course* since the turn of the millennium. As will be seen in Chapter Nine, the appearance of fresh charisma and revelation through two self help authors, Neale Donald Walsch and Gary Renard, may recreate the cycle of revelation, tradition construction and routinisation.

Weber's Taxonomy and *Course* Religious Discourse

Building on Lewis' study of the "strategies of legitimation" used by a variety of new spiritualities (2003a), it is useful to explore Max Weber's three part scheme as it relates to *Course* religious discourse formation and legitimation. As noted, Weber identified three strategies of legitimation by which traditional religions established authority for their followers: 1) charisma, 2) tradition, and 3) rationalism (Lewis, 2003a, 13-14). The following sections will briefly explore each as it relates to *Course* discourse formation and legitimation.

1) Charismatic Authority

Weber believed that charismatic authority existed only amongst the followers of a religion, the 'insiders' (Depertuis, 1986: 111). Weber defined charismatic authority as "unstable", in contrast to bureaucratic authority (1978: 226), "recognising no forms of orderly procedures....The bearer of charisma assumes the tasks appropriate to him and requires obedience and a following in virtue of his mission" (Eisenstadt, 1968: 20). If a charismatic leader's following collapses, his claims collapse. Thus the concept of 'recognition' is important, as is the need for 'proofs' (Runciman, 1978: 227). Although

Schucman renounced the role of guru, the early *Course* community, ‘recognised’ her charisma, and she in turn provided ample ‘proof’ of it through the dreams, moments of clairvoyance, visions of her (and Thetford’s) past lives and, finally, by the scribing of *A Course in Miracles*.

Weber also emphasised that charismatic leadership “rejects as dishonourable all rational planning” especially regarding the acquisition of money (Runciman, 1978, 228). This was a significant feature of the early years of the *Course*. Wapnick and Skutch recall asking the Holy Spirit for guidance as to whether the *Course* should be published, in what format and by whom. During the copyright court cases, Wapnick stressed that they had received specific guidance “early on” from the Holy Spirit that the *Course* should always be published as a three volume entity and that it should be copyrighted (*Miracle Worker*, March/April 2000: 7). Perhaps one of the reasons for the distress caused by Wapnick’s control of the copyright was the suspicion that a profit motive might be involved: according to Weber, true charisma is blind to such considerations. “Charisma flows from concrete and intensely personal experience of heavenly grace and a semi-divine heroic-stature” (ibid.: 230). Again, in spite of Schucman’s obvious revulsion, this role seems to have been assigned to her, and her very abhorrence of it only authenticated her charismatic role as something truly separate from the “ego-bound” human personality of Schucman. She also bears out another point Weber made about charisma: “The bearer of charisma holds his authority in virtue of a mission held to be incarnate in his person” (ibid.: 232). Schucman and Thetford both saw the scribing of the *Course* as an assignment to be fulfilled, ‘assignment’ perhaps being the 1970s equivalent of ‘mission’.

Weber connected this mission with the overthrow of existing morality, law and tradition (ibid.: 232) and whilst *Course* teachers emphasise that all paths lead to God, the teaching itself explicitly attacks traditional Christian understandings of Jesus and the institutional church. It is possible that this emphasis may in part account for the surprising and prevailing success of *Course* spirituality. It came at a time (and perhaps reflected that time) - 1960s and 1970s, - that welcomed the combining of different traditions and the rejection of institutional religions (see Pollock, 2004: 238).

2) Rational Appeals to Authority

Lewis defines rational appeals to legitimation as “a direct appeal to reason/rationality; an appeal to ‘common sense’ or ordinary experience”; and “an appeal to the authority of science” (2003a: 14). As noted in Chapter One, the latter strategy, grounded in modernism, is featured in many holistic spiritualities: by imposing a mystical understanding on, for example, holography or quantum physics, the claim is made that ‘science proves spirituality’. Indeed, Thetford defended his participation in the scribing of the *Course* by suggesting that the “latest findings” of physicists prove “the physical world does not exist as it had previously been understood” (*New Realities*, September/October 1984: 4). However, for the most part, *Course* spirituality does not appeal to science for legitimation; science is, after all, viewed as part of the illusory dream of level two and, as such, can prove nothing about the realities of level one.

Course spiritualities do, however, appeal to rationality through what Lewis calls ‘common sense’ and ‘ordinary experience’ (2003a: 14). This is particularly true of

Course-related self help texts. *Course* spirituality is authenticated by the narratives of experience which readers identify as being close to their own experience. Personal experience is given special significance as the ‘proof’ of one’s epistemology. The honest, harrowing stories in self help books are ones with which readers can identify; they offer spiritual hope for someone in the most dire situation through the promise that one can change any external circumstances by altering the way one chooses to view them. ‘Proofs’ are then offered through the medium of the authors’ stories of lives turned around (Tolle), useful, altruistic careers found (Jampolsky), and fortunes made (Williamson and Hay).

Third, the *Course* appeals to rationality for legitimation through the text itself. This was borne out for me in meetings and conversations with *Course* devotees who often commented on the consistent and unflinching logic of its “thought system”. Here the *Course* contrasts sharply with the lack of “literary merit, depth of ideas and logical coherence” evident in some of the self help literature (Hammer, 2004a: 416). In the words of Rosemarie LoSasso, Director of Publications for FACIM:

As a former professor of philosophy, one of the most profoundly consequential insights I experienced not long after I began studying the *Course* some 19 years ago, was that the entire human intellectual enterprise is a defence against the truth. It is rooted in the arrogant quest of the separated Son to dissolve the real truth about reality and replace it with another body of truths originating with, and verified by, the human intellect. This includes theology too, which incorporates intellectual validation. If all of this is the case, it leaves one with one’s feet firmly planted in mid-air. Indeed, the *Course* itself implores its students: “Be still, and lay aside all thought of what you are and what God is; all concepts you have learned about the world; all images you hold about yourself. Empty your mind of everything it thinks is either true or false, or good or bad, of every thought it judges worthy, all the ideas of which it is ashamed. Hold onto nothing. Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught, nor one belief you have learned before from anything. Forget this world, forget this course, and come with the wholly empty hands unto your God” [*Workbook*, 1996: 413]. Needless

to say, one cannot keep one's philosophy hat on and do this. I found this tremendously threatening and enormously risky to accept. Yet, paradoxically, my intellectual understanding of the *Course's* metaphysics provided me with a basis for making sense out of such a request, and understanding why doing this is indispensable if one is to reach God (Letter, 14 February 2003).

Thus LoSasso appeals to the internal consistency and logic of the *Course*, but ultimately relies on an epistemology of individual experience: "In the *Course*, Jesus asks only that we contrast what we experience when we forgive, with what we experience when we hold grievances; and if we like the consequences of forgiveness more than we like the consequences of judgment, we should probably continue to practise the lessons of the *Course*" (ibid.: 3).

3) The Legitimation of Tradition

At a superficial level, one can see that the *Course* links itself to older established traditions, especially that of Christianity (although it challenges traditional Christian interpretations) and Advaita Vedanta, as argued in Chapter Five. There are also the implied connections to ancient wisdom and mythology in Schucman's dreams: the 'Aesculapius' written on a large black book in an underwater chest represents the Greek god of healing (Wapnick, 1999: 101), and the Qumran-like cave in another dream (ibid.: 112) is reminiscent of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, Book 10, in which people believe their shadows on the cave wall are the only reality.

Perhaps more compelling for *Course* students, however, has been the development of the *Course's* own tradition. Weber saw the development of tradition as a consequence of the end of a phase of charismatic leadership; with the passing of charismatic leadership, "a

link with tradition becomes...by far the most appropriate possibility as a means of connecting to the original charisma” (Runciman, 1978: 237). Weber’s understanding of the development of tradition relates to the *Course* religious discourse from its earliest days. I have argued that the development and propagation, largely by Wapnick, of ‘the story of the *Course*’, became an important legitimating device for *Course* students and continues to serve this function today (Interview, Patrick, 25 August 2005). My field work bore out the importance which *Course* students place in the story of the *Course*, both in its capacity to illustrate *Course* teaching and as a legitimating device. Most (or all) *Course* meetings I attended featured the story of Schucman’s scribing of the *Course* and her resistance to this role.

In *Course* spirituality, this transition from charisma to tradition began before Schucman’s death, as Wapnick appropriated for himself the role of *Course* teacher (even to Schucman) and interpreter. I have suggested that the reluctance of Schucman and Thetford to lead a quasi-religious movement meant that the process of routinisation began earlier than is usually the case. However, this feature of *Course* spirituality may show that routinisation takes place earlier in a religious movement than has been thought to be the case. Or it may demonstrate that institutionalisation begins at the stage of charismatic leadership. If so, Weber’s linear model must be questioned. It is possible that there is parallel development: charisma includes the seeds of routinisation or, at least, the pressures to routinise are on charismatic leaders from the outset. Schucman’s role as charismatic leader also departs from Weber’s model in her reluctance to assume the role. Yet the importance of ‘recognition’ by her followers overcame this departure from

Weber's model as Schucman's followers bore the burden of what Tumminia has called "the social production of charisma" (2003: 63).

The inherently loose structure of the *Course* community from the beginning probably represents a group quite different from those Weber studied in his day. Weber studied religions as institutional organisations with hierarchical leadership and buildings. In spite of these caveats, Weber's taxonomy continues to have relevance, shedding light on the manner in which the *Course* religious discourse developed and established legitimacy for its followers. The inevitable egalitarianism that accompanies the routinisation of charisma can readily be seen in the last decade in the *Course* community. Weber suggested that routinisation can lead to fresh charisma on the part of followers in the form of new revelation (Tumminia, 2005: 134-135) as will be explored in Chapter Nine. Part Two has shown how the 'story of the *Course*' became a form of tradition construction and conferred 'charisma' on its reluctant scribe, Helen Schucman, whilst questioning Weber's linear model of routinisation. Part Three will examine the diffusion of *Course* teaching through the medium of popular spiritual self help literature.

Part Three

Diffusion of *Course* Themes: The Literature of Spiritual Self Help

Chapter Seven

Jampolsky, Williamson and Their Antecedents

Introduction

The idea of self help in western societies is rooted in the Victorian values of the nineteenth century. It received an early expression in Samuel Smiles' well-known book called *Self Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (1859). Smiles wrote his book to encourage people to have a sober estimation of their intrinsic worth, and to work hard to improve their situation in life. He did this by adducing many examples of individuals who had done just this, urging his readers to emulate their industry, application and perseverance. In this, the book was a forerunner of later self help books with its practical advice, focus on the individual self, inspirational tone and anecdotal character.

Building on the themes in Smiles' book, a genre of popular Christian inspirational books began to be published at the final quarter of the nineteenth century.³⁵ A significant sociological study of this early spiritual self help literature was published in 1958: *Popular Religion: Inspirational Books in America* by Louis Schneider and Sanford M. Dornbusch. The book broke new ground in the sociology of religion in that it examined

³⁵ See for example Hannah W. Smith (1875, which continues to be published today); Drummond (1890); Trine (1897); Gordon (1901); Allen (1910); Fosdick (1923); Clark (1925); Jones (1930); Dimnet (1932); Fosdick (1932); Fox (1932, 1934); Pickford (1934); Clark (1940); Fox (1942); Fosdick (1943); Laubach (1946); Harkness (1948); Peale (1948); Jones (1949); Keller (1949); Peale and Blanton (1950); Peale (1952); Sheen (1953).

relationships between religion and popular society (1958: v). The book suggested that the popular, largely Christian self help books of that era represented a form of inspirational psychotherapy. In the context of this study, it is significant to find that the formulae of contemporary spiritual self help books were well established by the early 20th century. One of the most famous of these books, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* was published in 1936. The first edition ran to only 5000 copies, but it quickly became a bestseller and continues to be reissued. Its perennial appeal shows that it touches a human need which cannot be explained as a faddish phenomenon.

The format of Carnegie's book is a familiar one to readers of later self help literature. The book is divided into four parts, each articulating a particular theme. Part One teaches "Fundamental Techniques in Handling People"; Part Two teaches "Six Ways to Make People Like You"; Part Three explains "How to Win People to Your Way of Thinking"; and Part Four offers advice on how to "Be a Leader: How to Change People Without Giving Offence or Arousing Resentment" (ibid.: 9-11). Each chapter is leavened with interesting anecdotes, often involving famous people of the era, and ends with a principle to be memorised. The principle at the end of Chapter One, for example, is "Don't criticise, condemn or complain" (ibid.: 40). The principle at the end of Chapter Two ("The Big Secret of Dealing with People") is "Give honest and sincere appreciation" (ibid.: 52). At the end of the book is a chapter by Lowell Thomas giving a potted biography of Dale Carnegie, stressing the American dream fulfilment aspects of his story as he is shown emerging from rural poverty in the Midwest to international fame. The book is secular, yet the lessons could be seen as implicitly religious and psychological.

Carnegie himself said that his achievement was to “help people conquer their fears and develop courage” (ibid.: 247). It was also aimed at mass culture, resembling the genre of popular spiritual self help literature which would flourish at the turn of the millennium. Finally, there is the format of inspirational advice encouraging personal optimism, spiced with anecdotes to demonstrate in real life the worth of the advice, and the offering of specific ‘techniques’ to achieve the goals laid out in the book. This format proved to be a successful formula which continues to be used.

The Context of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Inspirational Literature

As with the spiritual self help literature at the end of the twentieth century, these texts seem to draw on the American individualistic cult of success which is enshrined in the American constitution which states that all men (*sic*) are entitled to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. Then as now there was cross fertilisation across the Atlantic Ocean. Non-American authors sold inspirational books to the American public. Henry Drummond was British; Ernest Dimnet was French and Hannah W. Smith was an American who moved to England. The popularity of this literature may have been enhanced by the Depression which caused people to look for reasons for optimism. In *Power through Constructive Thinking*, one author, for example, wrote, “If only you will find out the thing God intends you to do, and will do it, you will find that all doors will open to you; all obstacles in your path will melt away...you will be most liberally rewarded from the monetary point of view; and you will be gloriously happy” (Fox, 1932: 23). Another wrote, “God is a twenty-four hour station. All you need to do is to plug in. You plug in with your thinking. Truthful thinking. Good thinking....And then

you can have and use all the Love and all the Power, all the Courage, all the Energy, all the Cheerfulness, all the Activity and all the Kindliness of God” (Pickford, 1934: 21). By the mid century, one of the most famous American inspirational writers, Norman Vincent Peale, wrote, “I am going to give you what I call a prescription to drive out the fear that lies in your mind like a poison. Here is a text from the Scriptures. Take it, repeat it to yourself over and over again, until your mind is completely possessed with it. Conceive of it as a medicine dropping into your mind, and it will spread a healing influence that will give you an immunity from this fear” (1950: 16).

The books in this genre had at least eight characteristics in common. First, they achieved bestseller status and made their authors wealthy. Most were published by mainstream publishing houses: Fleming H. Revell Company, Little, Brown & Company, Simon & Schuster, Harper & Brothers, Macmillan Company, Doubleday, Doran & Company, Harcourt Brace & Company, Prentice-Hall, Inc. and McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Second, they were Christian in character. Whilst no apologetic for explicitly Christian or even broadly Judeo-Christian belief was offered, a Christian worldview was assumed by the author. The task of the book was to show the reader how to tap into the practical potential of the beliefs they already held. Frank Laubach, for example, wrote that “Prayer is to the world of human relations what white blood corpuscles are to the human body” (1946: 14). The popular nature of the prose and the consciously non-denominational appeal to a wide public explicitly excluded thoughtful theological discussion.

Third, the literature, though Christian in tone, was non-denominational and emphasised help for this life rather than salvation for the next life. Whilst not overtly anti-church, there was often a hint that denominations (and therefore the institutional church) were a hindrance to true practical Christianity. Certainly, to avail oneself of the inspirational help offered in a book one need not belong to a denomination or go to church. It is assumed, if not explicitly stated, that one can be 'religious' without going to church or belonging to a denomination. As one author wrote, "Tapping the resources of power from cosmic roots secures power for daily living not by struggling after it but by inwardly releasing it...this is the essence of religion...it substitutes confidence for fear, a sense of security for a life lived on the ragged edge...it inevitably affects health" (Fosdick, 1932: 19). In this attitude of scepticism about institutional, hierarchical Christianity, there are links with the later spiritual self help literature which sees organised religion as part of the problem, not the solution.

Fourth, many of the books appealed to psychology in the manner of this quotation: "Said one of the world's most famous psychologists to a friend of mine, 'For complete psychological health, mankind requires, either a religion, or some substitute for religion which has not yet been discovered'. Certainly this experience of tapping into the resources of cosmic power makes a difference to the moral drive of character, and to the radiance, tranquillity, hopefulness and power with which men [*sic*] live" (ibid.: 20).

Fifth, these books offered 'techniques' to their readers (Schneider and Dornbusch, 1958: 4). As seen in the quotation from Peale, this might involve memorising a passage from

the Bible and repeating it throughout the day. Other authors might suggest withdrawing for quiet meditation in the midst of a busy day at the office. Glenn Clark urged his readers to give fifteen minutes of their time each day for two months to prayer (1925: 5). Some suggest visualising a God with a personal interest in the reader for a period of each day. E. Stanley Jones wrote, “Think faith, talk faith, act faith. Someone has suggested this for a good model of suggestion to yourself, ‘Every day, in every way, God is giving me health’” (1949: 357). All urged their readers to develop a particular technique to achieve an outward spiritual success.

Sixth, there was the promise of rewards for practising the techniques. The authors inspired hope in the mind of the reader both for this life (peace of mind, health, financial and business success) as well as the promise of salvation in the next life, although, as noted, the next life was not an important emphasis. Clark promised rewards for the daily discipline of prayer: “A man who learns and practises the laws of prayer correctly should be able to play golf better, do business better, work better, love better, serve better” (1925: 49). Jones promised, “The source of health is in God. Being on the receiving end of God’s power relaxes you, opens every pore of your being to the health of God” (1925: 45).

Seventh, the books appealed consciously to a wide range of ordinary people, literally to any who felt dissatisfied with their lives for whatever reason. This wide appeal, together with the anecdotal style and lack of theological depth mentioned in the second point, helped the books to achieve bestseller status. The books were not written for professional

theologians or psychologists but for ordinary people. Schneider and Dornbusch argue that internal evidence suggests that the books were intended broadly for the middle classes, “people of education and income above minimal level with middle class aspirations” (1958: 10-11). It could equally be argued, however, that the promise of success in business, the chance to become an effective public speaker or to become a doctor might appeal even more to those in the lower middle classes.

Eighth, there are harbingers in the content of some of this literature of the ‘self spirituality’ of the latter part of the century. The combination of optimism and individualism can, with hindsight, be seen as portents of the optimistic evolutionary outlook found in many New Age spiritualities of the 1980s. The focus on the individual and on mind training can be seen as forerunners of later holistic spiritualities. This is specially true of books influenced by New Thought, Christian Science (with its denial of the existence of matter) and Unity. For example, Emmet Fox suggested that “thoughts are things” (1934: 68)³⁶ and argued that the external world is only “the out-picturing of our own minds” (1942: 8). He taught that evil and time have no reality, and that we live in a “mental universe” (ibid.: 36). For Fox, the “good news” of the gospel is that man himself [*sic*] is “Divine Spirit”, that the body is “spiritual” and illness comes from a state of mind (ibid.: 164). Again, there are portents here of the idealism of the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles*. For example, Fox’s beliefs that what one does not fear cannot harm one and also that the material world gets its reality only from one’s thinking are very close to *Course* teaching. “What we experience” says Fox, “is our own concept of things” for “we

³⁶ One can find the influence of Unity, Christian Science and New Thought in this literature discussed in Charles L. Braden (1949). See also William James’ comment on the influence of New Thought in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902: 105).

make our own world by the way in which we think” (ibid.: 203). Again, the closeness of Christian Science and New Thought to *Course* metaphysics can be seen in Fox’s teaching that “it is useless to try to improve outer things if we leave our own mentality unchanged...the world you live in is a mental concept and not an objective reality” (ibid.: 229). This clearly prefigures the teaching of Kenneth Wapnick, the final editor of *A Course in Miracles*: “The *Course* is strictly a mind-training system. Since it says there is literally no world, only a dream of one, the *Course* is not interested in trying to improve the dream. It wants only to change the mind of the dreamer” (in Miller, 1997, 118). Moreover, Fox’s teaching can also be seen as a harbinger of the belief central to holistic spiritualities, namely that all people create their own reality.

I have introduced the inspirational self help literature of first half of the twentieth century in order not only to show the context of the present spiritual self help industry, but also to illustrate how a successful format for self help books was in place well before the New Age movement of the 1980s and the contemporary spiritual self help literature derived from it. This format included teaching certain principles, instruction in ‘techniques’ to live out the principles, and anecdotes to prove the effectiveness of the techniques in the lives of real people. In certain instances, there are also links in the content of both genres of literature: in the transforming power of focusing on the positive, in the appeal to psychology, in the importance of the spiritual dimension in life (whether Christian or New Age), in the promise of success and health in this life, in the distrust of formal institutional religion, in the importance of releasing the power within oneself, and in the

case of books influenced by Christian Science, Unity and New Thought, in the emphasis on mind over matter.

Self Help Literature Based on *A Course in Miracles*

The *Course* itself could be viewed as being in the lineage of the literature described above; it is a 'self help book'. The *Workbook for Students*, particularly, with its lesson for each day of the year is used as a spiritual manual by its devotees. There are self help books which explain each of the 365 lessons in the *Workbook*.³⁷ In addition, the *Course* has generated hundreds of books explaining its teaching, simplifying its doctrines and commenting on its text. In the last decade, books on the *Course* reveal hermeneutical battles being waged within the *Course* community. It is in the genre of spiritual self help, however, where the greatest volume of *Course* generated literature exists and where the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* have become accessible to contemporary popular culture. The self help books generated by the *Course* can be divided broadly into two categories: those based wholly on the *Course* and those which mix *Course* teaching with other traditions and spiritualities.

The first self-help book based on the *Course* is in the former category and takes the student back to the early days of *Course* history. The story behind it is worth examining as it exemplifies the metanarrative of the *Course* story. It also forms a typology of the many personal narratives which over the years have attached themselves (and continue to do so) to the central *Course* narrative, forming a living religious discourse.

³⁷ For example, Watson and Perry, 1998, *A Workbook Companion: Commentaries on the 'Workbook for Students' from 'A Course in Miracles'*.

Gerald Jampolsky

In the early 1970s Gerald Jampolsky, a psychiatrist with a thriving practice, had a reputation for being an effective psychotherapist treating alcoholics in the San Francisco area. With a wife, two sons and a respected position in the community, Jampolsky appeared to be successful in his personal and professional life. In his autobiography, however, he confessed to having a “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality. In the haven of my office I could be loving and receive love. But at home I was capable of being a tyrant. At the office I could talk about unconditional love with parents; at home, I was doing exactly those things that I had so sharply criticized in my parents” (1979: 1). Successful in treating alcoholics, he himself was an alcoholic in denial and suffered from debilitating back pain. After a painful divorce from his wife of twenty years, he was at an all time low. Jampolsky came to realise that he could not heal the wound of his own childhood, which was the belief that he was unlovable. As he relates,

I could make others right by becoming more guilty. The more guilty I became, the better they liked it. Becoming guilty became a way of pleasing others. Consequently, I became a storehouse of guilt...I decided to fulfil negative expectations others had of me by doing things to make myself wrong in order to make them right. It gave me a crazy sense of power finally to be right about something. Although I couldn't succeed at making people love me, I became an expert at making people angry. By provoking anger, I reinforced my belief that I could control something by demonstrating convincingly what an unworthy and unloving person I was. I experienced the world as a precarious place where I might be attacked at any moment (1985: 34-35).

As I have shown in my analysis of the *Text* of the *Course* (see Chapter Four above), there is in the *Course* metanarrative a point at which a low is reached and the choice is made to return to level one. For Jampolsky that choice was made when he agreed to read the first page of *A Course in Miracles*.

Jampolsky was a friend of Judith Skutch, who, when she visited San Francisco in 1975, offered to show him the manuscript of *A Course in Miracles*. An atheist, he declined to look at it when he heard it was about ‘God’ and ‘spirituality’. In his words, “I had been judgemental toward people who pursued a spiritual pathway; I saw them as fearful and I believed they were not using their intellect properly.” When she offered it to him a second time, however, “in a snobbish way I said I’d look at one page. I read one page, and for the first time in my life I heard an inner voice saying, ‘Physician, heal thyself. This is your way home.’” (1979: 2). Although still suspicious, Jampolsky began to study the *Course*. A few months later he met Schucman and Thetford, was impressed by their ‘ordinariness’ and came to believe that Jesus really had spoken through Schucman because the message of the *Course* and Schucman’s behaviour were so profoundly at odds (Miller, 1997: 84).³⁸ Later in 1975 Jampolsky ‘received guidance’³⁹ to start a centre to help dying children. The centre would be based on the principles of the *Course* but would use no religious language. This became the Center for Attitudinal Healing. Based on the *Course* principle that the student becomes the teacher, Jampolsky believed that dying children were wise spirits who could help each other and those who volunteered in

³⁸ As noted in Chapter Four, an important feature of the religious discourse spawned by the *Course* was the ‘proof’ of the *Course*’s divine provenance by the disjunction between Schucman’s attitudes and behaviour and the *Course*’s teachings.

³⁹ “To receive guidance” is a phrase often heard in the *Course* community. Although the words are not found in *A Course in Miracles*, they are implied in the text and have become an important part of the *Course* religious discourse and practice. Thetford, Schucman, Skutch and Wapnick ‘received guidance’ to publish the *Course* in the first place (Skutch, 1984: 117). Later they ‘received guidance’ to have it copyrighted (ibid.: 111). More recently when Wapnick’s foundation lost the copyright battle in a New York court in October 2003, Skutch was quoted as saying that their response would be to ‘seek guidance’ as to what the next step should be (*Miracle Worker*, Issue 56 January/February 2004, 5). It is a phrase often used by *Course* students. See Chapter Six’s discussion on the differences between Wapnick and Perry on ‘seeking guidance’. Wapnick argues that the *Course* reveals God as impersonal abstract love whilst Perry emphasizes *Course* teaching that personal guidance can be sought from the Holy Spirit for specific situations in this life.

the centre to help them. Today Attitudinal Healing is a worldwide organisation with over one hundred centres providing support to people facing a variety of crises. Jampolsky continued his psychiatry practice, but became dissatisfied with the Freudian model built on inequality and descriptions of pathology rather than health. He chose to provide a free service at the centre to enhance the feeling of equality between healers and participants. Jampolsky eventually gave up charging fees in his psychiatric practice as well, and continued to study the *Course* with a small group that included Thetford (Miller, 1997, 84-85). During this period Jampolsky became close to Thetford and Thetford helped Jampolsky to write the first *Course* based self help book: *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* (1979: i).

Gerald Jampolsky: *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*

Love is Letting Go of Fear (LLGF) is written in simple, accessible English. The word ‘God’ is mentioned only once in the book, in the author’s introductory note: “The *Course* could be described as a form of spiritual psychotherapy that is self-taught. I was perhaps more surprised than anyone when I became involved in a thought system that uses words like *God* and *love*” (1979: 1 – italics in original). Throughout the book, Jampolsky substituted the word ‘love’ wherever he might have written of God. At the time he said that he did this out of compassion for those (like himself) who felt uncomfortable with religious language.⁴⁰ There is a whimsical air to it which perhaps reflects Thetford’s influence on the material. Each chapter has several cartoon-like illustrations which highlight the *Course* teaching of the section. For example, the section urging the reader to

⁴⁰ Twenty one years later, Jampolsky wrote that the substitution of ‘love’ for God reflected his own discomfort at the time with the word ‘God’ (2000: 13).

let go of the past and not worry about the future shows a slim man standing on a box marked 'The Present'. He is being pushed by heavy thugs from either side. The man on the left is labelled 'past guilt' and the bully on the right 'future fear'. The illustration on the following page shows the man smiling, having pushed away the past and future. He stands securely on a block marked NOW and 'love' is written above him (1979: 20-21). He is enjoying the holographic 'holy instant', the 'eternal present'.

Thus, whilst the teaching of Jampolsky's book is remarkably close to that of the *Course*, the book's style is a deliberate contrast. Whilst the *Course's* language, often in iambic pentameter, is lofty, obscure and uses tortuous logic, Jampolsky uses short words and his sentences are almost childlike in their simplicity. There is an appealing humility in the anecdotes which he tells against himself. The cartoon figures which appear on nearly every page are ridiculous caricatures which encourage the readers not to take themselves too seriously. The message, however, is serious and powerful: the reader has the power to choose not to be a victim in life.

The theme of the book is 'personal transformation'. There are three sections. Part One is called 'Preparation for Personal Transformation'; Part Two is 'Ingredients of Personal Transformation'; and Part Three is 'Lessons for Personal Transformation'. Each part begins with a short quotation from the *Course*. The quotations, however, are not put between speech marks and no referencing is done to *A Course in Miracles*. In the 'Acknowledgements' section at the front of the book, Jampolsky tells the reader that the twelve lesson titles are quotations from *A Course in Miracles* and reprinted with the

permission of the publisher. The *Course*, however, like ‘God’, is seldom mentioned in the text of the book. The quotation introducing Part One is “All fear is past and only Love is here”. In Part One, ‘Preparation for Personal Transformation’, he begins by explaining that it is a mistake to believe that ‘reality’ is based on “feedback from our physical senses” (1979: 17). He defines love as something “that has no beginning and no ending” and suggests that the reader define this as his ‘reality’ (ibid.: 17). The concept of ‘fear’ is introduced as that which distorts our perception and confuses us. The two realities of the *Text* of the *Course* are introduced in simple language: “Love is the total absence of fear. Love asks no questions. Its natural state is one of extension and expansion, not comparison and measurement. Love, then, is really everything that is of value, and fear can offer us nothing because it *is* nothing...As we help ourselves and each other to let go of fear, we begin to experience a personal transformation” (ibid.: 17 – italics in original). Thus, on the first page of the book, Jampolsky introduces many *Course* concepts: ‘reality’ and ‘unreality’; ‘love’ and ‘fear’; ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’; and ‘joining’. Jampolsky promotes the idea of ‘joining’ with the promise that one only experiences personal transformation when one helps someone else let go of fear.

A few pages later Jampolsky introduces the central concept of ‘choice’, illustrating it with the cartoons noted above, showing a man choosing to reject the bullies of past guilt and future fear, to live in the loving present: “We can choose our own reality...we can experience the truth of our reality as Love. To do this, we must, each instant, refuse to be limited by the fearful past and future and by the questionable ‘realities’ we have adopted from our culture” (ibid.: 21). A short section defines forgiveness as the choice to see the

other person as either extending love or calling for love. Part One ends with nine “themes to live by”. These include: making peace of mind the goal; seeing forgiveness as the way to the goal; learning not to judge but to see others and ourselves as guiltless; living in the present; accepting guidance from our inner intuitive voice; believing guidance will be followed by the means to obey the guidance; following guidance by committing oneself to a specific goal; choosing our feelings; and using positive imagination” (ibid.: 28-29).

Part Two, ‘Ingredients for Personal Transformation’ begins with the quotation “This day I choose to spend in perfect peace”. This section reinforces the theme of ‘choice’ and offers five aids in retraining the mind. Jampolsky urges the reader to remember to ask themselves the following questions at all times:

1. Do I choose to experience *peace* of mind or do I choose to experience *conflict*?
2. Do I choose to experience *love* or *fear*?
3. Do I choose to be a *love finder* or a *fault finder*?
4. Do I choose to be a *love giver* or a *love seeker*?
5. Is this communication (verbal or non-verbal) loving to the other person and is it loving to me? If we want peace of mind, it is essential that our communications with others bring about a sense of joining (ibid.: 37).

Part Two then suggests a list of words to be eliminated from the reader’s vocabulary: “impossible”; “can’t”; “try”; “limitation”; “if only”; “but”; “however”; “difficult”; “ought to”; “should”; “doubt”. “Any words that place you or anyone else in a category, any words that tend to measure or evaluate you or other people, any words that tend to judge or condemn you or someone else” (ibid.: 41). The cartoon illustrating the advice shows a man, having tied all of these words into a garbage bag, happily burying them in the ground. Part Two ends with a Review summing up the teaching: time enables us to

‘choose’; all minds are one; our physical senses give us a false view of reality; we can’t change the external world but we can change how we view ourselves and others; love is our reality and fear is made up; and we experience only what our mind has projected outward (ibid.: 43). Parts One and Two give the reader the simple teaching that in the large and small situations of life, one is always confronted with a *choice* between *love* and *fear*. The reader is made to believe he has the power to make the choice in favour of love (reality) and to deny the reality and power of fear.

Part Three, ‘Lessons for Personal Transformation’, begins with the quotation “Forgiveness ends all suffering and loss”. This section contains twelve lessons “for personal transformation”; each lesson title is a quotation from *A Course in Miracles*. Introducing the twelve lessons are seven “suggestions for deriving maximum benefit from the lessons”. Having given *Course* teaching in Part One and Two, Part Three gives the reader practical self help. The suggestions are specific and practical. For example, the reader is encouraged to “Put the lesson title on a card and keep it with you, review it periodically throughout the day and evening, and apply the lesson to everyone and everything without exception” (ibid.: 48).

The format for Part Three has a lesson quoting from the *Course*, a teaching section followed by an ‘example’, a story from real life reinforcing the teaching and a final exhortation beginning with the word, “Today...” helping the reader to internalise the lesson. For example, Lesson Two is “Forgiveness is the Key to Happiness”. A teaching section ends with the application: “Whenever I see someone else as guilty, I am

reinforcing my own sense of guilt and unworthiness....only through forgiveness can my release from guilt and fear be complete” (ibid.: 66). The ‘example’ is a story from Jampolsky’s psychiatric practice involving a patient who refused to pay his bill. After Jampolsky phoned the patient informing him that he would not send more bills but let the money go, the man paid his bill of \$70. An hour later at his centre, Jampolsky met the mother of a child with cancer of the spine who was unable to pay her car repair bill of \$70 at the garage. “My inner voice said, ‘Give her the \$70 since you have just found money that you thought you didn’t have’. When I did this, I experienced inner peace. I continue to be impressed by how quickly I experience inner peace when I let go of my attachment to the past belief that someone is guilty and someone is innocent” (ibid.: 68). The final exhortation is “Today I choose to let go of all my past misperceptions about myself and others. Instead, I will join with everyone and say: I see you and myself only in the light of true forgiveness” (ibid.: 68).⁴¹

The final lesson is followed by a page with this quotation from the *Course*: “I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me, I ask for, and receive as I have asked” (ibid.: 129). The cartoon on the opposite page shows a ship labelled ‘love’, full of happy people sailing to a sunlit future, having cut loose the rope tying the ship to a small, rather shabby dinghy labelled ‘fear’ carrying an unkempt, sad man.

⁴¹ *Course* teaching on forgiveness differs from the Christian model of forgiveness. *Course* teachers believe an inequality is inherent in Christian concepts of forgiveness because the forgiver always does so from a position of superiority. The *Course* concept of forgiveness is built on the belief that all are equally perfect, sinless Sons of God (Interview, Ian Patrick, 4 February, 2002).

LLGF is significant for several reasons. First, it was the first self help book based on the *Course*. Second, it appears to be at least partly written by Thetford himself. In the acknowledgements, Jampolsky thanks Thetford for collaborating with him in the book, and for “modifying and adding content” to it (ibid.: i). Hence, this self help book is the closest the researcher may get to Thetford’s understanding of the *Course*. As noted in Chapter Four, Judith Skutch confirmed to me that Thetford had in fact written in the book although the ideas came from Jampolsky (Interview, 23 September 2005). Third, it is effective in simplifying *Course* teaching, using the familiar self help formula of practical suggestions, teaching, techniques and anecdotes and the humorous addition of cartoons illustrating the major themes. Fourth, it links the central *Course* teaching on the power of ‘choice’ to what was to become a significant feature of New Age spirituality in the 1980s, namely the belief that an individual’s mind creates its own reality. This principle has also become a key teaching of the spiritual self help literature since the 1990s. The teaching is reinforced by the final quotation from the *Course* on the last page of the book. The belief that each person creates his own reality became so diffused throughout the culture, that it could be gently mocked in a cartoon in a magazine after the turn of the millennium. The cartoon shows two ducks in a pond speaking to one another with the caption: “Maybe you should ask yourself why you’re inviting all this duck hunting into your life right now” (*New Yorker*, 21 May, 2001: 69).

Fifth, Jampolsky was one of the first to teach a spirituality using non-traditional language. His refusal to use the word ‘God’ or other ‘spiritual’ language in LLGF helped

to begin the process of the detraditionalisation of religious language which continues today in contemporary spiritualities. It could also be argued that by substituting the word 'love' for 'God' he helped to begin the process of detraditionalisation of religious authority which became important in later Self and holistic spiritualities (see Heelas, Lash and Morris, 1996).

Finally, this was the first *Course*-related book to achieve bestseller status. After the book was promoted on the Johnny Carson show, a popular evening chat show, it became a bestseller and over three million copies have been sold. Jampolsky followed it up with other self help books,⁴² including a sequel to LLGF called *Shortcuts to God* (2000). In the Introduction he tells that he now feels comfortable writing and speaking about God and suggests that his earlier reluctance showed that he had not fully dealt with fear in his life. The format is similar. Cartoons are again included as effective teaching devices, techniques are suggested, and there are many anecdotes. The theme of the book, like the first one, is 'personal transformation' and the message is broadly similar, but the word 'God' appears on nearly every page. Whether this simply reflects Jampolsky's personal pilgrimage or whether it is a harbinger for those in holistic spiritualities remains to be seen.

⁴² Other books by Jampolsky (some co-authored with his wife Diane V. Cirincione) include *Teach Only Love; Goodbye to Guilt; Out of the Darkness into the Light; Love is the Answer: Creating Positive Relationships; To Give Is to Receive; Change Your Mind, Change Your Life; An 18 Day Mini-Course on Healing Relationships; One Person Can Make a Difference* and *Wake-Up Call*. He has also written a book for children, *Me First and the Gimme Gimmes*. Jampolsky's son Lee Jampolsky has used *Course* principles to work with people struggling with addictions and has written several self help books including (1991) *Healing the Addictive Mind: Freeing Yourself from Addictive Patterns and Relationships* (1991) and *Walking through Walls: Practical Spirituality for an Impractical World* (2005).

Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson's 1992 *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of 'A Course in Miracles'* (ARL) and personal story are as important to the *Course* narrative as are Jampolsky's, but for different reasons. Williamson came from a liberal, middle class Jewish family in Houston. Her father, an immigration lawyer, took her to Viet Nam when she was thirteen, to show her the reality of war (1992: xiii). Her grandfather was religious and took her to the synagogue (ibid.: xiii). After a philosophy class in high school, however, she became an atheist (ibid.: xiv). She dropped out of university and describes the 1960s and 1970s as a time she cannot remember: she experimented with drugs, drifted from city to city and from relationship to relationship, went into therapy several times, tried Eastern and Western philosophies, esotericism, Kierkegaard, the I Ching, existentialism, radical death-of-God Christian theology, and Buddhism. However, she concluded that none of them showed her how to apply their teachings to her own life (ibid.: xiv-xv).

In 1977 she saw a set of blue volumes on Judith Skutch's coffee table, opened the first one and read the familiar introduction to *A Course in Miracles*. She stopped reading at the paragraph which spoke of removing the blocks to "the awareness of love's presence which is your natural inheritance" (ibid.: xvi), considering it to be both intriguing and arrogant. Then she noticed the Christian language, became frightened and put the book back on the table.

A year later, in deep depression, Williamson returned to the *Course* and “knew immediately that it had something very important to teach me.”⁴³ It used traditional Christian terms, but in decidedly non-traditional, nonreligious ways. I was struck, as most people are, by the profound authority of its voice” (ibid.: xvii). Whereas Jampolsky had avoided the word ‘God’ and all spiritual language, in Williamson’s book, she broke new ground by explaining Christian terms such as ‘hell’ (1992: 24), ‘Christ’ (ibid.: 31-32), ‘devil’ (ibid.: 34), ‘surrendering to God’ (ibid.: 39), ‘accepting Christ’ (ibid.: 39), ‘atonement’ (ibid.: 38), ‘prayer’ and ‘sin’ (ibid.: 37), and ‘Holy Spirit’ (ibid.: 41) in non-religious language. In doing so, she continued the process begun by Jampolsky, namely the detraditionalisation of religious language and authority.

Williamson felt drawn to the *Course* because it challenged her intelligence without insulting it: “It’s a bit clichéd to say this, but I felt like I had come home...for me, this was not just another book. This was my personal teacher, my path out of hell” (ibid.: xvii). As Williamson began reading the *Course* and doing the daily *Workbook* lessons, she soon felt positive change within herself: “I felt happy. I was beginning to calm down. I began to understand myself, to get some hook on why my relationships had been so painful, why I could never stay with anything...I began to have some sense that I could change. Studying the *Course* unleashed huge amounts of hopeful energy inside me” (ibid.: xxvii-xviii). Up to this point, Williamson’s narrative is similar to the stories of many other *Course* students. Early on, they experience hope and empowerment; later, it has become part of the *Course* religious discourse that the determined student runs into

⁴³ This point is featured in many *Course* narratives: the reader sees or starts to read the *Course* and intuitively knows that this is to be her life path. Another important part of the *Course* religious discourse is the later point at which the student encounters overwhelming difficulties on the spiritual path.

severe difficulties internally and externally. The removal of the “blocks to the awareness of love” is found to be a painful, long experience requiring discipline, determination and perseverance. Williamson’s story illustrates an extreme case common to the trajectory of many *Course* narratives, perhaps because of the high profile she came to have.

The above account comes from the ‘Preface’ to the original 1992 edition of *A Return to Love*. By the time the second edition of the book came out in 1996, she wrote in the ‘Foreword to the New Edition’, “I’m older than I was when I wrote this book, and in some ways I am less innocent. I have tasted more of love’s opposition. Yet having seen as much as I have now seen of the world’s resistance to the ways of love, I realise more deeply than ever the responsibility which each of us has to embrace it more fully and express it effectively” (ibid.: xii). What had happened to Williamson between the publications of the two editions? How had her book and her person aroused such opposition?

As she records in her book, she ran into opposition early in her career as a *Course* student. A final low point brought on by a nervous breakdown and a failed marriage, in her words, caused her to “invite God into my life.” She writes:

After that, nothing felt the way I expected it to. I had thought that things would improve...I thought God would give [me] a wonderful paint job – new shutters perhaps, a pretty portico, a new roof. Instead, it felt as though as soon as I gave the house to God, He hit it with a giant wrecking ball. “Sorry, honey” he seemed to say, “There were cracks in the foundation...I thought we better just start all over” (1992: 10-11).

During this difficult period, Williamson persisted with *Course* studies. She supported herself by temporary secretarial work and tried to break into the world of cabaret singing. After several failures, she realised that people enjoyed her chats between songs more than her singing. She began to lecture on the *Course* whilst continuing the struggle to earn a living as well as to give time to charity work. By the time *A Return to Love* was published, she had become a minor celebrity. Moving to Los Angeles, she gained a celebrity audience with movie stars, gay men (she started centres for AIDS patients called 'Centers for Living') and upper middle class members of the 'baby boomer' generation. Soon she had a busy schedule jetting between Los Angeles and New York, lecturing and appearing on television. The popularity of her funny, racy and strident lectures caused a literary agent to persuade her to do a book (Miller, 1997: 94-95).

A Return to Love

ARL is a compilation of her lectures, and her intimate, fast paced lecture style comes through the pages. Following the self help literary formula, the book has two parts, 'Principles' and 'Practice'. In the first section of principles, five chapters deal with 'Hell', 'God', 'You', 'Surrender' and 'Miracles'. Williamson's writing style is intensely personal. As with other self help literature, there are many anecdotes, but they are mainly drawn from her own life. The book is addressed to "my generation" or "our generation" meaning the baby boomers born in America after World War II. (1992: 5). She diagnoses that they are "terrified" because they never grew up (ibid.: 5). Having used the 'Introduction' to introduce the reader to the contrast between 'love' and 'fear', she teaches that love is an 'energy' which "can't be seen with physical eyes" yet "you know

when it is there” (ibid.: xxiii). Thus the *Course* teaching on the unreality of the physical world is made accessible using her personal anecdotal style. Chapter One, ‘Hell’, introduces the concept of ‘miracles’ as “a shift in perception” (ibid.: 6). ‘Hell’ is defined as self-hatred (ibid.: 6); ‘demons’ are our “painful thoughts” (ibid.: 8). Through the story of her personal experience, she shows ‘hell’ to be the final low point which drives a person to surrender to God (ibid.: 11-13). Throughout Part One, the *Course* concepts (‘one-mindedness’, ‘the ego’, the power of ‘choice’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘belief in separation’, love as ‘extension’ of God, and the world as a ‘dream’) are taught as she draws on her personal narrative.

Part Two, ‘Practice’, reads much like Part One. Chapters cover relationships, work, the body, and heaven. Several ‘techniques’ are offered. The reader is urged to make space for the discipline of meditation and doing the *Course* daily *Workbook* lessons. Prayers are suggested for specific situations (ibid.: 300). The chapter on ‘the body’ draws on her work with AIDS patients: she urges the reader to heal the mind and the body will follow. Visualisation techniques are recommended (ibid.: 241). The chapter on ‘work’ encourages the reader to use the *Course* teaching on ‘joining’ to use one’s “talents and abilities in a way that serve others” (ibid.: 179). The final chapter on ‘heaven’ defines heaven as the reader’s choice to be happy by seeing himself as God sees him (ibid.: 271-273).

Williamson’s treatment of *Course* themes is different from Jampolsky’s in two significant ways. First, Williamson’s writing is eclectic. The subtitle of Williamson’s

book reads 'Reflections on *A Course in Miracles*' and the book is a faithful presentation of *Course* metaphysics in a narrative style. However, unlike Jampolsky, Williamson quotes from sources other than the *Course*. *A Return to Love* quotes from the Twelve Step programme (ibid.: 21), Freud (ibid.: 24), the biblical Jesus (ibid.: 18: 273), Buddha (ibid.: 43), Genesis in the Old Testament (ibid.: 19), Jung (ibid.:30), "Eastern religions" (ibid.: 32), Zen Buddhism (ibid.: 59), I Ching (ibid.: 205) and Deepak Chopra (ibid.: 229). The impression given is that *Course* teaching is in agreement with all the great religious traditions of the world, as well as contemporary psychological theory. This belief differs from Wapnick's view of the *Course* as a unique spiritual path, but resonates with what we know of Thetford's view of the *Course*, that it was one of many articulations of the perennial philosophy behind all religion. Williamson says of herself, "I don't consider myself an advanced student [of the *Course*]. I think I'm a good intermediate student...I'm a popularizer of spiritual themes and I don't think the *Course* has a monopoly on spiritual truth" (in Miller, 1997: 90).

Second, Williamson shows more clearly than other writers how the *Course* detraditionalises Christian language. Whilst Jampolsky refused to write in religious terminology, Williamson takes care to explain the new meanings given to traditional Christian terms. Coming as she does from a Jewish background, it is perhaps important for her to explain how she can follow a book using Christian vocabulary. She writes:

A Course in Miracles uses traditional Christian terminology, but it uses it in very non-traditional ways. Words like Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, Jesus, etc., are used for their psychological rather than religious significance. As a student and teacher of *A Course in Miracles*, I have learned much about the resistance that many people have to Christian terms. As a Jew, I thought it was only other Jews who would have a problem with the word Jesus. But I was wrong. It's not just Jews who get nervous

at the mention of his name. Say the word Jesus to a group of moderate Christians, and there is likely to be as much resistance to the topic as there is in anyone else....As it says in the *Course*, “some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world”. So many Christian terms have been used to create and perpetuate guilt, that many thinking people have decided to reject them entirely. ... Words are just words, and new ones can always be found to replace ones that offend. In the case of Jesus, however, the problem isn’t as simple as just coming up with another word. Jesus is his name. There’s no point in pretending that his name is Herbert....The *Course* understands our resistances but it doesn’t cater to them....Who is Jesus? He is a personal symbol of the Holy Spirit. Having been totally healed by the Holy Spirit, He has become one with Him....Jesus reached total actualization of the Christ mind, and was then given by God the power to help the rest of us reach that place within ourselves (1992: 44-46).

I have quoted from Williamson’s writing as an example of how religious language and authority are detraditionalised because the process is helpful to our understanding of contemporary spiritualities. Williamson, more than many other writers, explains the new meanings of terms rather than implying new meanings or assuming that new meanings will be understood by the reader. Examples of her explanations for the detraditionalising explanations of language are found throughout the book. ‘God’ is, for example, defined as “the universe” and that which is “stable and unchangeable” and “love” (ibid.: 25). ‘Christ’ is defined as “a psychological term” (ibid.: 31). The ‘Holy Spirit’ is “a force in our minds that knows us in our perfectly loving, natural state – which we’ve forgotten – but enters into the world of fear and illusion with us, and uses our experiences here to remind us who we are” (ibid.: 41). “Accepting Christ” is a “shift in self-perception...accepting the beauty within me as who I really am” (ibid.: 32-33). “Praying to God to save our lives” is really “praying for Him to save us from our own negative thoughts” (ibid.: 37). The ‘atonement’ is the Holy Spirit’s reminder to us that we are “at one” with God (ibid.: 38).

There is a third characteristic in which Williamson is closer to Jampolsky than may be initially apparent to the reader. Unlike Wapnick, who believes that it is not the burden of a *Course* student to try to make the world a better place, Williamson is intensely involved in this world. As noted above, from an early stage she worked with AIDS patients. Again, like Judith Skutch, she has been involved with liberal Democratic political campaigns. More recently, she has organised a campaign to create a cabinet position of 'peace' in the American government. In contrast, Jampolsky has not involved himself in teaching *Course* principles; he does not suggest the *Course* to people who come to his centre, but uses *Course* principles to help families with dying children.

Like Jampolsky's book, ARL was publicised on a popular chat show, that of Oprah Winfrey. After Winfrey's recommendation, the book became a bestseller selling over 750,000 copies in the months after the show and it has since been translated into over a dozen languages around the world (ibid.: 97). Another spin off of Williamson's fame was that sales of *A Course in Miracles* increased by fifty per cent in the year after *A Return to Love* was published (ibid.: 90). Indeed, her fame and celebrity have become greater than that of the *Course*. (One viewer of her interview on 'Larry King Live' even came away with the impression that she was the author of the *Course*.) She appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine and was featured in *Time* magazine as the "Mother Teresa for the '90s" (Miller, 1997: 96). The press attention increased when it was learned that she had been invited to speak on the development of one's human potential at Camp David (the White House retreat) to President Bill and Mrs. Hillary Clinton, that she sometimes lunched with Hillary Clinton, and that she 'officiated' at the wedding of Elizabeth Taylor

to Larry Fortensky (Miller, 1997: 92, 97). Her high profile in the tabloid press and appearances on Larry King and CNN soon created a backlash in the press. The Centers for Living (her AIDS centres) were rife with personality difficulties and people with whom she worked told eager reporters that she had an uncontrollable temper, was a control freak and a self-promoting hypocrite. Staff and board members of the centres resigned and she distanced herself from the organisation and maintained a lower profile during the late nineties (ibid.: 97-98).

It is not difficult to understand the disquiet with which Kenneth Wapnick and his Foundation (FACIM) viewed Williamson's notoriety, in spite of the increased sales which her publicity had brought to the *Course*. Williamson not only quoted from the *Course* throughout the book, but frequently paraphrased the *Course* and mixed its teachings with those of other religious traditions. Wapnick as the final editor of the *Course* saw himself as responsible for the public life of the Course. He founded FACIM after Schucman herself was said to have received a vision of such a teaching centre (Wapnick, 1992 [1978], 91-94). To the public, Williamson had become the voice of the *Course*. Wapnick (like Schucman) eschewed celebrity and New Age associations. Whilst Jampolsky had quoted from the *Course* without using speech marks, he had written the book with the blessing and help of Thetford. Williamson's work, however, is far more controversial. Indeed, it was possibly the publication of ARL that began the court cases brought by Judith Skutch's FIP and Kenneth Wapnick's FACIM over the copyright of *A Course in Miracles*. However, as Williamson had been originally taught the *Course* by Skutch and had been an early helper in the FIP office, Wapnick personally went through

the book, distinguishing between *Course* quotations and paraphrases (Skutch Interview, 23 September 2005). Although the dispute was settled amicably in this way, Williamson was bruised by the encounter with FACIM. The court cases were to bring dismay and a notoriety of its own to the *Course* community throughout the 1990s and beyond.

When I heard her speak and interviewed her in London, 11 October 2003, Williamson had written four more books and seemed to have recovered her equilibrium and popularity with her followers. The largely (but not exclusively) female audience seemed electrified by her rapid *tour de force* which quoted the *Course* as well as (without reference to who they were) the Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi (“If I could awaken the women of India I could transform it in a month”); the Eastern wisdom of I Ching (“The word spoken in truth resonates for a thousand miles”); the Human Potential Movement leader Werner Erhard (“You can live in one of two ways: react to circumstances or create a space in your own awareness of what you want to do”); the self help author Deepak Chopra (“If I’m in an accident get me to a Western hospital as fast as possible. But for long term health and patterns of healthy living, I turn to Eastern ayurveda”); and the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King (“I am working not just for integration but to create a beloved community”). When asked by a member of the audience for her views on the situation in Iraq she replied, “There is no point in not liking George Bush, or Tony Blair, or Sadam Hussain if you can’t get on with your own mother”. She referred to her campaign, which had just begun, for a Department of Peace in the U.S. government. She ended her talk with the rallying cry which she said came from Buddhism: “From the Buddhist perspective it doesn’t matter if I achieve it in my

life time as long as I die trying” (11 October 2003, London). I have included the above quotations to give the feel of her rapidly delivered, apparently disorganised, but compelling lecture. During her early days she had charged \$7 for a lecture (Miller, 1997: 95). In 2003 she was able to fill the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington High Street to standing room only at £70 per head. When I interviewed her, I asked her if she felt any disjunction between *Course* teaching on the ‘illusion’ of this world and her involvement with helping AIDS patients and campaigning for world peace. Her reply revealed her own *Course*-inspired version of non-dualism: “There is no point in working for peace in ourselves unless we are committed to working for peace in the world. They are two sides of the same thing” (Interview, 11 October 2003).

In this chapter I have suggested that the context for contemporary spiritual self help literature can be found in the inspirational literature of the early twentieth century. The books of Gerald Jampolsky and Marianne Williamson, the first self help books to come out of the *Course* community, borrowed the successful formulae of the inspirational literature of the past, whilst detraditionalising religious language and drawing on anecdotal narratives of experience to give legitimation to the principles and techniques taught in their books. They prepared the way for the plethora of spiritual self help literature which was to follow. The following chapter will examine this wider genre of self help literature and its links with *Course* themes.

Chapter Eight

Peck and Hay: Preparing the Way for Financial Success

Introduction

This chapter will examine the teaching of Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* (TRLT) and Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life* (YCHYL). It will show how each draws, in very different ways, on *A Course in Miracles* and how both books helped to spawn the contemporary industry of spiritual self help literature.

M. Scott Peck: *The Road Less Travelled*

M. Scott Peck towers over the spiritual self help industry: Peck is to contemporary spiritual self help literature what Dale Carnegie was to popular inspirational literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Both wrote books which sold in the millions and went on to become perennial bestsellers. Just as Carnegie's book differed from the inspirational Christian literature of the time, so Peck's book differs in several ways from the average self help book at the turn of the millennium. At times, he seems to decry the concept of the formulaic self help books which were to follow him: "There are many who, by virtue of their passivity, dependency, fear and laziness, seek to be shown every inch of the way and have it demonstrated to them that each step will be safe and worth their while. This cannot be done" (1978: 332).

Following the self help formula, Peck's personal story can be put together from anecdotes in TRLT and subsequent books.⁴⁴ Peck grew up in New York City, in the heart of east

⁴⁴ These include Peck, 1983, 1987, 1993 and 1997.

coast establishment America. His father, a judge, sent him to Exeter School, a New England boarding school patterned after an English public school. When he was unhappy there he was allowed to finish school at the progressive Friends School in New York. He went on to Harvard and Columbia Universities and trained in psychiatry. Whilst a psychiatrist in the army, he opposed the Viet Nam war and in 1972 settled into private psychiatric practice in New Milford, Connecticut (1990: 46).

Peck's TRLT reads more like an academic monograph than a popular self help book. The self help formula of teaching principles in a simple, popularising manner and offering techniques for daily practice appears not to be followed. There is, however, much use of anecdotes, drawn from his life as well as from his patients' lives, to illustrate themes in the book. Whilst eminently readable, the book is thoughtful, almost academic in tone. If this is a popular self help book, its air of sophistication and learning gives the impression that it is an up market version of the genre. At the end of the book Peck acknowledges many of his sources, including: *The American Journal of Psychiatry*; *The Cloud of Unknowing*; *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by C.G. Jung; *The Portable Jung* edited by Joseph Campbell; *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran; and *The Way of the Sufi*, by Idries Shah (1978: 341-342). The reader is made to feel that the great literature and wisdom of the world have been made accessible in an interesting, non-threatening way through the quotations and allusions in Peck's writing.

Peck is intentionally eclectic, drawing from many sources of spiritual wisdom. He quotes from or alludes to Jung (ibid.: 10, 15, 269, 271-274, 301-302), Sylvia Plath (ibid.: 54),

Seneca (ibid.: 78), Carlos Castenada (ibid.: 142), Abraham Maslow (ibid.: 100), 'Hinduism and Buddhism' (ibid.: 101-102), Erich Fromm (ibid.: 78), the Sufi Aba ibn Abi-I Khair (ibid.: 239), Paul Tillich (ibid.: 238), Dame Julian of Norwich (ibid.: 230), the Buddha (ibid.: 13, 80, 305, 329, 331), Lao-tse (ibid.: 331), Christ (ibid.: 80, 327, 331), Joseph Campbell (ibid.: 274), Freud (ibid.: 10, 186, 264-266), Martin Buber (ibid.: 245), and St. Augustine (ibid.: 324-325). In the final chapter of the book he writes, "These concepts have been set forth before – by Buddha, by Christ, by Lao-tse, among many others. The originality of this book results from the fact that I have arrived at their same meaning through the particular individual byways of my twentieth-century life" (ibid.: 331). Peck thus sees his contribution as that of making the great religious traditions, as well as the great psychotherapy traditions, of the world accessible to the reader. He does this by detraditionalising the language of these traditions behind which, he believes, lies the perennial philosophy frequently referred to by Thetford. What are "these concepts" which Peck offers his readers?

Peck's Self Help Schema

Peck begins TRLT with a quotation from the first of the 'Four Noble Truths' taught by the Buddha: "Life is difficult" (ibid.: 13). Whilst adopting an appreciative stance towards Christ, Sufism, Hinduism, Jung, Castenada and other traditions, Peck claims he was a Buddhist when he wrote TRLT. Writing later, he tells of his spiritual journey: "I came to God through Zen Buddhism, but that was just the first stretch of the road. The road I have chosen for myself, after twenty years of dabbling with Zen, is Christianity. To accept Christianity one must be prepared to accept paradox, and Zen Buddhism...is the ideal

training school for paradox” (1993: 156). Looking backwards, he describes TRLT as a book written by someone practising Zen whilst beginning to “tend in the direction” of Christianity (ibid.: 156). In TRLT, however, he manages to conceal his personal stance remarkably well and this may have contributed to the success of the book. Many believed it was a Christian book, bringing Christian doctrine up to date for modern people (ibid.: 157). Others claimed it for the New Age movement of the 1980s (Button and Bloom, 1992: 54; Bloom, 2000: 193-197) because it speaks of spiritual growth (1978: 15, 171, 288-289, 320-322), God with us (ibid.: 292), evolving consciousness (ibid.: 268, 282-286) oneness with God (ibid.: 326) and monism being proved by wave particle physicists (ibid.: 101, 279-280). Beyond the obvious link with the eclecticism of self books, in what other sense can TRLT be understood as the popular self help book which helped to produce the spiritual self help industry?

Peck begins his Introduction by telling his readers that he makes two assumptions: first, he makes “no distinction between mind and spirit” nor between “the process of achieving spiritual growth and mental growth. They are one and the same” (ibid.: 10). Second, the process of spiritual growth is “complex, arduous and lifelong” (ibid.: 11). That said, whilst there are no obvious “techniques” or inspiring world formulae for the reader to repeat, there are “techniques” embedded in the text. TRLT is divided into four parts, dealing with ‘Discipline’, ‘Love’, ‘Growth and Religion’ and ‘Grace.’

Part One, ‘Discipline’, calls for the practice of four ‘techniques’. Chapter One, ‘Problems and Pain’ sets the stage for the ‘techniques’ offered. It teaches, as noted, that “life is

difficult” (ibid.: 13). Peck defines ‘discipline’ as the tools required to solve life’s problems. The process of facing problems can be even more painful than attempting to solve them. Fearing the pain involved, most people avoid problems through procrastination, through drugs or through ignoring them (ibid.: 13-14). He quotes Jung to show how people go to great lengths to avoid their problems and the suffering they cause, and offers Jung’s definition of neurosis: “A substitute for legitimate suffering” (ibid.: 15). Having defined the central problems in psychological terms, Peck expounds the four ‘techniques’ (ibid.: 16) to help the reader to achieve the discipline of confronting and overcoming her problems: 1) delaying gratification (ibid.: 17-31); 2) accepting responsibility (ibid.: 32-44); 3) being dedicated to reality (ibid.: 45-65); and 4) balancing (ibid.: 66-81). These four ‘techniques’ give the reader a formula for achieving the ‘discipline’ required to solve his problems.

The first of these, “delaying gratification”, is the simple principle of not “Playing now, paying later” (ibid.: 18). Developmentally, he suggests that those who demand instant gratification in relationships, in work and other areas of life, have not progressed beyond age six (ibid.: 18). Why do some automatically develop the ‘technique’ of delaying gratification whilst others never do? Peck does not know, but the tools of the psychiatrist can help if the reader/patient is willing to “accept responsibility” (the second ‘technique’) for herself. Peck introduces this second ‘technique’ with the statement, “We cannot solve life’s problems except by solving them” and goes on to explain that this statement is not as “idiotically tautological or self-evident” as it seems because “the extent to which people will go psychologically to avoid assuming responsibility for personal problems,

while always sad, is sometimes almost ludicrous” (ibid.: 32). Refusal to accept responsibility causes the most common problems encountered by the psychiatrist, he confides. These are neurosis and character disorders. Neurotics, he writes, take on too much responsibility for themselves and assume they are always at fault; those, on the other hand, with character disorders, assume too little responsibility for themselves and blame the world, their colleagues at work or their family for their problems (ibid.: 35). The psychiatrist must encourage the patient to understand that only she can take responsibility for her problems, and then offer strategies for doing this (ibid.: 35-39).

To teach the third ‘technique’, that of having a dedication to ‘reality’, Peck uses the metaphor of a map. “Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are, and if we have decided where we want to go, we will know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we generally will be lost” (ibid.: 45). Again, Peck concedes the obviousness of his teaching metaphor, but defends it by arguing that most people “choose to ignore” it (ibid.: 45): “They choose to ignore it because our route to reality is not easy. First, we are not born with maps; we have to make them and the making requires effort...but many do not want to make this effort. Some stop making it by the end of adolescence....By the end of middle age most people have given up the effort. They feel certain that their maps are complete and their *Weltanschauung* is correct (even sacrosanct)” (ibid.: 45-46).

This quotation from Peck shows how he detraditionalises the language of psychotherapy, in this case the process called ‘transference’ (ibid.: 48-52), to make it accessible to a wide

readership. The passage also illustrates the simplicity and elegance of Peck's prose and its subliminal appeal to snobbery. The concept of making an accurate map to reach a destination is a simple one. Embedded in the simple sentences and vocabulary, however, is the German term for worldview, '*Weltanschauung*', without any explanation apart from the context of the paragraph. The reader, who may not have gone to university, is flattered; this is not a popular self help book written for lonely, dysfunctional people, but an academic treatise which assumes a well-educated, socially secure readership. This is Peck's genius. He uses simple words and short sentences with only the occasional reminder, such as use of '*Weltanschauung*' or an allusion to a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem (ibid.: 230), a story from Greek mythology (ibid.: 314), or a quotation from "Aba Said ibn Abi-l-Khair" [*sic*] (ibid.: 239), that the reader has been welcomed as an equal into a world which is probably much loftier socially and intellectually than her own. The technique also serves to create confidence in an author who has such wide knowledge of the world's spiritual and philosophical traditions.

Peck's fourth 'technique' is called 'balancing' and takes the reader back to the concept of discipline itself: "The exercise of discipline is not only a demanding but also a complex task, requiring both flexibility and judgment...we must assume total responsibility for ourselves, but in doing so must possess the capacity to reject responsibility that is not truly ours" (ibid.: 66). Peck encourages the reader to "delay gratification daily, yet...possess the capacity to act spontaneously....Discipline itself must be disciplined. This type of discipline I call balancing" (ibid.: 66). Peck uses anecdotal examples of appropriate and inappropriate anger to demonstrate the technique of 'balancing' (ibid.:

66-70) and refers to the therapeutic quality of depression as an alarm signal that all is not well. Perhaps influenced by his Buddhist and incipient Christian beliefs, he frequently refers to the importance of accepting suffering as part of responsible living: “One measure...of a person’s greatness is the capacity for suffering. Yet the great are also joyful. This, then, is the paradox. Buddhists tend to ignore the Buddha’s suffering and Christians forget Christ’s joy. The suffering of Christ letting go on the cross and the joy of Buddha letting go under the bo tree are one” (ibid.: 80).

Finally, and surprisingly for one who writes of the dangers of looking for easy formulae, Peck ends Part One with an unequivocal statement of certainty (similar to those in the self help books which followed his) in the effectiveness of his ‘techniques’: “This analysis of discipline has not been intended to be exhaustive, and it is possible that I have neglected one or more additional basic techniques, *although I suspect not....*The basic techniques herein described, if practised unceasingly and genuinely, *are alone sufficient* to enable the practitioner...to evolve to spiritually higher levels” (ibid.: 81 – italics mine). *The Road Less Travelled* is indeed a spiritual self help book. Beneath the intellectual trappings and elegant prose, the caveats about the length of the journey, the importance of suffering and the dangers of short cuts, Peck offers general principles for living, along with specific ‘techniques’ which are absolutely guaranteed to work. Anecdotes based on his patients’ stories offer ‘proof’ of the success of his ‘techniques’.

Part Two on ‘Love’, described as the “motive, the energy” of discipline, proceeds along similar lines. Part One detraditionalised the language of psychotherapy and Part Three

does the same for religious language: “As human beings grow in discipline and love, their understanding of the world and their place in it naturally grows apace....This understanding is our religion” (ibid.: 199). Having detraditionalised the idea of ‘religion’, Part Four, ‘Grace’, takes the reader beyond the scientific world of psychotherapy into the supernatural realms of metaphysics.

Peck again uses detraditionalised language to introduce the concept of ‘grace’, describing it as a “common, predictable phenomenon” (ibid.: 252-252). He defines the phenomena of grace as those things that 1) “serve to nurture human life and spiritual growth”; 2) have a mechanism of action which is “either incompletely understandable or totally obscure”; 3) have “frequent, routine, commonplace and universal” occurrence; and 4) have an origin “outside the conscious will and beyond the process of conscious decision-making” (ibid.: 278). Peck refers to Hindu and Buddhist ideas of monism which might explain the universal nature of ‘grace’ (ibid.: 280) as well as Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious (ibid.: 269).

Each section of the book is interwoven with stories from Peck’s own life and that of his wife and family (ibid.: 10, 19, 26-27, 40-41, 48-51, 69-70, 144-146, 191, 256-257, 268, 336), and from case histories of his patients (ibid.: 17, 28, 32-34, 35, 56, 63, 68-69, 105, 118, 152-157, 163, 173-175, 182, 200-204, 252, 260, 263, 265, 311-313). Three chapters contain the case histories of three patients (ibid.: 212-222, 223-224, 226-236). Peck is a master story teller and the anecdotes draw the reader almost effortlessly into Peck’s narrative and into his privileged world. There is an element of voyeurism involved in

being allowed to be a “fly on the wall” as Peck deals with his patients on the couch. Peck’s humour and humility also engage the reader. Some of the stories are told against himself: he offends his daughter by being over-competitive in a game of chess (ibid.: 69-70); he sometimes fails with patients (ibid.: 48-51) and sometimes succeeds (ibid.: 35-36).

Although Peck ends Part One with an unequivocal statement that his ‘techniques’ work, unlike other self help authors who followed him,⁴⁵ he does not promise that everything will work out well. Peck promises the more elusive goal of “spiritual growth”. The seduction of his message, as noted, is subliminal. Peck refers to his New England boarding school (ibid.: 144-146), to patients with inherited wealth (ibid.: 223), to personal friends in high places and to the trappings of his upper middle class life (ibid.: 171). The reader is given the illusion of being a friend, even confidante of Peck, a part of his privileged world. The implied intimacy coupled with Peck’s erudition and sincerity seduce the reader. When the next Peck book is published (nine came out in the 1980s and 90s), the reader will want to buy it to continue with Peck along the road to spiritual growth as much as to maintain intimacy with a cherished friend.

Peck admits to using the language of seduction when speaking of psychotherapy. Convincing a patient that “the only real relief will come through challenge and discipline is a delicate, often lengthy and frequently unsuccessful task. We speak, therefore of ‘seducing’ patients into psychotherapy. And we may say of some patients whom we have

⁴⁵ Deepak Chopra, for example, promises his readers “effortless wealth creation” (1992), “a practical guide to the fulfilment of your dreams” (1996), “spiritual lessons for creating the love you need” (1997) and “the complete mind-body programme for overcoming heart disease” (1998).

been seeing for a year or more, ‘They have not really entered therapy yet’” (1978: 56-57). Peck likewise tries to seduce the reader of TRLT.

The Influence of *A Course in Miracles* on Peck

Peck begins his ‘Introduction’ by writing that “the ideas herein presented stem, for the most part, from my day-to-day clinical work with patients as they struggled to avoid or to gain ever greater levels of maturity” (1978: 9). Peck presents himself as a hard working psychotherapist, keen to share what he has learned from his “day-to-day” work with those who perhaps do not have access to psychotherapy. He quotes from many sources and is eclectic in his approach to psychotherapy, not being a “Freudian or Jungian or Adlerian or behaviourist or gestaltist” therapist (1978: 10). He lists footnotes for sources cited and acknowledges permission to quote excerpts from his sources (ibid.: 341). However, Peck neither quotes from nor alludes to *A Course in Miracles*; he gives no indication that he knows of its existence until his second book, *The People of the Lie* (1983), a book about the psychology of evil. In spite of this, the vocabulary and themes of TRLT suggest that Peck knew and was influenced by the *Course* at the time of writing, and came to disagree with it later because of its denial of the possibility of human evil.

There is internal evidence for the *Course*'s influence on Peck's ideas in TRLT. However, a word of caution is in order. Peck, Thetford and Schucman belonged to the same east coast American intellectual milieu of psychologists. Although Thetford and Schucman were a generation older than Peck, they would have drawn from the same pool of ideas and been aware of the same cultural trends. It is possible that they met at conferences in

their discipline: Peck may have heard one or both of them give papers. It is not surprising, therefore, if there is some overlap between Peck's writing and the vocabulary and themes of *A Course in Miracles*. Both use the psychological language of their time to teach about spirituality. Furthermore, the *Course* detraditionalises religious language: one could read in a newspaper words such as 'ego', 'reality', 'extend', 'choice' and 'love' – all significant *Course* words with specialised meanings – and it would not prove that the journalist knew the *Course*. Or, Schucman, Thetford and Peck may have been influenced by the Human Potential Movement and the Esalen Institute. However, taking these caveats into consideration, there is still a case to be made for the *Course*'s influence on TRLT.

First, the concept of 'choice' is as central in TRLT as it is in the *Course*: it is used in the same contexts and with the same specialised meaning. Throughout the *Course*, 'choice' is the key to its interpretation. The *Course* student is given the 'choice' to choose between the level one (reality/God) and level two (unreality/fear). The idea of 'choice' is seen to have a transforming power for those who have gone through life believing they are victims. It says, "You have control of this. And if you choose to see a world without an enemy, in which you are not helpless, the means to see it will be given you" (*Text*, 1996: 464). A major theme of TRLT is the importance of a patient taking responsibility for himself. When Peck writes about the need to take responsibility for oneself, he usually uses the word 'choice'. The following quotation illustrates Peck's use of 'choice' in ways which echo the *Course*'s use of 'choice': "...our choices are unlimited....We have the freedom to choose every step of the way in the manner in which we are going to respond

to deal with [oppressive] forces” (ibid.: 43). The *Course* teaches that “the mind can elect what it chooses to serve. The only limit put on its choice is that it cannot serve two masters” (*Text*, 1996: 13). Whatever our situation, both the *Course* and Peck insist that we can ‘choose’ how we view a situation even if we can’t change it. Neither Peck nor the *Course* permits a person to perceive himself as a victim; one can always choose how a situation will be perceived.

Second, when he writes about his third ‘technique’, ‘Dedication to Reality’, Peck defines ‘reality’ as ‘truth’. He writes, “Truth is reality. That which is false is unreal” (ibid.: 45). Peck’s understanding of truth as ‘real’ and falsehood as ‘unreal’ seems to draw on the *Course*’s understanding of the two levels as set out in its Introduction: level one is the ‘real’ or (God/love), and the ‘unreal’ (or false) is level two (1996: 1). Peck also warns against ‘illusions’, another *Course* word, which prevent us from seeing ‘reality’ as we should (1978: 93). Throughout the *Text*, the *Course* warns against ‘illusions’ which keep us from seeing the ‘reality’ of God and hold the student back in level two: “Let us not lose sight of His direction through illusions, for only illusions of another direction can obscure the one for which God’s voice speaks in all of us....Leave all illusions behind” (ibid.: 148). The *Course* urges the student to have the courage to face his ‘illusions’: “No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected” (ibid.: 202; see Peck, 1978: 45). The final chapter of the *Text* speaks of the end of the journey where “not one illusion is accorded faith” (*Text*, 1996: 669). Peck’s use of ‘reality’, ‘unreality’ and ‘illusion’ appears to draw on the *Course*’s understanding of these words.

Third, Peck expands on the metaphor of the book's title by writing about constructing an accurate map of reality to reach the destination of spiritual growth. It is important, he teaches, to be able to "change one's map" when all the signs tell a patient the map he has constructed no longer conforms to reality (1978: 52). This concept coincides with *Course* teaching on changing one's perception about a situation. To change one's 'map' is to change how one views a situation. The *Course* teaches that we often cannot change a situation, but we can choose to change our perception of a situation. When this happens there is a 'miracle', a change in perception which often also brings a change in the external world as well. "Seek not to change the world; seek rather to change your perception of the world" (*Text*, 1996: 66).

Fourth, the concept of 'love' is as central to Peck's teaching as it is to that of the *Course* and Peck's definition of love appears to draw on that of the *Course*. The *Course* teaches that 'love' cannot be defined because it is beyond definition. It says that it "does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught" (*Text*, 1996: 1). Peck writes, "I am conscious of the fact that in attempting to examine love we will be beginning to toy with mystery. In a very real sense we will be attempting to examine the unexaminable and to know the unknowable. Love is too large, too deep, ever to be truly understood or measured or limited with the framework of words" (1978: 85). The *Course* and Peck agree that 'love' cannot be defined. Likewise, the *Course* and Peck view 'fear' as love's opposite. In the *Course's* words, "The opposite of love is fear, but that which is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (*Text*, 1996: 1). The *Course* teaches that

everything that appears to be evil derives from 'fear'. Peck writes of 'fear' as the greatest hindrance to spiritual growth. There is fear of the suffering involved (1978: 22), fear of the implications of "changing one's map of reality" (ibid.: 46), fear of mental health (ibid.: 324), fear of the responsibility involved in succeeding at spiritual growth (ibid.: 325). Peck writes of people wrestling "for years with their fearfulness" (ibid.: 325). Lastly, the *Course* writes of "blocks to the awareness of God's love" (*Text*, 1996: 1), whilst Peck refers to resistance to love and grace (1978: 326); both are similar barriers that must be overcome on the spiritual journey.

Closely related to 'love' and 'fear' is the similarity between Peck and the *Course* in the specialised meaning of 'extend', a word used throughout the *Course*. The *Text* teaches that 'love' is an "extension of God and students should "extend" love to one another: "Your function is to add to God's treasure by creating yours....He extends his Fatherhood to you so that you can extend yourself as He did" (1996: 149). Peck also links 'love' with the verb 'extend': "I define love thus: the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (1978: 85). Peck teaches that "love is a strangely circular process. For the process of extending oneself is an evolutionary process. When one has successfully extended one's limits, one has then grown into a larger state of being. Thus the act of loving is an act of self-evolution even when the purpose of the act is someone else's growth" (ibid.: 86). Again, this evokes *Course* teaching on 'extending love' by 'joining' with another (*Text*, 1996: 164), as Thetford and Schucman did, thereby helping the entire 'Sonship' back to oneness with God: "...being must be extended. Spirit...does not wish to contain God, but wills to extend His

being....The ego's whole thought system blocks extension" (*Text*, 1996: 132). 'Extend' in the *Course* has a specialised meaning that Peck appears to have used.

Fifth, Peck speaks much about 'Grace', giving a four point definition (1978: 278) which is like the *Course's* understanding of 'miracles'. In Peck's scheme, the occurrence of grace is "frequent, routine, commonplace and essentially universal among humanity" (ibid.: 278). Similarly, "I believe that grace is available to everyone, that we are all cloaked in the love of God, no one less nobly than another" (ibid.: 321). By comparison, in the fifty miracle principles at the beginning of the *Text*, the *Course* teaches that "Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love...miracles are habits and should be involuntary....Miracles are natural. When they do not occur something has gone wrong. Miracles are everyone's right" (1996: 3). Peck also uses the word 'miracle' instead of the code word, 'grace', referring to the 'miracle' of health (1978: 251), the 'miracle' of the unconscious (ibid.: 260), the 'miracle' of serendipity (ibid.: 271) and the 'miracle' of evolution (ibid.: 282). The following quote shows how he uses 'miracle' and 'grace' interchangeably and how his definition of 'miracle' as 'commonplace' is close to that of the *Course*. "Perception of the miraculous refers...to the commonplace....In thinking about miracles, I believe our frame of reference has been too dramatic. We have been looking for the burning bush, the parting of the sea...instead we should be looking at the ordinary day-to-day events in our lives for evidence of the miraculous....Ordinary occurrences in the practice of psychiatry have led me to an understanding of the extraordinary phenomenon of grace" (ibid.: 246).

Sixth, Peck writes of the goal of spiritual growth, bringing TRLT to a surprising climax: “For the call to grace is a promotion, a call to higher responsibility and power...for to experience one’s closeness to God is also to experience the obligation to be God” (ibid.: 322). Detraditionalising religious language, Peck insists that the “call to grace...is a summons to be one with God, to assume peership with God. Hence it is a call to total adulthood. Too many people want the self-confidence of adulthood without having to grow up” (ibid.: 326). The call to ‘grace’ is the call to realise one’s “freedom”, to accept adult responsibility and self-discipline: “We seem to need to have powers above us to blame for our condition. To rise to a position of such power that we have no one to blame except ourselves is a fearful state of affairs...were it not for God’s presence with us in that exalted position we would be terrified” (ibid.: 325-326). The *Course* refers to “a core of fear” (*Text*, 1996: 615) encountered when the time comes to let go of “childhood” forever. Wapnick, too, emphasises the terror *Course* students find within as they begin to “undo” their belief in guilt: “As we get closer to the guilt and fear that we have spent a lifetime (if not many lifetimes) running from, we will be thrown into a panic...if we are not prepared for it we will become afraid of it and throw the book away” (1983: 107). Peck’s ontology is surprisingly close to that of the *Course*: “The collective unconscious is God; the conscious is man as individual; and the personal unconscious is the interface between them....The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is for the individual to become as one with God. Since the unconscious is God all along, we may further define the goal of spiritual growth to be the attainment of godhood by the conscious self” (1978: 302-303). In the language of the *Course*, “Nothing God created can oppose your decision...God gave your will its power...if you want to be like me I will help you, knowing that we are

alike....The Holy Trinity is holy *because* It is one. If you exclude yourself from this Union, you are perceiving the Holy Trinity as separated” (*Text*, 1996: 145-156) – italics in original). Like the *Course*, Peck teaches, “...our unconscious is God” (Peck, 1978.: 301).

Peck acknowledges indebtedness for his ontology to Jung, who described himself as a “splinter of the infinite deity” (ibid.: 301) and to Hindu and Buddhist understandings of oneness (ibid.: 280, 303), but not to the *Course*. Yet, both present these understandings of ‘oneness’ in remarkably similar ways. The reader is to “grow up” into God in Peck’s scheme (ibid.: 320,326) and to leave childhood behind in *Course* language (*Text*, 1996: 615). Both teach it is impossible to be separate from God: in Peck’s words “We were part of God all the time” (1978: 301).

That said, Peck’s understanding of monism appears less radical than that of the *Course*. As noted, Thetford believed the *Course*’s ontology was the same as that of Hindu Advaita Vedanta. It is possible both drew from Eastern sources, given Thetford’s delight in Vedanta philosophy and Peck’s partiality to Buddhism. Peck, however, writes, “Does this mean that the goal of the conscious is to merge with the unconscious so that all is unconsciousness? Hardly. The point is to become God while preserving consciousness...as a conscious individual, we become a new life form of God” (ibid.: 303). In this he criticises Hindu and Buddhist (and *Course*) non-duality: “There is a regressive quality to the mystical thought of some Hindu or Buddhist theology, in which the status of the infant without ego boundaries is compared to Nirvana and the goal of

entering Nirvana seems similar to the goal of returning to the womb. The goal of theology presented here is exactly the opposite. It is not to become an egoless, unconscious babe. Rather it is to develop a mature, conscious ego which then can become the ego of God” (ibid.: 303). It is possible that *Course* study prompted Peck to revisit Buddhist monism and to move beyond it, just as I shall suggest his study of the *Course* prompted him to renounce explicitly its view of evil in his second book (1983). That said, Peck closes the section with language reminiscent of the *Course*: having become “one with God” as conscious beings, he then speaks of going out to be “agents of God” in the world, so that “through our conscious decisions we are able to influence the world” (ibid.: 304). The *Course* urges students to “go out to be the saviour of the world” (*Manual*, 1996: 31).

A final correlation between Peck and the *Course* should be noted. In his chapter on ‘Resistance to Grace’, Peck appears to quote, almost directly, a *Course* paraphrase of Jesus’ words in Matthew 20.16: “For many are called, but few chosen”. The *Course*’s correction of Jesus’ words reads, “All are called, but few choose to listen” (*Text*, 1996: 44). Peck’s apparent paraphrase of the *Course* reads, “Christ’s assertion, ‘many are called, but few are chosen’ I would translate to mean, ‘All of us are called by and to grace, but few of us choose to listen to the call’” (1978: 321). Thus, the *Course*’s “All are called, but few choose to listen” becomes Peck’s “All of us are called by and to grace, but few of us choose to listen to the call”.

I believe I have provided a compelling case demonstrating that Peck knew and was influenced by the *Course* when he wrote TRLT. Anecdotal evidence supports this claim. A friend and fellow psychotherapist of Peck in the 1970s confirms that he was a student of the *Course* when he wrote TRLT and was “profoundly influenced” by it, although he later came to denounce it in conferences and subsequent books (Letter, Marcia Bond, 28 August 2005).

Peck’s first reference to the *Course* is a footnote in the first book written after TRLT, *The People of the Lie* (1983). Written after he had converted to Christianity, the book is a study of evil. The footnote surveys understandings of evil held by various religious traditions: “the non-dualism of Hinduism and Buddhism, in which evil is envisioned simply as the other side of the coin....This attitude has found its way into supposedly Christian sects such as Christian Science and the recently popular *Course in Miracles* [*sic*], but it is considered heresy by Christian theologians” (1983: 50). In a later book (1993), he confides that “one of the reasons I gradually gravitated toward Christianity is that I came to believe that Christian doctrine has the most correct understanding of the nature of sin. It is a paradoxical, multidimensional understanding” (1983, *ibid.*: 157). In this book he explicitly rejects the *Course*’s attitude toward evil. Having commended the “New Age protest against rampant capitalism” and the sins of technology (*ibid.*: 197, 203), Peck condemns New Age views of evil: “The one New Age book that has attracted the most attention...is *A Course in Miracles*. It is a good book, filled with first-rate psychiatric wisdom. But *A Course in Miracles* also denies the reality of evil, saying that evil is unreal, a kind of figment of our imagination” (*ibid.*: 202). Peck then gives what

appears to be a backhanded admission that he perhaps borrowed from *Course* vocabulary even when he wrote his book on evil: “Evil does have a great deal to do with unreality. In fact, in my book *People of the Lie*, I defined Satan as ‘a real spirit of unreality’. So the devil does have a great deal to do with unreality – that is, with lies and untruth.” (ibid.: 202). He suggests that the *Course* presents only “half-truth” about evil: “In failing to deal with the problem of evil, it leaves out a major part of the picture. It runs with only one side of the ‘paradox’ of evil” (ibid.: 202). In the same book, Peck criticises Jampolsky’s LLGF for making forgiveness “sound easy” (1993: 40). Given Peck’s generally benign attitude toward many traditions, his attack on the *Course* and Jampolsky suggests that *Course* teaching on the unreality of evil deeply disturbed Peck.

The question remains, given his scrupulous citing of sources in his books, and his critical references to the *Course* in books written after TRLT, why did Peck not allude to the *Course* in TRLT, acknowledging where *Course* teaching overlapped with his own and where it diverged from it? The most straightforward answer may be that he was loathe to acknowledge indebtedness to a channelled document for the same reason that Thetford and Schucman, in their east coast scholarly milieu, viewed the *Course* as “their guilty secret”. Peck inhabited the same milieu and, like them, he may have felt it intellectually dangerous to associate himself with *A Course in Miracles*. Throughout the summer of 2005 I tried to contact Peck to ask him about his early relationship with the *Course*. His website and the website of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (to whom he gave his papers) informed me that he could not be reached. He was suffering from Parkinson’s disease and cancer, and died in September 2005.

Peck is a pivotal figure in spiritual self help literature. He was influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the *Course*. He followed the established formulae of self help literature from the first half of the century, although camouflaging them and raising them to a new level of literature. He harked back to the inspirational literature of the early twentieth century, quoting approvingly from Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1993: 189),⁴⁶ while opening the floodgates for the lucrative spiritual self help industry that followed. Susan Jeffers, a bestselling self help author who followed Peck (see Chapter Nine), acknowledged this when she heard of his death: "I found *The Road Less Travelled* personally helpful; its popularity opened doors. Judging from the underlinings in my copy, it obviously had a large influence on me. I read it in 1978, nine years before my book was published" (BBC Online News: 1-2 – Accessed 29 September 2005). Peck's death also caused reporters to take note of the spiritual self help industry. The same obituary reported that Britons spent £90 million on "personal and spiritual development titles" in 2004, and referred to Peck as "the granddaddy of the genre".

Louise Hay

The personal narratives and writing style of Hay and Peck form a sharp contrast. Whereas Peck grew up with every advantage in the heart of East coast establishment America, Hay relates the harrowing story of her early life in her 1984 bestseller, *You Can Heal Your Life* (YCHYL). Hay was born into a poor family in California. After her parents' divorce, her mother worked as a live-in domestic servant and, in desperation, entered a brutal

⁴⁶ Peck writes, "Psychiatrists...might be embarrassed to realise that their new 'cognitive therapy' is no different from Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, a book written decades ago" (1993: 189)

marriage during the 1930s depression. Hay was raped by an alcoholic neighbour when she was five and lived in fear of the man for years after. She describes her childhood as one of “physical and sexual abuse with a lot of hard labour thrown in. My self image became lower and lower and I began to express this pattern to the world” (1984: 216). She ran away from home as a teenager, worked as a waitress and, looking for affection, “gave my body to whoever was kind to me” (ibid.: 216). When she was sixteen she gave birth to a daughter whom she gave up for adoption and has not seen since. She believes her sense of worthlessness attracted abusive men to her. After settling in Chicago and achieving at work, “my self esteem grew and those kind of men began to leave my life. She explains this process in YCHYL: “They [abusive men] no longer fit my old pattern of unconsciously believing I deserved abuse. I do not condone their behaviour, but if it were not ‘my pattern’ they would not have been attracted to me. Now, a man who abuses women does not even know I exist. Our patterns no longer attract” (ibid.: 217).

After the Chicago years of menial work but growing self esteem, Hay worked as a fashion model in New York, married an “English gentleman” with whom she travelled, met royalty and had dinner in the White House. When he left her for another woman, she was devastated but a ‘numerologist’ told her that her life would soon get better. A visit to the Church of Religious Science in New York caused her to explore metaphysics and healing (ibid.: 218). She became a licensed practitioner in the church, took up Transcendental Meditation and attended “the Maharishi’s International University in Fairfield, Iowa”. She writes of this experience with childlike excitement: “It was the perfect place for me at that time. Every Monday we began a new subject, things I had

only heard of, such as biology, chemistry and the theory of relativity” (ibid.: 218). Back in New York, she carried on with her church work, began to speak at their noon meetings and to see clients who needed healing. She privately published a small booklet *You Can Heal Your Body*, “a simple list of metaphysical causations for physical illness” and began to lecture and travel. As she became more sought after as a lecturer, she discovered she had incurable cancer. She writes of her reaction: “Because of my work with clients I knew that mental healing worked, and here I was being given a chance to prove it to myself...I knew that cancer was a dis-ease [sic] of deep resentment that has been held for a long time and it literally eats away at the body. With my background of having been raped and battered, it was no wonder I manifested cancer in the vaginal area” (ibid.: 219). Hay saw her cancer as an opportunity to prove her healing methods: “The word incurable means to me that this particular condition cannot be cured by any outer means and that we must go within to find the cure. If I had an operation to get rid of the cancer and did not clear the mental pattern that created it, then the doctors would just keep cutting Louise until there was no more Louise to cut. I didn’t like that idea” (ibid.: 219). She practised the techniques of mental healing on herself, including working on her sense of worthlessness. She overcame the latter by looking at herself in a mirror and repeating, “Louise, I love you. I really love you” (ibid.: 220). A nutritionist helped her to develop healthy eating patterns. Six months later doctors confirmed that the cancer was gone.

Moving to Los Angeles, she made contact with the California New Age community, and soon was lecturing and seeing clients, including many in Hollywood. She worked with AIDS patients, beginning with six men meeting in her living room, and helped Marianne

Williamson set up her AIDS centre. Her weekly AIDS meeting grew to 800 and became organised as the 'Hayride Support Group'. The success of her lectures led from publishers, in the wake of the extraordinary success of Peck's book, to request a book from her. The contents of her taped lectures, together with the booklet, were brought together and published as YCHYL. The book uses the format of Peck's TRLT: Introduction, chapters divided into four parts and an Afterword. Hay gives two reasons for the success of the book: 1) "I have an ability to help people change without laying guilt on them" and 2) "The universe really wanted this book to span the globe!" (ibid.: 225). The book continues to be reprinted today, has been translated into many languages and has sold in the millions.

You Can Heal Your Life

The writing style and contents of YCHYL also contrast sharply with Peck's writing. Unlike Peck's quasi-academic monograph, Hay's format is that of a self help manual. There is an unsophisticated, almost desperate, quality to the personal affirmations offered for the reader to repeat. Frequently one is invited to affirm with Hay, "In the infinity of life where I am, all is perfect, whole, and complete" (ibid.: xiv). The final affirmation of the book states, "All is well in my world...I am a beloved child of the Universe and the Universe lovingly takes care of me now and forever more" (ibid.: 228-229). Like Peck she gives the illusion of intimacy with the reader: "I aim to take the reader through a session just as if she came to me as a private client" (ibid.: xi). She encourages the reader to adopt a three-fold strategy: do the exercises as they appear in the book, read the book a

second time more slowly, doing each exercise in depth and, finally, work through the exercises with a friend or family member (ibid.: xi).

Part One of YCHYL is an explanation of Hay's philosophy. She does not mention the *Course* in her personal story (ibid.: 215-224), but her beliefs appear to have been drawn largely from the *Course* and Jampolsky's interpretation of the *Course*, LLGF (published five years previously). Chapter One, for example, is prefaced with 'Some Points of My Philosophy' (ibid.: xiii) as laid out below:

We are each responsible for all of our experiences
Every thought we think is creating our future.
The point of power is always in the present moment.
Everyone suffers from self-hatred and guilt.
The bottom line for everyone is,
"I'm not good enough."
It's only a thought, a thought can be changed.
Resentment, criticism, and guilt
Are most damaging patterns.
Releasing resentment will dissolve even cancer.
When we really love ourselves, everything in our life works.
We must release the past and forgive everyone.
Self-approval and self-acceptance in the now are the keys to positive changes.
We create every so-called 'illness' in our body.

For example, each chapter opens with an affirmation similar to Jampolsky's affirmations. Whereas Jampolsky's affirmations are referenced *Course* quotations, Hay's affirmations, although in speech marks, give no indication from where the quotation is drawn. Hay has no footnotes, and the only book quoted is *A Course in Miracles*.

Hay's statement of philosophy and subsequent affirmations seem to draw on Jampolsky's affirmations and his emphasis on *Course* teaching on forgiveness, releasing the past and

cleansing oneself from self-hatred and the feeling of “not being good enough”, and the pitfalls of guilt (Jampolsky, 1979: 1). The following affirmation, for example, from Jampolsky’s book (ibid.: 129). whilst shorter, appears to be the inspiration for those of Hay:

I am Responsible for what I see
I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide
Upon the goal I would achieve.
And everything that seems to happen to me,
I ask for, and receive as I have asked.

Many of Hay’s affirmations seem to amplify those of Jampolsky. For example, the last two lines of the above quotation from Jampolsky appear to be picked up in Hay: “Whatever I need comes to me in the right time, space, and sequence” (1984: 9). Like Jampolsky, Hay does not speak of God but substitutes the word ‘Universe’ for God. The chapter consists of sixteen principles with one or two paragraphs to explain each. The principles are:

- 1) Life is really very simple. What we give out, we get back (ibid.: 1).
- 2) The Universe totally supports us in every thought we choose to think and believe (ibid.: 2).
- 3) The Universal power never judges or criticises us (ibid.: 2).
- 4) Most of us have foolish ideas about who we are and many, many rigid rules about how life ought to be lived (ibid.: 2).
- 5) When we are very little, we learn how to feel about ourselves and about life by the reactions of the adults around us (ibid.: 3).
- 6) When we grow up, we have a tendency to recreate the emotional environment of our early home life (ibid.: 3).
- 7) However, I would not blame our parents for this (ibid.: 3).
- 8) I believe that we choose our parents (ibid.: 4).
- 9) The point of power is always in the present moment (ibid.: 4).
- 10) The only thing we are ever dealing with is a thought, and a thought can be changed (ibid.: 5).
- 11) Believe it or not, we do choose our thoughts (ibid.: 5).

- 12) The innermost belief for everyone I have worked with is always, 'I'm not good enough!' (ibid.: 6).
- 13) I find that resentment, criticism, guilt and fear cause more problems than anything else (ibid.: 6).
- 14) We can change our attitude toward the past (ibid.: 7).
- 15) To release the past, we must be willing to forgive (ibid.: 7).
- 16) All dis-ease [*sic*] comes from a state of unforgiveness (ibid.: 8).

As in other self help literature, there is the promise of certain rewards for following the principles. These rewards include the promise of 'miracles':

When people come to me with a problem, I don't care what it is – poor health, lack of money, unfulfilling relationships, or stifled creativity – there is only one thing I ever work on, and that is LOVING THE SELF. I find that when we really love and accept and APPROVE OF OURSELVES EXACTLY AS WE ARE, then everything in life works. It's as if little miracles are everywhere. Our health improves, we attract more money, our relationships become much more fulfilling, and we begin to express ourselves in creatively fulfilling ways....Loving and approving of yourself...will create organisation in your mind, create more loving relationships in your life, attract a new job and a new and better place to live, and even enable your body weight to normalise" (ibid.: 8-9 – emphasis in original).

Hay's prose is unscholarly. She quotes from *A Course in Miracles* once but does not reference her quotation (ibid.: 8) and alludes to it once (ibid.: 70). It is the only book from which she quotes, and many of her ideas, apart from those concerning bodily illness and the importance of loving yourself, appear to draw on the *Course*. Her writing is given to hyperbole, but the simplicity and certainty of her tone, combined with her astonishing life story, make for a compelling self help book.

Part Two takes the reader through 'A Session with Louise', creating the impression of intimacy with Hay, a device also used by Peck. Part Three, 'Putting the Ideas to Work', is taken from her booklet *You Can Heal Your Body*. Specific illnesses are linked to their mental cause. For example, abscesses are attributed to "fermenting thoughts over hurts, slights and revenge". The remedy offered is the new thought pattern to be learned: "I

allow my thoughts to be free. The past is over. I am at peace” (ibid.: 146). Athlete’s foot is caused by “frustration at not being accepted and the inability to move forward with ease”. The remedy is to learn the thought, “I love and approve of myself, I give myself permission to go ahead. It’s safe to move” (ibid.: 151). Seizures are caused by “running away from the family, from the self or from life”. The healing thought offered is, “I am at home in the universe. I am at peace everywhere. I trust Life” (ibid.: 197).

Part Four contains Hay’s harrowing life story. The ‘Afterword’, written for the 1994 edition, tells of the amazing success of the book. Ten years after its publication, nearly three million copies of YCHYL had been sold and it had been translated into 23 languages (ibid.: 225). Hay founded Hay House to publish other self help authors, and acknowledges with an apparent lack of guile, “It feels good to earn money helping other people improve the quality of their lives” (ibid.: 226). People everywhere, she writes, greet her “as an old friend who has helped them through many a sticky moment” (ibid.: 227). Hay also writes an advice column carried in “over thirty New Age/spiritual” publications (ibid.: 227).

The Influence of *A Course in Miracles* on Hay

Hay alludes to the *Course* twice in the text of YCHYL and lists the *Course*, along with two of Jampolsky’s books⁴⁷ at the end in a list of recommended spiritual resources (ibid.: 231). Hay’s life story does not include mention of contact with *A Course in Miracles*. It is possible she encountered it in her New York church, or when she read “everything I could lay my hands on about metaphysics” (ibid.: 218). In contrast to Peck, however, she

⁴⁷ *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* (1979) and *Teach Only Love* (1983).

quotes the *Course* as an authority on spirituality with the assumption that no explanation is needed as to what *A Course in Miracles* is. The *Course* was published in 1976 by FIP; Peck's book in 1978, Jampolsky's book in 1979, and Hay's in 1984. It is noteworthy that by 1984, eight years after the *Course*'s publication, she could write, "*A Course in Miracles* says that 'all dis-ease [*sic*] comes from a state of unforgiveness" (ibid.: 8). Whilst the teaching is true to the spirit of the *Course*, the quotation is not referenced and I have not been able to find the passage in the *Course*. However, it is significant that, by 1984, an author (albeit one writing for a 1980s New Age audience) could quote from the *Course* assuming that the reader 1) knew of it, and 2) recognised it as an authoritative spiritual text.

Hay's second reference to the *Course* reinforces this impression: "Next step, *forgiveness*. Forgiveness of ourselves and of others releases us from the past. *A Course in Miracles* says over and over that forgiveness is the answer to almost everything" (ibid.: 70 – emphasis in original). Again, the assumption is clear that the *Course* is seen as an authoritative spiritual text in the same way that authors of earlier inspirational literature might have written "the Bible says" without further information about what the Bible is.

YCHYL is so permeated with *Course* themes that it is difficult to isolate specific links with *Course* passages. The 'affirmations' above make links with several strands of *Course* teaching: the importance of changing how one 'thinks' about a situation, the importance of 'choice', the damaging power of 'guilt', the importance of releasing the 'past', and the belief that we "are responsible for all our experiences" (we created this

'dream', in *Course* language). As with Peck, Hay does not wholly agree with the *Course* although it is possible that she does not realise this. Part Three of YCHYL, dealing with mental causes of physical illness, is constructed around the belief in the unity of the mind and body. Hay recognises the importance of the body and physical beauty, parting company with *Course* teaching, both on the unreality of the physical world and also on the teaching that we are not bodies, but pure spirit. She writes, "I recognise my body as a good friend. Each cell in my body has Divine Intelligence. I listen to what it tells me, and know that its advice is valid. I am always safe, and Divinely protected and guided. I choose to be healthy and free" (ibid.: 144).

Although Hay's ideas generally echo those of the *Course* as understood through the filter of Jampolsky's LLGF, there are four *Course* themes particularly emphasised by Hay. First, Hay reflects the *Course*'s monistic teaching that there are no distinctions: "There is no right or wrong, nor good or bad" (ibid.: 228). Also reflecting non-dualism and oneness with God are the words of another affirmation: "I am one with the very Power that created me, and this Power has given me the power to create my own circumstances" (ibid.: xiv).

Second, Hay's affirmations echo the *Course*'s definition of love as having "no ending and no beginning" (*Text*, 1996: 1). Hay assures the reader that love has "no beginning and no end" (1984: xiv). 'Love' is central to Hay's teaching: nearly every affirmation contains the word and, as in the *Course*, it is equated with God, or the 'Universe' in Hay's vocabulary (ibid.: 203).

Third, forgiveness is as central to Hay's teaching as it is in the *Course*. The two places where Hay alludes to the *Course* concern the centrality of forgiveness. It is not clear whether Hay understands the nuances of the *Course's* definition of forgiveness based on the belief that all are equally innocent and in union with God. However, she draws on the *Course's* teaching that forgiveness involves letting go and releasing the past, as taught by Jampolsky.

Fourth, the contrasts set out in the *Course* between the reality of level one (God) and the unreality of level two (this world/fear) (*Text*, 1996: 1) are described as the difference between 'scarcity' and 'abundance' (ibid.: 11, 315). The students must learn that one has the power to 'choose' between the two levels. Hay appears to draw on these contrasts in the affirmations of Part Two: "I no longer choose to believe in the old limitations and lacks. I now choose to begin to see myself as the Universe sees me – perfect, whole and complete" (1984: 39). The *Course* urges the student to see himself as God created him; Hay urges the reader to see herself "as the Universe sees me".

Fifth, the theme of 'choice' is central to both Hay and the *Course*. It is possible that both Hay, Peck and the *Course* were influenced by this post-1960s theme of the Self and its choices. Chapter Four above showed how 'choice' is the interpretative key to the *Text* of the *Course*, as the reader is urged to choose between the contrasting values of level one (reality) and level two (unreality). The empowering theme of 'choice' runs throughout Hay's book. The pages of affirmations punctuating the sections urge the reader to

'choose'. The first page of affirmation states, "I rejoice in the knowledge that I have the power of my own mind to use in any way I choose" (ibid.: xiv). Most of the affirmations which follow involve 'choice': "The Universe totally supports us in every thought we choose to think and believe" (ibid.: 2); "I believe we choose our parents" (ibid.: 4); "Believe it or not, we do choose our thoughts" (ibid.: 9); "I now choose to rise above my personality problems to recognise the magnificence of my being" (ibid.: 23); "I now choose calmly and objectively to see my old patterns and I am willing to make changes...I choose to have fun doing this. I choose to react as though I have found a treasure when I discover something else to release. Thoughts no longer have any power over me....I choose to be free" (ibid.: 47); "Today is a wonderful day. I choose to make it so" (ibid.: 62); "I welcome change, I choose to change my thinking. I choose to change the words I use" (ibid.: 74). All of Hay's affirmations begin with the same phrase emphasising the holographic, eternal present, referred to by the *Course* as the 'Holy Instant' (*Text*: 1996: 322). She writes, "In the infinity of life where I am, all is perfect, whole and complete", and all affirmations end with the sentence: "All is well in my world" (for example, ibid.: 9, 23, 38, 47, 62, 74, 227), emphasising the teaching that each creates one's own reality.

It is easy to smile at Hay's easy certainties and seemingly trite formulae. However, the working out of her affirmations in daily life might be as challenging as following the obvious rigour of the *Course's* mental discipline. My fieldwork suggests that her book has been significant to the spiritual experience of academics, professionals in the business

world and many others who seem unlikely to be duped by trite formulaic advice. She continues to be used as a reference by many.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Peck and Hay can be viewed as the founders of contemporary spiritual self help literature. They are significant for at least four reasons. First, there is the influence which their commercial success exerted on the publishing industry. Peck's TRLT remained on the New York Times bestseller list for ten years; both continue to be bestsellers. The financial success of their books caused publishers to ask for sequels from them and to commission new spiritual self help books from other authors. Marianne Williamson, for example, told me that she would never have thought of herself as an author had not a publisher asked her to put her lectures on *Course* spiritual themes into the book which became ARL (Interview, 11 October 2003). Williamson's book sold nearly one million copies in the first year after publication.

Second, both Peck and Hay continued the process of the detraditionalisation of religious language and authority. Peck also detraditionalises the specialist language of psychotherapy, making technical concepts accessible to his readership. In so doing, both authors attracted large numbers of people who would not normally buy a religious book to read books on spiritual themes.

⁴⁸ Ian Patrick, Miracle Network director, keeps a copy of YCHYL on his shelf to check symptoms (Interview, 25 August 2005). The scholar Daren Kemp, in his *New Age: A Guide*, thanks "the lady who gave me a copy of Louise Hay's *You Can Heal Your Life* to inspire recovery in a grim hospital ward" (2004: ix)

Third, Peck and Hay influenced future spiritual self help authors by the form and content of their books. Although very different from each other and aimed at different audiences, the organisation of TRLT and YCHYL is remarkably similar. Together they gave future spiritual self help authors updated versions of the winning formula of the early twentieth century inspirational books which offered principles and techniques, illustrated by anecdotes. The anecdotes not only show how a technique works, but also give the reader the illusion of intimacy with the author. Peck and Hay inhabit different worlds, but both succeed in making the reader feel welcomed into the heart of their lives to such an extent that when the next Hay or Peck book appears, the reader will want to buy it. These features continue today in the burgeoning industry of spiritual self help.

Fourth, Peck and Hay wrote books whose themes draw on *A Course in Miracles*. Hay alludes to the *Course*, recommending it to readers, and much of her book reads like a paraphrase of *Course* teaching. Peck, on the other hand, neither quotes from nor alludes to the *Course*. The themes and vocabulary of TRLT, however, suggest that Peck was influenced by *Course* ideas, and anecdotal evidence points to the same conclusion. It is significant that two of the foundational books of the contemporary self help industry were in part inspired by *A Course in Miracles*. The ongoing influence of *Course* themes on spiritual self help books of the last decade will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter Nine

Contemporary *Course*-Related Self Help Literature

Chapter Seven explored the background of contemporary spiritual self help books in the Christian inspirational literature of the first half of the twentieth century, and it examined the first two self help books derived directly from *A Course in Miracles*. Chapter Eight showed how the ideas of the *Course* spread to writers not connected to the original *Course* community and its two foundations, FIP and FACIM. The present chapter will show that many of the themes from *A Course in Miracles* continue to influence the teaching found in some of the most popular contemporary spiritual self help books. It will examine representative bestselling spiritual self help books which followed Peck's and Hay's beginning in the late 1980s and continuing into the present. Ideas from the *Course* continue to influence spiritual self help literature unconnected to *Course* organisations or *Course* leaders. Authors often feature one or two key *Course* themes and develop a self help scheme based on these selected themes. Many *Course* concepts have become so commonplace that they are accepted as 'givens' in the literature and thus are not articulated or referenced to the *Course*. However, many of the books ignore the metaphysical system and metanarrative underpinning *Course* teaching, and focus on the practice and experiential proof of the spirituality on offer. Often, the practice is offered as help for a specific difficulty such as addictive behaviour or fear.

The fact that the broad genre of spiritual self help literature makes the often obscure, rigorous and uncompromising *Course* teaching accessible in bite-size chunks to a mass

readership means that popular self help literature is a significant means by which the religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles* has been diffused throughout the wider culture to the extent that its themes have become part of the public cultural discourse. Indeed, whilst the new generation of spiritual self help literature does not spell out the *Course* ontology and metaphysics, in much of the literature, as will be seen, these have become taken-for-granted truths underpinning the techniques taught. There is no need for the literature to spell out the monistic philosophy, for example, because it is assumed. The fact that the term 'New Age' has become passé in today's society (and is often connected to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) together with the fact that the new spiritualities are no longer perceived by many as 'alternative' demonstrates *not* that their ideas are no longer viable but rather the opposite: holistic spiritualities are no longer confined to the margins of public discourse in UK.

1. Susan Jeffers: *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*

The subtitle of Susan Jeffers' 1987 self help book, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* is *How to Turn your Fear and Indecision into Confidence and Action*. Susan Jeffers has a PhD in psychology and her book, in some senses, combines parts of Peck's and Hay's approaches. She uses no footnotes to buttress erudite arguments with learned references as Peck does; however, she writes with the authority of an academic who has lectured in mainstream American universities such the New School for Social Research in New York and UCLA in California. On the other hand, perhaps at the request of her publisher, her book appears to be aimed at as popular an audience as those for whom Hay wrote.

The Introduction of the *Course* lays out in two sentences the simple logic of its metaphysical system based on the two levels of reality and unreality: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists” (*Text*: 1996: 1) The Introduction also teaches that the main attribute of level one, the real/God, is love, whilst the main feature of level two, the unreal world of material existence, is fear. Jeffers’ book is a practical self help guide to overcoming the ‘fear’ which, in the *Course*’s system, is the source of all that is wrong with the individual and society. Thus, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (FFDIA) can be seen to focus on the *Course*’s diagnosis of the root of human problems: fear. It also gives practical advice on realising the *Course*’s teaching that “Fear is not justified in any form” (*Workbook*, 1996: 412).

Jeffers’ book does not read like an academic monograph. However she offers a bibliography at the back giving sources for the wisdom on offer. Among the books recommended are *A Course in Miracles*, Hay’s *You Can Heal Your Life*, Jampolsky’s *Love is Letting Go of Fear*, Peale’s *You Can if You Think You Can*, Peck’s *The Road Less Travelled*. Also recommended is the book of another *Course* author who was a close friend of Thetford, Hugh Prather’s *There Is a Place Where You Are Not Alone*. The influences of the *Course*, Peck, Hay and, to a lesser degree, Peale’s philosophy of Christian positive thinking are evident in the book.

FFDIA follows the established self help formula. First published in 1987, it has been through several editions and has been translated into thirty languages (2004). Like the books of Peck, Hay, Jampolsky and Williamson, it has sold in the millions worldwide.

The cover of my 2002 edition of the book refers to it as a “modern spiritual classic”. Jeffers writes that fear is an “epidemic” in society: fear of endings, fear of change, fear of “staying stuck”, fear of success, fear of failure, fear of public speaking, of making decisions, of intimacy, of being alone, of driving, of losing a loved one, of ending a relationship and of dying (1987: 3).

Having made the diagnosis of what is wrong, the book follows the self help formula by promising help by way of assured results if the book’s techniques are followed. “*Whatever* the fear, this book will give you the insight and tools to vastly improve your ability to handle any given situation. You will move from a place of pain, paralysis and depression (feelings that often accompany fear) to one of power, energy and excitement” (ibid.: 4 – emphasis in original). Like the *Course*, FFDIA teaches that the solution to any problem lies in changing one’s mind about it. ‘Re-education’ is Jeffers’ word for what the *Course* calls “unlearning” or “changing the mind”; however, Jeffers also writes of the need to “unlearn” wrong thinking patterns which keep one in a state of fear (ibid.: 5). Continuing the self help formula, Jeffers offers proof that fear can be conquered through training the mind by offering her own experience as well as the experiences of others (ibid.: 4)

Jeffers believes that conquering fear lies in the realm of education rather than in psychology. To illustrate this she shares her experience of teaching a college course in ‘fear’ in the New School of Social Research in New York (ibid.: 11-18; 197-198). Like Peck and Hay, Jeffers offers proof of the power of her teaching by telling the stories of

her students and others she has known (ibid.: 59-62, 94-100). Drawing on their experiences, Jeffers divides 'fear' into three categories. The first category involves what she calls "surface fears" (ibid.: 13-14), that is, fears which happen (being alone) and fears requiring action (making friends) whilst the second category lies deeper, involving the ego (rejection, failure, loss of image). Jeffers' third category, she claims, lies behind all fear: "at the bottom of every one of your fears is simply the fear that you can't handle whatever life may bring you" (ibid.: 15). Behind the fears of category one and two is the basic fear of not being able to handle life: "I can't handle illness...I can't handle losing my job...I can't handle failure...I can't handle being rejected" (ibid.: 15). Jeffers then promises techniques and teaching which will assure the reader that she can "develop more trust in your ability to handle whatever comes your way!" (ibid.: 16). Jeffers' technique number one is to repeat these words throughout the day, "Whatever happens to me, given any situation, I can handle it" (ibid.: 18).

In the following chapters, Jeffers uses anecdotes from her life and those of others together with her teaching on the principle of overcoming fear, to expand on *Course* teaching that the key to solving problems lies in changing one's mind about how one views them, making the mental shift which the *Course* calls a 'miracle': "Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you" (*Text*, 1996: 666). Jeffers teaches five 'truths' about fear. To help the reader change his mind about how to view fear. The five truths are: 1) "Fear will never go away as long as I continue to grow" (ibid.: 22-23) and should

therefore be viewed in a positive light. 2) “The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it” (ibid.: 23-25). 3) “The only way to feel better about myself is to go out and do it” (ibid.: 25). The “doing” (regardless of the results) always comes before the “feeling better”, and again the reader is presented with a win-win situation. 4) “Not only am I going to experience fear whenever I’m on unfamiliar territory, but so is everyone else” (ibid.: 25). Jeffers urges the reader to interpret fear as “a green light to move ahead rather than a red light signal to retreat” (ibid.: 27). 5) “Pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the underlying fear that comes from a feeling of helplessness” (ibid.: 28-29). Here Jeffers echoes *Course* teaching that living in the “weakness” of level one is an absurd choice when the “strength” of level two is available: “The saviours of the world are merely those who choose His strength instead of their own weakness” (*Text*, 1996: 667). In the words of the *Course*, “All things are lessons God would have me learn” (*Workbook*, 1996: 367), and “By hiding truth in fear, you see no reason to believe that the more you look at fear the less you see it, and the clearer what it conceals [truth] becomes” (*Text*, 1996: 287).

Technique two is to repeat the above five ‘Fear Truths’ “at least ten times a day”. Following the *Course’s Workbook* system of mind training using repetition, Jeffers writes, “retraining your thinking takes constant repetition. *Knowing* the Fear Truths is not enough. You have to keep feeding them to yourself until they become a part of your being – until you start to reverse your behaviour and move *toward* your desired goals, rather than retreat....trust me and repeat the Fear Truths over and over again” (ibid.: 27 – emphasis in original). In the technique of repetition Jeffers follows closely the *Course’s*

main teaching technique. The *Workbook* frequently asks the reader to repeat phrases not only several times a day but the same phrases for many days. Lessons 141 to 150 ask the student repeat throughout the day for ten days “My mind holds only what I think with God” (*Workbook*, 1996: 275-277) and the lessons for days 201 to 220 require the reader to repeat throughout the day, for twenty days, the sentences “I am not a body. I am free. For I am still as God created me” (ibid.: 388-397; see also ibid.: 157, 196, 213, 332-335).

Jeffers begins Chapter Three by referring back to the *Course*'s two levels of reality: love (level one) and fear (level two). Having suggested that everyone feels fear, she argues that the difference between those who use it positively and those who are enslaved by it, lies in “how they hold fear”: do they choose to hold it from a position of “power” or of “helplessness, depression and paralysis”? (ibid.: 33) “How you hold fear” echoes the *Course*'s emphasis that there is always “another way of looking at” a thing (*Workbook*, 1996: 50). The position of power, she teaches, goes with love, which is the opposite of fear as the *Course*'s Introduction teaches (1996: 1). “*The truth is that love and power go together. With power, one can really begin to open up the heart. With no power, love is distorted*” (1987: 35 – emphasis in original). The *Course* teaches that the fear and darkness of the level two belief system obscure the power one possesses in level one, which is one's true reality. “In the darkness you have obscured the glory God gave you and the power He bestowed upon you...banish not power from your mind” (*Text*, 1996: 289).

Jeffers offers technique three to help the reader achieve this position of power. “Repeat to yourself at least twenty-five times each morning, noon and night: I AM POWERFUL AND I AM LOVED. And: I AM POWERFUL AND I AM LOVING. An energizing variation is: I AM POWERFUL AND I LOVE IT! Their constant repetition will make the concepts of power and love more compatible and more comfortable” (ibid.: 35-36 – emphasis in original).

Chapter Four on “choosing to take responsibility for your life” draws on themes from the *Course* as well as Peck’s TRLT (ibid.: 49). Echoing Peck (1978: 41-43) she reminds the reader that to complain is not to take responsibility for oneself (ibid.: 50). In a paraphrase of the *Course*, she writes, “I ask you to believe you are the cause of all your experiences of life meaning that you are the cause of your *reactions* to everything that happens to you” (ibid.: 51). This passage appears to link closely with the *Course*: “I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked” (*Text*, 1996: 448).

Expanding on the theme of ‘taking responsibility’, Jeffers teaches that everyone is either a victim or someone who takes responsibility for herself. Many who think they are responsible actually have a subtle form of victim mentality and do not understand what ‘taking responsibility for oneself’ means. For example, if a person complains, he is not taking responsibility for himself, but shifting the blame for his situation (cancer, a bad marriage, etc.) onto others. To explain the concept of responsibility Jeffers give seven

‘definitions’ of taking responsibility and offers anecdotes from people’s lives to make the ‘definition’ live.

First, “taking responsibility means never blaming anyone else for anything you are being, doing, having or feeling...until you fully understand that you, and no one else, create what goes on in your head, you will never be in control of your life” (ibid.: 52). Here FFDIA echoes Peck’s chapter on taking responsibility for one’s choices (1978: 32-34) as well as *Course* teaching that one can choose how one views a situation (*Workbook*, 1996: 281). Second, “taking responsibility means not blaming yourself...now you are learning a new way of thinking, don’t be upset with your past, present or future behaviour. It is all simply part of the learning process” (1987: 54; see *Workbook*, 1996: 50-51). Third, “taking responsibility means being aware of where and when you are NOT taking responsibility so that you can eventually change” (1987: 54-55). Here Jeffers explicitly draws on *Course* teaching that there is always a perceived ‘payoff’ in negative thinking about oneself. “Invest it [blame] not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. *And above all be not afraid of it*” (*Text*, 1996: 373 – emphasis in original). Jeffers writes that she and her friends were feeding each other stories of martyrdom: “the payoff was that we didn’t have to create our own happiness when we could blame others for it...once I realised what I was doing I could get into the task of correcting it” (1987: 55-56). Anger, writes Jeffers, is a clue that you are not taking responsibility for yourself. The *Course* teaches, “I am not the victim of the world I see....I have invented this situation as I see it....There is another way of looking at this....I could see peace in this situation instead of what I now see in it” (*Workbook*, 1996: 48-51). Fourth, “taking responsibility

means handling the Chatterbox, the little voice inside, the voice that tries to drive you crazy” (1987: 57), what the *Course* calls the voice of the Ego which the student can choose not to invest with reality. Fifth, “taking responsibility means being ware of payoffs that keep you ‘stuck’” (ibid.: 59-60). The *Course* urges the student to see these ‘payoffs’ as the ego trying to hold one in a state of victimhood and helplessness (*Workbook*, 1996: 50-51). Sixth, “taking responsibility means figuring out what you want in life and acting on it. Set your goals – then go out and work toward them”....(1987: 62-63). In *Course* vocabulary, create your own reality (*Text*, 1996: 448). Seventh and finally, “taking responsibility means being aware of the multitude of choices you have in any given situation” (1987: 63-64).

Having explained her understanding of ‘taking responsibility’ and illustrating each with three or four anecdotes from the lives of friends and students, Jeffers proceeds to more self help: six techniques to help the reader feel “more powerful in the face of fears” (ibid.: 65). 1) List the payoffs you get from staying stuck in some aspect of your life. 2) Be aware of the options you have during a given day...and be aware of the alternatives each time you are upset. 3) Notice what you say in conversations with friends. Does it include complaining about other people? 4) List in a notebook the many choices available to you that can change presently upsetting experiences into positive ones. The reader is encouraged to draw from Jeffers’ anecdotes, such as, for example, “Jill’s story of lateness”. If you know a friend is always late you can a) stop meeting her, b) arrive late, c) bring a book to read. Don’t blame others; realise there are at least thirty ways to change your point of view. 5) Look at the gifts you have received from what you have

always looked at as a 'bad' situation. 6) See if you can go one week without criticising anyone or complaining about anything. Replace complaining by looking for positive things to say (ibid.: 65-57). Jeffers here gives specific techniques for realising the fundamental *Course* teaching that one can always change how one views a situation; this shift is defined by the *Course* as the 'miracle' (*Text*, 1996: 53).

Jeffers follows the above self help techniques with seven more, these designed to "reclaim your power". Again, she appears to be putting "flesh and bones" on key *Course* principles. The *Course* teaches you that in the reality of level one the student has 'power' (*Workbook*, 1996: 460).

The final half of FFDIA moves from the negative (conquering fear) to the positive as Jeffers offers techniques for learning positive thinking, learning to chose "love and trust" and learning to be generous (ibid.: 167). In the penultimate chapter Jeffers moves into the metaphysical realm: "There is a body of psychologists who believe in the existence of the Higher Self..." (ibid.: 189). Her teaching on the Higher Self links closely with the *Course*. We search, Jeffers writes, for something to fill the emptiness within (what the *Course* refers to as the belief in scarcity in level two). We look to fill it with "things out there", a new relationship, car or job when we should look within to the Higher Self: "The Higher Self is in operation when you create 'miracles' in your life....The Chatterbox is the repository of all our negative input from the time we were born. It contains our childlike ego that needs attention and doesn't know how to give. The conscious Mind sends orders to the Subconscious Mind based on the information it gets

from either the Higher Self or the Chatterbox. We can train it to choose from either” (ibid. 192). Jeffers simplifies the *Course*’s basic teaching that one can choose between the reality of level one and the fear, helplessness and ego illusions which bind the reader to level two.

In the final chapter there are echoes of those who have gone before her in self help writing: tell the Chatterbox “it’s all happening perfectly” (ibid.: 213, cf Hay, 1984: 9, 23, 32, 47, 74, 85, 111, 143, 208, 228). “There is no quick fix. There are workshops, books and tapes that give you tools, but they are not quick tools. They are to be mastered through a life time” (1987: 214; cf Peck, 1978: 66-71; 332 on the slowness of true spiritual growth). Her teaching that one must refuse to play the role of the victim (1987: 215) is couched in language reminiscent of Jampolsky’s *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* (1979: 129). The final chapter echoes the *Course*’s teaching that the work to be done is in the Mind: “The path that needs changing is the one in your mind...it is your mind that has to be changed first – then all that is right will follow” (1987: 215-216).

I have gone into detail in writing about Jeffers’ self help book for several reasons. First, it presents a useful example of how self help literature takes principles from *A Course in Miracles*, focuses on one or two central teachings (in this case *Course* teaching on fear and on choosing to be responsible for oneself) and gives specific techniques for practising these principles in ordinary life.

Second, Jeffers uses the *Course's* own techniques of repetition, both in the sense of repeating a teaching again, in a spiral that adds something new to the teaching each time it comes round again, and in the sense of using verbal repetition of words as a means of mind training (following the techniques of the *Workbook*). Jeffers believes in the power of the words we speak.

Third, Jeffers is also significant in the context of this study of spiritual self help literature in that FFDIA shows how self help authors drew upon one another as the genre developed. The cover of the 2004 edition of the book bears a testimony from Marianne Williamson showing the cross pollination that goes on between spiritual self help authors: "Now more than ever, Susan Jeffers' wisdom feels like a precious gift. Her counsel is profound and meaningful in such challenging times". In an interview with the BBC given after Peck's death on 25 September 2005, Jeffers told how she had found TRLT "personally helpful: judging from the underlinings in my copy of *The road Less Travelled*, it obviously had a large influence on me"..

Fourth, Jeffers is unashamed and unapologetic about the lucrative aspect of self help literature. She also paid tribute to Peck for another reason: the popularity of TRLT "opened doors" for her first book, FFDIA nine years later.⁴⁹ Future self help authors may feel that Jeffers (along with Louise Hay, Gerald Jampolsky and Marianne Williamson) performed a similar role for them in opening up the lucrative spiritual self help genre of literature. In the Acknowledgements section of her 2003 book, *Embracing Uncertainty*,

⁴⁹ BBC News Magazine, 29 September 2005 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4289424.stm) accessed 7 October 2005.

Jeffers unselfconsciously thanks her agent in the UK for making sure that all her work is represented in “the UK market” (2003: ix).

2. Neale Donald Walsch: *Conversations with God*

Conversations with God (CWG), published in 1995, provides a contrast to Jeffers’ self help writing in many ways. On the one hand, like Jeffers, Peck and Hay, Walsch’s approach is eclectic. In the Preface he acknowledges his debt to his “spiritual teachers, who include the saints and sages of all religions”. Like Peck, Walsch acknowledges that his life has not been one which his friends would have labelled ‘spiritual’. On the other hand, Walsch’s ambitions for CWG (the first of a trilogy of *Conversations with God* books) appear to be greater than those of Jeffers and other spiritual self help authors. As I will show, Walsch was inspired and influenced by *A Course in Miracles* in the content of what he teaches, but more importantly in the genesis he claims for the CWG books. Internal evidence suggests that he views CWG as channelled revelation from God and therefore on a par with the *Course* as a source in itself of revealed wisdom for the new evolving spirituality of the future. As such, it is a book which will, like the *Course*, require commentaries, explanatory notes and other spin offs. To enhance this impression, Walsch has written a ‘guidebook’ for CWG (1997)⁵⁰ as well as booklets which focus on one aspect of the material covered in the ‘guidebook’ (1997: 205).

Walsch’s narrative of how CWG came to be written provides a classic example of spontaneous channelling: “This book happened to me. I mean that literally. This book

⁵⁰ Neale Donald Walsch, 1997, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 1 Guidebook* (1997).

was not written by me, it happened *to me*" (1995: vi – emphasis in original). Walsch recounts how "it was not possible for me to stop the process" (ibid.: vi). However, as with other self help books, there are also promises for the reader:

This book addresses most, if not all, of the questions we have ever asked about life and love, purposes and function, people and relationships, good and evil, guilt and sin, forgiveness and redemption, the path to God and the road to hell...everything. It directly discusses sex, power, money, children, marriage, divorce, life work, health, the hereafter, the before-now...*everything*. It explores war and peace, knowing and not knowing, giving and taking, joy and sorrow. It looks at the concrete and the abstract, the visible and the invisible, the truth and the untruth. You could say that this book is "God's latest word on things..." (1995: vii – emphasis in original).

To claim that one is writing "God's latest word on things" is an ambitious undertaking, but Walsch does not flinch from claiming to have received divine, unmediated revelation from God. This is clear from his explanation in the first chapter of the circumstances leading up to his experience of taking dictation from God.

In the spring of 1992 Walsch had been through an unhappy time. Professionally and emotionally he felt a failure. He had formed the habit of writing angry letters (which were not posted) to people he felt were "victimising" him. This time his unhappiness was so general that he wrote an angry, spiteful letter to God. The letter was full of confusions, contortions, condemnations and angry questions:

Why wasn't my life working? What would it take to get it to work? Why could I not find happiness in relationships? Was the experience of adequate money going to elude me forever?...*What had I done to deserve a life of such continuing struggle?* To my surprise as I scribbled out the last of my bitter, unanswerable questions and prepared to toss my pen aside, my hand remained poised over the paper, as if held there by some invisible force. Abruptly, the pen began *moving on its own*. I had no idea what I was about to write, but an idea seemed to be coming, so I decided to flow with it. Out came...**Do you really want an answer to all these questions, or are you**

just venting? My mind came up with a reply....Before I knew it, I had begun a conversation...and I was not writing so much as *taking dictation*. That dictation went on for three years...The answers to the questions I was putting on paper never came to me until the question was completely written and I'd put my *own thoughts away*. Often the answers came faster than I could write (ibid.: 1-2 – emphasis in original).

Two years after the publication of CWG, Walsch wrote “I can say humbly that it is now clear *Conversations with God – Book 1* is a very special document. While there is very little which is new in the book, there is a new way of sharing that which is ancient. For in *Conversations with God*, Deity has spoken to Everyman...in Everyman’s own language. This has made the wisdom of the ages accessible at last to the average person, perhaps to the largest audience ever” (1997: 9). Just as Schucman found herself unable to question the authority of the ‘Voice’, Walsch writes, “Shortly after this material began happening to me, I knew that I was talking with God. Directly, personally. Irrefutably. And that God was responding to my questions in direct proportion to my ability to comprehend. ...This accounts for much of the colloquial style of the writing and the occasional references to material I’d gathered from other sources and prior experiences in my life” (ibid.: vii).

If Walsch’s book is more ambitious than other self help books, it is also different in that it has few personal anecdotes. Almost the only anecdotal material is his description of himself before he began to take the dictation: “I am deeply embarrassed by my own life, which has been marked by continued mistakes and misdeeds, some very shameful behaviours, and some choices and decisions which I’m certain others consider hurtful and unforgivable” (ibid.: viii). In this he follows the *Course*, in which there are no stories. There is also the similarity to descriptions of Schucman as a difficult, prickly person, the

last sort of individual, it is suggested, that one would associate with spirituality. CWG differs from both the *Course* and other self help books in that there are no lists of techniques to be practised and no phrases to be repeated. The closest that Walsch comes to ordering the reader to carry out a technique is where he writes “I want you to get into this dialogue as soon as you can, because what’s really important here is not my story, but yours. It is your life story which brought you here. It is your personal experience to which this material has relevance. Otherwise you would not be here, with it right now” (ibid.: 2). Here Walsch echoes words I have heard from many *Course* devotees, that they were ‘guided’ to the *Course*, sometimes in extraordinary ways, or that the *Course* ‘found’ them.⁵¹ Walsch implies that anyone who has started to read the book has been guided to it because it is God’s dialogue with the person as much as it was with Walsch. A belief in personal spiritual guidance is implied and it is a powerful literary device for drawing the reader into the dialogue of the book.

The book is written in question and answer format. Its purpose is to put to God all the questions anyone might think to ask. Walsch believes God speaks to everyone, “the good and bad, the saint and scoundrel” (ibid.: vii) though not necessarily as directly as God spoke to Walsch: “How many times have you heard the old axiom: when the student is ready, the teacher will appear? This book is our teacher” (ibid.: vii). Unlike Schucman, Walsch’s use of italics emphasises his apparent need to convince the reader that the process of receiving the material was involuntary, that it came from a source outside of his consciousness. In contrast, whilst Schucman wrote later that she never doubted the authority of the ‘Voice’, yet she was resistant to the process and often said that she did

⁵¹ Interview, Robert Perry, 4 May, 2004

not believe or understand the *Course*. *Course* hagiographies agree that she made no attempt to practise its spiritual discipline. As noted, this has become a significant part of the development of the religious discourse of the *Course*. Walsch is openly pleased with the result of his channelling. He writes of study groups springing up after its publication, of the book's power to move people to change their lives (1997: 9), of the amazing internal organisation that emerges from the seemingly casual dialogue between himself and God. He sees an organisation similar to the teaching spiral of the *Course*, as the reader is returned "again and again to a set of basic conceptual statements which form the framework of its message...introducing new concepts, exploring old concepts in greater depth and rendering them functional in one's daily life". He concludes, "It turns out that God is a good writer" (ibid.: 15).

The *Course*'s Influence on *Conversations with God*

The teaching of CWG is in great part derived from the *Course*. An examination of a few of its themes will show that Walsch is following a well-travelled pathway, eclectic but with many borrowings from the *Course*.

First, Walsch's CWG uses biblical material in a way that is similar to the *Course*'s use of biblical quotations and allusions. God tells Walsch that "God created you in the image and likeness of God" echoing Genesis 1 (1995: 13). Another passage seems to allude to passages in Jesus' last discourse with his disciples in John's gospel (John 14.18; 16.13) where Jesus promises not to leave his disciples "comfortless" but will send his spirit to teach them. Walsch's version has God promising "I will not leave you without those who

would show you, teach you, guide you, and remind you of these truths” (ibid.: 20). Walsch has God quoting Jesus’ words (in Matthew 17.20) without attributing them to Jesus that “if you have but the faith of a mustard seed, you shall move mountains (ibid.: 12).

Second, Walsch’s core teachings echo those of the *Course*. As Chapter Four’s analysis of the text showed, *Course* ontology is set out with simplicity in the Introduction to the *Text*: God is “all-encompassing” and what is “all-encompassing” can have no opposite (*Text*, 1996: 1). Walsch’s version of his similar but more complicated ontology reads, “This nothing which holds the everything is what some people call God. Yet that is not accurate, either, for it suggests that there is something God is not – namely everything that is not ‘nothing’. But I am All Things” (1995: 24). CWG ontology also draws on the Seth texts’ understanding of God and uses some of Roberts’ vocabulary for God - for example ‘All That Is’ (ibid.: 22). *Course* teaching, as laid out in the Introduction, that God is love and love’s opposite is fear (*Text*, 1996: 1) is also borrowed by Walsch. According to CWG, “all human actions are motivated at their deepest level by one of two emotions: fear or love. In truth there are only two emotions – only two words in the language of the soul....Every human thought, and every human action, is based in either love or fear and all other ideas are but derivatives of these two” (1995: 16).

Like the *Course*, which teaches that humankind is in the dream of level two (fear) and needs to remember its true identity with God in level one (*Text*, 1996: 447), CWG teaches that “the act of returning to God is called remembrance. You actually choose to

re-member Who You Really Are” (1995: 28). For both the *Course* and CWG, the act of remembering one’s true identity is also an act of “joining” with the whole. In the words of the *Course*, “What is a miracle but this remembering? And who is there in whom this memory lies not? The light in one awakens it in all. And when you see it in your brother, you *are* remembering for everyone” (*Text*, 1996: 447 – emphasis in original). In CWG, “To remember Who You Really Are is to join together with the various parts of you to experience the all of you, which is to say, the All of Me” (1995: 28). The *Course* teaches that level two does not logically exist because that which is “all-encompassing” can have no opposite (*Text*, 1996: 1). Therefore, no one has, in reality, left God and level one. In the words of CWG, “Of course, there is no way for you to not be who and what you are – you simply are that (pure, creative spirit), have been always and always will be. So you did the next best thing. You caused yourself to forget Who You Really Are” (1995: 28).

The *Course* teaches that one should not try to change external events but to choose how we view the events. “Seek not to change the world, seek to change your mind about the world” (*Text*, 1996: 617, 666). CWG teaches “The way to reduce the pain which you associate with earthly experiences and events is to change the way you behold them” (1995: 37). In both books, ‘choice’ is the key to change, to remembering one’s true identity with God. In the final chapter of the *Text* the reader is urged “My brother, choose again” (*Text*, 1996: 666). Choice plays an equally prominent role in Walsch’s system: “It is in the act of choosing to be, rather than simply being told that you are, a part of God that you experience yourself as being at total choice, which is what, by definition, God is” (1995: 28) and “Pure choice produces salvation....” (*ibid.*: 175).

Walsch refers only once to *A Course in Miracles* in CWG and he does so using a literary device which perhaps is meant to acknowledge the other derivative passages. In the dialogue, God says, "All attack is a call for help". Walsch replies to God, "I read that in *A Course in Miracles*", and God replies, "I put it there". Walsch: "Boy, you have an answer for everything" (1995: 90).⁵²

Walsch follows in the footsteps of Jane Roberts who channelled the entity 'Seth' and Thetford and Schucman who were responsible for the scribing of *A Course in Miracles*. He places himself in this position in CWG. God is seen to view him as a special person who has received divine revelation comparable to the scriptures of the religious traditions of the world. His *Guidebook* (1997) is a comprehensive self help text based on the teaching of CWG. In writing a self help text based on his own channelled text, he may also be following in the footsteps of William Thetford who was responsible for writing Jampolsky's *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*. He has established himself firmly in the top echelon of spiritual self help authors whose books continue to sell in the millions around the world.

⁵² Walsch mentions the *Course* again in *Conversations with God, Book 3* (1998). In a passage, God commends Walsch as one of the great spiritual teachers of the world: "Book 1 was brought through by you, my Son, just as all great teachings have been inspired by Me, and brought through human forms. Those who allow such inspirations to move them and who fearlessly share them publicly, are My greatest teachers". When Walsch demurs, "I am not sure that I would put myself in that category", God reminds him that, "The words you have been inspired to share have touched millions. They have been translated into 24 languages. They have reached around the world." When Walsch continues to protest, God says, "I'm saying what I said through Judith [*sic*] Schucman in *A Course in Miracles*: You teach what you have to learn" (1998: 184-185). It is difficult to understand how someone like Walsch, who shows evidence of having immersed himself deeply in the teachings of the *Course*, to have got Schucman's name wrong. It is possible that this is a deliberate device to downplay the influence of the *Course* on his books fearing that his books may appear too derivative, or it is possible that he mixed up the names of Judith Skutch Whitson and Helen Schucman.

Eckhart Tolle: *The Power of Now*

This chapter on contemporary spiritual self help books would not be complete without a glance at one more book which was published in 1998 and continues to be a bestseller in many countries, Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (PON). Like Jeffers, who deals with one important aspect of *Course* teaching, the anatomy of 'fear' and strategies for dealing with it, Tolle concentrates on the central *Course* teaching on the 'holy instant' by showing the reader how to live in the eternal present.

In the Preface to the 2005 edition of PON, Tolle recounts the publishing history of the book. He writes, "Six years after it was first published, *The Power of Now* continues to play its part in the urgent task of transformation of human consciousness....It has taken on a life of its own. It has reached several million readers worldwide, many of whom have written to me to tell me of the life-changing effect it has had on them" (2005 [1999]: 1). Whilst my 1999 and 2005 editions of PON were published by Hodder and Stoughton, the original publisher was a little-known New Age publisher, Namaste Publishing in Vancouver. Namaste published 3000 copies of POW in 1998 (ibid.: 1). Tolle recounts how during the first year of its publication the book found its readers "almost exclusively through word of mouth" (ibid.: 1). Tolle tells of personally delivering copies of the book to small bookshops in Vancouver. Friends of Tolle helped by placing copies of the book in 'spiritual' bookstores in "Calgary, Seattle, California and London" (ibid.: 1). Tolle was encouraged when Stephen Gawtry, whom he calls the "manager of the world's oldest

metaphysical bookstore in London” [Watkins] wrote, “I foresee great things for this book” (ibid.: ii). In 1999 PON became what he calls “an underground bestseller” causing it to be reviewed in several mainstream magazines and newspapers and noticed by Oprah Winfrey. Sales of PON became “explosive” when she recommended the book on her American television talk show. Tolle writes, “five years after it was first published, it reached number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and it is now available in thirty languages” (ibid.: ii). He is particularly pleased that it has become a bestseller in India, “a country considered by many to be the birthplace of humanity’s quest for spiritual enlightenment” (ibid.: ii).

In the Preface, Tolle also tells of the thousands of letters and e-mails which he has received from all over the world, from “ordinary people but also from Buddhist monks and Christian nuns, people in prison or facing a life-threatening illness or imminent death” (ibid.: ii). He writes that psychotherapists recommend PON to their patients and incorporate its teaching in their practice (ibid.: xii). The contents of some of the letters become the promise of reward which Tolle offers potential readers in the third edition of PON: there is “a lessening or even a complete disappearance of suffering and problem-making...the beneficial effects of inner body awareness, the sense of freedom that comes from letting go of self-identification with one’s personal history and life-situation and a new found inner peace that arises as one learns to relinquish mental/emotional resistance to the ‘suchness’ of the present moment” (ibid.: ii). He claims that the book’s transformative powers are heightened by a second and third reading. He sees the context of the book’s extraordinary success to be the “dysfunction of the human mind” played out

in daily television news reports and the growing number of people who realize “the urgent need for a radical change in human consciousness. This need as well as readiness in millions of people for the arising of a new consciousness” accounts for the success of PON (ibid. ii-iii). He writes also, on the other hand, of resistance to the book: *Time* magazine called it “mumbo-jumbo” and Tolle uses the familiar language of the *Course* to explain this: it is proof that “any teaching that puts the spotlight of attention on the workings of the ego will necessarily provoke egoic reaction, resistance and attack” (ibid.: iii).

The format of PON follows that of Walsch’s CWG. There are questions and answers and there are ‘pause’ marks where the reader is encouraged to stop and think about a teaching before continuing to read. Unlike Walsch, however, Tolle does not claim to have given the world a channelled text. He writes, “The book originated...in response to questions asked by individuals in seminars, meditation classes and private counselling sessions....Some of the questions and answers I wrote down almost verbatim. Others are generic, combining certain types of questions that were frequently asked into one, and extracting the essence of the answers to form one generic answer” (1998: 4). Sometimes in the process of writing the question and answer a new idea came to Tolle which he included in the answer. Additional questions were asked by his editor (ibid.: 4). Tolle sees himself as giving a restatement of a timeless perennial philosophy at the heart of all religions using “terminology as neutral as possible in order to reach a wide range of people” (ibid.: 6). In the Introduction he writes that he will quote from “the words of Jesus or the Buddha, from *A Course in Miracles* or from other teachings, not to compare

but to draw attention to the fact that in essence there is and always has been only one spiritual teaching, although it comes in many forms” (ibid.: 6). Thus Tolle, not claiming originality or divine inspiration for himself, sees his role as that of interpreting the spiritual essence behind all religions for people today. In so doing, he places wisdom from the *Course* on a par with teachings from the Buddha and from Jesus.

Although Tolle does not claim to have written a channelled text, he writes with great authority and this authority derives from his personal spiritual experience. He writes, “I speak from inner experience, and if at times I speak forcefully, it is to cut through the heavy layers of mental resistance and to reach that place within you where you already *know*, just as I know, and where the truth is recognised when it is heard” (ibid.: 7 – emphasis in original). Following the self help formula, Tolle tells his own story which serves to authenticate his teaching. He gives few details about his life before his ‘awakening’, but the jacket cover tells the reader that he was born in Germany, graduated from the University of London and worked at Cambridge University. In the Introduction Tolle writes of living in a state of anxiety, “interspersed with periods of suicidal depression” until he was twenty-nine years old. He had a “deep longing for annihilation” and the thought came to him, “I can’t live with myself any longer” (ibid.: 1). As he recounts,

Suddenly I became aware of what a peculiar thought it was. “Am I one or two? If I cannot live with myself, there must be two of me: the ‘I’ and the ‘self’ that ‘I’ cannot live with. “Maybe,” I thought, “only one of them is real”. I was so stunned by this strange realisation that my mind stopped. I was fully conscious, but there were no more thoughts. Then I felt drawn into what seemed like a vortex of energy....I have no recollection of what happened after that. I was awakened by the chirping of a bird outside the window...The first light of dawn was filtering through the curtains.

Without any thought, I felt, I know, that there is infinitely more to light than we realise.... It wasn't until later, after I had read spiritual texts and spent time with spiritual teachers, that I realised ...that the intense pressure of suffering that night must have forced my consciousness to withdraw from its identification with the unhappy and fearful self, which is ultimately a fiction of the mind. This withdrawal must have been so complete that this false, suffering self immediately collapsed. What was left was my true nature as the ever-present *I am*...But more fundamental than any experience is the undercurrent of peace that has never left me since then....People came up to me saying "I want what you have"...Before I knew it I had an external identity again. I had become a spiritual teacher (ibid.: 1-3 – emphasis in original).

I have quoted Tolle's personal narrative in detail as it shows how cleverly he works the ontology of the *Course*, as set out in the *Course* Introduction (*Text*, 1996: 1) into his personal narrative in the book's Introduction. The thought, "I can't live with myself anymore" prompts him to realise that there are two selves and only one can be real, thus teaching about level one (the real) and level two (the unreal). He experiences the terrifying 'fear' and 'darkness' (*Text*, 1996: 11) of level two and is told to "Resist nothing" echoing *Course* teaching on 'defencelessness': "I need do nothing" (*Text*, 1996: 388, 478). He 'awakens' to the reality, 'light' and 'love' of level one (ibid.: 1, 198, 548). He has found his true identity of 'being' ("*I am*") in level one as opposed to 'existence' in level two (ibid.: 448). He realises that the unhappy fearful self he had known was a "fiction of the mind", in the words of the *Course*, 'unreal'.

Tolle's extraordinary experience authenticates his teaching. Just as Jeffers' book concentrated on offering the reader strategies to cope with the 'fear' of level two in the *Course*'s metaphysical system, Tolle's self help teaching focuses largely on the *Course*'s teaching on the 'holy instant', or the eternal present (ibid.: 312-317). He traces the "basic mistake" of humankind back to Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore I am",

arguing that Descartes had in fact “given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking. The compulsive thinker, which means almost everyone, lives in a state of apparent separateness...” (1998: 12). Tolle’s remedy is to remove oneself from the merry-go-round of compulsive thinking by practising what the *Course* calls the ‘holy instant’ (*Text*, 1996: 309).

As with Peck, Tolle’s self help techniques are embedded in the text. There are no lists of exercises to attempt, but the advice is specific and moves the reader toward Tolle’s goal of ‘being’ in level one. His first step involves the reader in listening to one’s own thoughts, analysing them, looking for patterns, then stepping back from them. He calls this “watching the thinker” (1998: 14-16). As one realises how much one’s thoughts are conditioned by one’s view of the past and one’s fears of the future, one is empowered to release these as they present themselves (*ibid.*: 16-17). This is the first step, “learning to disidentify [*sic*] from your mind” on the path to awakening the true ‘deeper self’ within (*ibid.*: 17) which Tolle says is the “Christ within” (*ibid.*: 86). Other techniques include suggestions for group work using the book, techniques for ‘disidentifying’ from the body (*ibid.*: 160). Tolle uses the teaching of Zen masters (*ibid.*: 78), the Buddha (*ibid.*: 117) and biblical material, the latter more positively than many spiritual self help writers. He views, for example, the “new consciousness” which is coming as the new world spoken of in the book of Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (*ibid.*: 166). In that sense he is more truly eclectic and, although much of his teaching derives from the *Course*, he quotes from the

Course only once in its teaching that “time is the great illusion” (*Text*, 1996: 246-247, 348-349) which makes separation seem possible (1998: 164).

Self Help Books Connected with *Course* Organisations

There is not space to do a study of the hundreds of *Course*-related books which have been published by in-house publishers for *Course* organisations since the *Course* itself was published. However three are significant: Chuck Spezzano’s *If It Hurts, It Isn’t Love: Secrets of Successful Relationships* (1991), Colin Tipping’s *Radical Forgiveness: Making Room for the Miracle* (1997) and Gary Renard’s *The Disappearance of the Universe: Straight Talk about Illusions, Past Lives, Religion, Sex, Politics and the Miracles of Forgiveness* (2002). Chuck Spezzano founded the organisation Psychology of Vision based on the psychological principles found in the *Course*. Colin Tipping founded Radical Forgiveness, a organisation which emphasises *Course* teaching on forgiveness. Renard appears to be close to Wapnick but includes a caveat in the ‘Author’s Note’: “the ideas represented herein are the personal interpretation and understanding of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the copyright holder of *A Course in Miracles*” (ibid: xv).

Chuck Spezzano’s *If It Hurts, It Isn’t Love*

The format of Spezzano’s *If It Hurts, It Isn’t Love* (IHIL) appears to follow that of the *Workbook* of *A Course in Miracles*. There are 366 lessons or ‘principles’, one for each day of the year, including an extra lesson for leap year. Unlike other self help authors, Spezzano puts in little autobiographical detail beyond the fact that he has a Ph.D. in

Psychology and that he and his wife, Lency, founded Psychology of Vision, which conducts seminars around the world on their psychological application of *Course* principles. Spezzano could also be said to have produced a grandchild organisation of the *Course* in the UK: Robert Holden started his spiritual journey in Spezzano's Psychology of Vision and went on to form a UK *Course* organisation, the Happiness Now Project and to write the self help book *Happiness Now*. As will be seen in Chapter Eleven, Spezzano's book and organisation has been the entry point for several who now hold key positions in the *Course* community.

In the frontispiece of IHIL, Spezzano tells of his purpose in writing the book: "The whole reason for my work is to make psychology available to everybody at every level in society. I want to put it into everyday language with everyday principles so people will know they have the power and the tools to transform themselves in every situation in every relationship" (1991: viii). In the acknowledgements, Spezzano thanks "clients" and those he has learned from in Psychology of Vision workshops as well as the *Course*: "I would like to acknowledge *A Course in Miracles* for its profound effect in my life, the healing and its gift to me, my clients and this book. Many of the principles in this book, I first learned from *A Course in Miracles* and many were corroborated by what I had already learned" (ibid.: x).

There are no quotations from the *Course* in IHIL. In his Foreword to the book, however, Robert Holden links the book's teaching firmly to the central *Course* teaching about love and fear: "In this small world of big and little personal dramas, each individual soul elects

to live a life where they finally, eventually choose love over fear. Love is, after all, the whole point of everything....Love is the ultimate goal, the only real goal. Other lesser goals such as happiness, security, success, safety, power and wealth, lose all value and meaning without love. What would it profit you to gain the whole world and lose love?" (ibid.: xi).

Spezzano, in his Introduction, incorporates *Course* teaching, when he says that you don't have to believe the book for it to 'work' for you and when he writes that the reader has the task of 'unlearning' and then 'learning' (ibid.: xiv). He tells how the book has been distilled from his practice of the *Course* as a psychotherapist and marriage counsellor (ibid.: xiii). Like other spiritual self help authors, he offers promises to his readers: "Using these principles will resolve any relationship problems and help you to enjoy, learn and grow from your relationships...." (ibid.: 15).

To the untutored eye, the lessons appear to be in random order. They contain no quotations from the *Course* or from any other book or person. However, the lessons are permeated with *Course* language. For example, Lesson One teaches that Intimacy can heal anything and the reader is told that "joining with our partner and recognising a new level of connectedness will heal anything" (ibid.: 1). These words bring to mind the original 'joining' of Schucman and Thetford. Lesson Two teaches, "Any behaviour that is not love is a call for love" (ibid.: 2; see *Text*, 1996: 279).

The exercise which Spezzano suggests for Lesson twenty-three is a good example of the exercises in the book:

Today, take a look at what you have rejected about your parents, and see if you are acting in the same way or in a compensatory way. See if you are acting out a role that makes you do good things, but does not let you receive, which eventually leads to burn-out. Your understanding of their situation, and your willingness to forgive them will release all of you. Allow God's Love to help you forgive them, and say from your heart, "In God's love, I forgive you, Mum, Dad (ibid.: 26)

Other lessons appear to be paradoxical: Lesson Ninety teaches "Any judgement against others is a judgement against myself" and Lesson Ninety-one teaches: "To the extent I am indulgent is the extent I am in sacrifice" (ibid.: 104-105). Thus, Spezzano incorporates *Course* teaching that none of us are separate (*Text*, 1996: 17), and the unhealthiness of a belief in the need for sacrifice (ibid.: 36, 453), whether it is Jesus' sacrifice or the dynamics of the sacrifices we feel compelled to make in our lives.

Spezzano's IHIL is an example of a spiritual self help book which began as an in-house publication of a *Course* organisation (Psychology of Vision), and which did so well that it was picked up by a mainstream publisher. Since 1999 it has been published by Hodder and Stoughton and has been a bestseller in many countries. It is also a good example of a second generation self help book based on the *Course* in that the author has absorbed the *Course* teaching, used it in his psychotherapy practice, applied it to relationships and developed fresh principles found in the book.

Colin Tipping: *Radical Forgiveness*

Colin Tipping's *Radical Forgiveness* (RF) is an example of a book with a wide following which continues to be printed by the *Course* organisation from which it comes, The Institute for Radical Forgiveness, whose publishing Company is Global 13 Publications. After publication in 1997, it went through four reprintings before a second edition was published in 2002. RF follows the same self help formula as other self help books based on the *Course* in that it focuses on one strand of *Course* teaching, in this case 'forgiveness'.

RF begins with promises of what the book can do for the reader and also advertises other 'forgiveness' tools on offer: a worksheet which can help the reader to achieve forgiveness in ten minutes and the worksheet on a CD called 'The Thirteen Steps'. Tipping promises that the truths of RF will transform corporate culture: "The application of Radical Forgiveness principles to any business organisation seems to increase productivity, raise morale, improve customer relations and boost the bottom line. As soon as people realise that difficult relationship situations at work are simply opportunities to heal, all barriers come down" (2002: x).

RF begins with a story about Tipping's sister, Jill, which explains how the principles of Radical Forgiveness healed her marriage. Later in the book he makes much of the story of Princess Diana's life and death. For Tipping the story illustrates how Prince Charles and Princess Diana 'chose' the mission of their involvement with each other to "open the heart chakra" of the British people (ibid.: 118-119). "The British people, and others

around the world, will either stay in the love vibration that Diana's death catapulted them into, and use that power to transform themselves, or they will focus on the illusion of what happened....It was all agreed in advance, prior to each character's soul incarnating into this world and the paparazzi were also playing an essential and loving part in all this too" (ibid.: 119-120). Here Tipping echoes *Course* teaching that what bothers us in someone else is that part within us which needs healing (*Text*, 1996: 649).

Like Spezzano's IHIL, RF is permeated with *Course* vocabulary and *Course* themes. Like Spezzano, he does not quote from the *Course*. However, it is surprising to read the disclaimer at the front of the book: "Though the reader may observe some similarities between *Radical Forgiveness* and *A Course in Miracles*, I wish to make it clear that, although I am familiar with some of the principles taught in ACIM, I have never been either a student or a teacher of it and therefore this is not in any sense an ACIM book" (2002: ii). However, the underlying metanarrative of RF is remarkably like that of the *Course*: "When all our souls were one with God, we experimented with a thought that separation was possible. We became trapped in that thought, which became the illusion or dream that we now live. It is a dream because the separation did not actually happen. We only think it did – and that thought gave birth to the belief system we call the Ego" (ibid.: 171). Among many examples of explicit borrowing of language is Chapter Twenty, called "Making Room for the Miracle" (ibid.: 211). It is possible that Tipping was consciously trying to avoid the court cases which other *Course* authors faced from 1996 onwards. Or it is possible that he represents a phase where *Course* teaching has so permeated holistic spiritualities, that they are truly unaware of their debt to the *Course*.

When I spoke to Tipping in 2002 (at a *Course* conference), he disparaged the *Course* and told me that it made the “simplest things, which all of us already know to be true, difficult – it’s impossible to read, impossible to understand”.⁵³

Gary Renard: *The Disappearance of the Universe*

The Disappearance of the Universe (DU) is an example of a self help book published by a small New Age publisher, Fearless Books, that became an “underground bestseller”⁵⁴ and was taken up by Hay House, founded by Louise Hay (author of YCHYL). New editions of it were published in 2003 and 2004. DU begins with Gary Renard’s extraordinary story of how it came to be written. Reminiscent in tone and format of Walsch’s CWG, he claims to have received channelled material from two guests who appeared in his home.

His story begins in 1992 four years after he had gone bankrupt and faced other challenges in his life. He writes of being on a spiritual search for thirteen years when he experienced a shift within, believing “things have got to change, there’s got to be a better way” (2004 [2002]: 3). He wrote a friend he was suing that he was dropping legal action to remove conflict from his life and friendship was restored. For a year he tried to practise forgiveness and love with some good results. He also began noticing “little flashes of light” out of the corner of his eye or around certain objects. During the year Renard prayed to Jesus, his favourite prophet of wisdom, wishing he could learn from him in person. Then, as he was meditating alone in his home during Christmas week of 1992, he

⁵³ Interview, Colin Tipping, 25 January 2002.

⁵⁴ Interview, Ian Patrick, 25 August 2005

was startled to see a man and woman sitting on his sofa “looking at me with gentle smiles and lucid penetrating eyes. These very solid looking people had apparently materialised out of nowhere” (ibid.: 4). They appeared to be in their thirties, their clothing “stylish and contemporary” (ibid.: 5). The woman spoke first: “Hello, my dear brother. I can see you are astonished, but not really afraid. I am Pursah and this is our brother, Arten. We are appearing to you as symbols whose words will help facilitate the disappearance of the universe. I say we are symbols because *anything* that appears to take on a form is symbolic. The only true reality is God or pure spirit which are synonymous, and God and pure spirit have no form” (ibid.: 5). In the conversation, Arten reminds Renard that he has asked Jesus (referred to as J) for help and they have come as his representatives. Thus begins a three way conversation similar to Walsch’s ‘conversations with God’.

During the ongoing conversations, Arten and Pursah quote from *A Course in Miracles*, and the Bible. They explain the genesis of the *Course* and talk about the personalities involved (Schucman, Thetford, Wapnick and Skutch). If Marianne Williamson praises Robert Perry as the “most brilliant” *Course* teacher, Renard offers a corrective in the voices of Arten and Pursah: “Ken [Wapnick] was identified to the group by J as the one who would be responsible for teaching people what the *Course* means....Today, whenever the *Course* is translated into a foreign language, it’s Ken’s job to make sure the translator truly understands every single line...he will be viewed in the future as the greatest teacher of the *Course*. He is the one whom students and scholars will still be reading hundreds, even thousands of years from now” (ibid.: 95). Having given Wapnick Jesus’ stamp of approval, Arten and Pursah denigrate Marianne Williamson. Having

heard Wapnick praised, Renard says “I thought Marianne Williamson was the main teacher of the *Course*”. Pursah replies, “No, our sister Marianne, whom I call the holy rap artist is just one teacher” and suggests that her personality and gift for public speaking account for the many people who have been introduced to the *Course* by her (ibid.: 95). In another, joking, reference to *Course* teachers, Arten asks Renard if he has started writing the book of these conversations. Renard, who loves beer, replies that he is trying to think of a title, possibly, *Love Is Letting Go of Beer* [Jampolsky] and *A Return to Beer* [Williamson]. Under the influence of Arten and Pursah, Renard adopts Wapnick as his *Course* teacher and begins listening to tapes by him. “At first I wasn’t enthralled by Ken’s style, which was much like that of a college professor. After all Ken was a scholar. As I continued listening, I realised that when it came to explaining the advanced metaphysical principles of the *Course* as well as the practical applications of it Ken was extremely helpful” (ibid.: 154).

After five years of listening to Wapnick’s tapes, it comes as no surprise to the reader that Renard visits Wapnick’s FACIM centre to do a workshop with him in person. He writes of spending three days at the workshop, meeting Wapnick and chatting with him and discovering a man “with an easygoing manner and excellent humour” (ibid.: 346). Two years later in June 2000 he does a second workshop with Wapnick. In contrast, Robert Perry is not mentioned in DU.

DU explains and sometimes amplifies central *Course* concepts such as forgiveness, the impossibility of separation, and God as pure spirit. By the end of the book, the *Course*

has been quoted 365 times, once for each day of the year. If the book is read in a year (echoes of the *Workbook* and Spezzano's IHIL) it constitutes a refresher course in *A Course in Miracles* (ibid.: 402).

One concept which is amplified is that of reincarnation, which is implied in the *Course* but takes a larger role in DU. Near the end of DU Renard is told that Arten was Thaddaeus, one of Jesus' disciples, and Pursah was Thomas. In a final twist, Pursah tells Renard that he was once Thomas, the author of *The Gospel of Thomas* and she has come back to her/himself when appearing to Renard. Renard's response: "Are you telling me that you're appearing to yourself in your previous lifetime, and that I'm you? I was there with Thaddaeus and J 2000 years ago as Thomas? I wrote *The Gospel of Thomas*? I'm going to be you, a woman, the next time around? And that'll be my final lifetime – the one where I achieve enlightenment?" Pursah replies, "You've got it. It would take someone with a spiritual background to get that. Try to understand that I came to help you, and to help others through you – and so did Arten. It's all part of the Holy Spirit's holographic plan of forgiveness" (ibid.: 402-403).

Reincarnation is central to the thesis of the book and its title. The idea that our future self may appear to us to help us in this life is a novel one. DU teaches that one lifetime of following the *Course's* spiritual path is not enough time for most people to achieve enlightenment. However, at some point in the future, when enough people who have followed the *Course's* path have reincarnated two or three times, all will achieve enlightenment and the universe (the physical world of form) will disappear (ibid: 405 –

406). This apocalyptic scenario perhaps explains why DU entered the bestseller lists in America this year and, in a manner which harks back to the fame which Williamson's book brought to the *Course* in the early 1990s, may interest a new generation in the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles*. Ian Patrick, attending the triennial *Course* international conference in April 2005, noticed how many young people said they had come because they had read Renard's book.⁵⁵

The May/June 2006 edition of *Miracle Worker* announced that a second book by Renard is about to be published. It also said that he has formed an organisation to support his form of *Course* teaching. Nevertheless, DU defends the original teaching foundation of the *Course* and Wapnick as the official interpreter of *A Course in Miracles*. In his preface to the book Renard pays tribute to Kenneth Wapnick and his wife: "I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick, founders of the Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*, upon whose work much of this book is based. The reader will see that my visitors suggested I should also become a student of the Wapnicks' teachings, and this book cannot help but reflect all of my learning experience" (ibid.: xv). DU provides an example of the continuing battles being fought within the *Course* community for the role of foremost interpreter as well as a window into the evolving religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles*.

Concluding Remarks

The *Course*-derived self help books, together with the distress in the *Course* community over the copyright court cases, have moved the *Course* discourse on from exclusive

⁵⁵ Interview, Ian Patrick, 25 August 2005.

reliance on Wapnick's narrative for discourse formation. Weber argued that with the passing of a charismatic leader, "it is the wish of the charismatically led followers to change charisma and the charismatic blessings of his subjects from a once-for-all, extremely transitory gift of grace belonging to extra-ordinary times...into a permanent, everyday possession" (Runciman, 1978: 236). Part Three of this thesis has traced the development of the lucrative self help industry and the links made through these books with the broader community of holistic spiritualities. Weber's reference to tradition as "grace...a permanent, everyday possession" has in a sense developed through the promises found in the self help texts. Readers are urged to make direct connection with the divine (the 'universe' in Hay's writing; the 'God behind all religious traditions' in Williamson's books). The implication is that readers can replicate the experience of Schucman and Wapnick for themselves, as Walsch and Renard have done by bringing out fresh channelled material. Finally, Weber wrote, "The mode of existence of charisma is always overtaken by the conditions of everyday life and the forces which dominate them, especially economic interests" (1978: 236). In the self help books, the reader is promised health, wealth, peace, direct connection with God through their Higher Self, or, in *Course* language, recovery of their true identity as part of God; some of the books are explicit in their promise of financial rewards. This is a feature of Williamson's lectures and Hay's books. Not all contemporary self help authors examined in Part Three refer to the financial gain brought to them by their books; fresh editions of the books prefer to emphasise letters or stories from readers of past editions relating how the books have helped them. However, the reader can imagine the material blessings enjoyed by the author of a book selling in the millions. Commentators within and outside the *Course*

community do not agree about Wapnick's motivation in suing to retain control of the *Course* copyright, but most suggest it was either for financial gain or for the preservation of religious orthodoxy (Pollock, 2004: 237). Weber addressed both contingencies, viewing both as a means of legitimation and power.

Part Three has traced the development of *Course* teaching in popular self help literature, showing how the process of detraditionalisation of religious language and authority continued. Part Four will describe the fieldwork undertaken with *Course* students and readers of *Course*-inspired self help literature.

Part Four

Fieldwork: The ‘Habitus’ of *Course* Devotees

Chapter Ten

Participant Observation and Survey

Fieldwork is central to this study; every part of the thesis is informed by it. I have looked to Gavin Flood (1999) for strategies that go beyond phenomenology in the study of religion, and to Olav Hammer (2004), who showed me the importance of “narratives of experience” as I attempted to allow the voices of *Course* devotees to speak for themselves of their spiritual experience. I continue to be grateful for the insights of Bourdieu (1977) on the necessary tension between trying to understand the spiritualities of those studied without doing so “with the researcher’s eye”, whilst at the same time maintaining an etic perspective. Bourdieu’s term ‘habitus’ rather than ‘field’ was important throughout: I was bringing my ‘habitus’ together with that of *Course* students, rather than occupying a privileged space as researcher and observer.

From 1999 (before I had settled on a research subject) through 2005, I attended several meetings, mostly organised by Ian Patrick’s umbrella organisation, The Miracle Network. Early on I attended *Course* meetings to gain an understanding of *Course* spirituality and *Course* devotees; latterly I attended in order to meet and talk in greater depth to *Course* students. I have not written here about every meeting attended, but have included five representative meetings, classes or conferences which show the development of the research and the insights the fieldwork yielded to my understanding of *Course* spirituality and its influence on wider popular culture through spiritual self help literature. I was fortunate to encounter individuals who found both the *Course* and popular spiritual self help literature to be helpful.

The first section of this chapter tells the story of these meetings. The second section explains my survey (Appendix A) of *Course* devotees. This was distributed in *Miracle Worker* in July/August 2002. The survey then served as a starting point as I began to conduct in depth interviews with *Course* students 2003 – 2005. Appendix B gives the results of the survey. If a respondent was willing to go into greater depth, I used (but was not constrained by) a second questionnaire (Appendix C) to guide the conversation. I used this second questionnaire with James, Lily, Jane, Harry, Ian Patrick and Robert Perry. Chapter Eleven lets these *Course* students speak in greater depth about their spirituality. I have used their real names if they gave permission for me to do so; if they did not, I have used first names. The criteria for inclusion in the third section were that a student of the *Course* should have practised *Course* spirituality for more than ten years, or have used (in a more than superficial way) a self help book derived from the *Course*. These last two chapters draw together the lessons learned through five years of fieldwork, and show how the *Course's* religious discourse has developed for devotees.

Two Conferences: Endeavor and Miracle Network

The first *Course* related meeting I attended was a weekend conference in May 1999 in Chester. At the time I was completing a thesis for an M.Th. from Chester College and considering doing a research degree in a new spirituality. Since the conference was on my doorstep I attended. This was my first (albeit atypical) exposure to *A Course in Miracles*. The conference was organised by Dutch and American *Course* devotees associated with Endeavor [*sic*] Academy in Wisconsin, USA. 'Endeavor' is a *Course*

group viewed by mainstream *Course* organisations⁵⁶ as well as by New Age scholars as heterodox and ‘unhealthy’. At this time Endeavor was fighting its case against Wapnick’s and Skutch Whitson’s foundations (FACIM and FIP) over the copyright of the *Course*. Their anger against Kenneth Wapnick over his control of the copyright was palpable and seemed to overshadow their presentation of *Course* teaching. I came away from the two days of seminars and lectures with little idea of what the *Course* taught, but aware of the anger against Wapnick. Presentations by Ted Poppe were riddled with sarcastic remarks about Wapnick. Another feature of the lectures was the hero worship the speakers felt for Endeavor’s leader, Charles Anderson. He was referred to as the “master teacher”; all speakers at the conference referred to him as somehow giving validation to *Course* spirituality for them. Most of the speakers seemed to derive personal significance for their lives from their connection to the ‘master teacher’ rather than from *Course* teaching. Some boasted of their special relationship with him. The leader of the team, Poppe, told with pride how he could telephone the ‘master teacher’ and speak to him whenever he needed to do so.⁵⁷ Frequently, those organising the conference laughed, almost hysterically, to affirm something a teacher said. To an outsider it was not always clear why people laughed unless it was to show outsiders the happiness this spirituality gives its devotees. The conference left me uncertain as to whether or not I wanted to pursue research into a new spirituality. The Endeavor people impressed me as individuals who might not fit easily into ordinary life; as a group they appeared to be torn by internal strife, uncertain of their message and unhealthily dependent on their leader. It was difficult to imagine this group having an impact on society at large.

⁵⁶ Interview, Judith Skutch Whitson, 23 September 2005. In addition to their unhealthy ‘control’ over *Course* students in their organisation, Skutch spoke of Endeavor people mixing *Course* quotations with biblical quotations without differentiating between them in their publications. See also Miller (1997: 66-68).

⁵⁷ Ted Poppe, ‘What You See Is What You Get’, Lecture. Chester, 8 May 1999.

A search on the internet put me in touch with The Miracle Network in the UK directed by Ian Patrick. As noted in Chapter Five, Patrick runs an umbrella organisation supporting people and organisations teaching *A Course in Miracles*. He also organises workshops and conferences. I subscribed to *Miracle Worker*, the network's magazine and attended its sixth annual conference at the Columbia Hotel near Lancaster Gate in London, 2–4 November, 2001. The atmosphere and organisation of this conference were rather different from that of the conference in Chester. The price for the two-day weekend conference was £134 if one paid in advance and £144 at the door. Concessions were offered "for those in genuine need". The price did not include meals or accommodation. (The Chester Endeavor conference, on the other hand, was free.) The over 300 participants seemed to be largely middle class professional people. Several to whom I spoke were psychotherapists, and this was true of all subsequent *Course* meetings I attended. There were also teachers, academics, doctors, civil servants and one or two actors. Women were in the ascendancy, but not overwhelmingly so. Most seemed to be age 30 – 50. The conference theme emphasised the practice of *Course* spirituality: 'Doing it, Living It, Breathing It: Putting *A Course in Miracles* into Practice'. There were eight speakers who came from several *Course* organisations: Anna Powell (The Journey Home), Robert Perry and Nicola Harvey (Circle of Atonement), Nick Davis (Centre for Inner Peace), Miranda Holden (Happiness Project and Interfaith Seminary), Michael Dawson (a *Course* teacher who ran the Healing Department of the Findhorn Foundation for several years), Simon Small (an Anglican vicar and *Course* teacher) and Ian Patrick (Miracle Network). Lecturers featured either a particular strand of

Course teaching with an emphasis on the practicality of the teaching for a student's everyday life, or a specific *Course* practice from the *Workbook*.

Robert Perry and Nicola Harvey, for example, spoke on meditation, not a major theme of *A Course in Miracles*. Perry argued that there is practical teaching on meditation embedded in the *Workbook*. He took the group of over 300 participants through a guided meditation on the name of God. He showed how through meditation a *Course* student can, at any place and time during the day, reconnect with their true identity in God. Perry's colleague, Harvey, spoke about meditation as a *Course*-based healing activity: a healer, she taught, should look at the patient as God sees him, "healed, perfect, holy and loving". She suggested that a healer must "see the little spark of truth in him, find a spot of light that reminds you of his true identity. One by one, bring your misperceptions of him (as ill, as in pain, as having a gender, as having a body) to your awareness and exchange your judgements for truth. As you do so, you will see more light in him, extending through his body and beyond it, getting brighter as each false judgement is laid aside. His body becomes like a shadow as you identify with the light coming from him".⁵⁸ In this way, both Harvey and Perry invited the conference participants to use *Course* 'truth' (e.g. that we are not bodies but holy, loving spirits as God created us and, as such, connected to God and to each other) to change perceptions of people and bring reconciliation in relationships. The metaphysics of monism can seem arid; linked to personal meditation, relationships and healing, it was presented as an attractive path of personal transformation and healing.

⁵⁸ Nicola Harvey, 'Healing is Holy' Lecture, London, 3 November 2001.

There was no talk about copyright battles, nor reference to a revered leader, nor to Wapnick (although I later learned – as noted in Chapter Five - that Wapnick’s FACIM had brought a court case against Perry in the 1990s). During the conference I spoke to Robert Perry and Anna Powell, to probe how their respective organisations might have a different emphasis from one another. Powell is a psycho-therapist and continues to practise psycho-therapy at the same time as giving workshops for The Journey Home. She spoke to me of the goal, as she sees it, of all of us being “absorbed into the whole” at the end.⁵⁹ Her metaphysics seemed similar to that of Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism. In contrast, a chat with Perry revealed that he does not see himself losing his individuality when he is united with God. He even believes his *Course* practice puts him in contact with the biblical Jesus. He says about the *Course*: “I’m convinced it was actually written by Jesus of Nazareth. In the *Course*, he has appeared to the world again. In following the *Course*, I am walking behind Jesus on the dusty roads of Israel”.⁶⁰ Of the speakers in the conference, Perry was the most text-oriented. He described the *Course* as “a tight, complex symphony of thought, profound, incisive, sublime and radical. Every section, every paragraph has depths to be plumbed”. Perry expects to spend the rest of his life exploring the wisdom of the *Course* and he believes that humanity will eventually spend centuries doing the same.⁶¹ In retrospect, I am pleased that my early exposure to the *Course* through these two conferences showed me 1) the vastly different approach taken by two conferences and the different clientele at each, and 2) the different understandings of the *Course* amongst the Miracle Network conference speakers as evidenced by Powell’s monistic emphasis which seemed to connect with Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, and Perry’s

⁵⁹ Interview, Anna Powell, 3 November 2001. At this time I saw myself as “testing the waters” regarding *A Course in Miracles* as the focus of my research and I identified myself as someone doing research into new spiritualities.

⁶⁰ Interview, Robert Perry, 4 November 2001.

⁶¹ Ibid.

personal connection to the biblical Jesus combined with his devotion to the words of the text of the *Course*.

Patrick's Class: The Fundamentals of *A Course in Miracles*

From 21 January until 11 March of 2002, I attended Patrick's night class on "The Fundamentals of *A Course in Miracles*" which was advertised in *Miracle Worker*. The course was described as "an eight-week series of classes with Ian Patrick, suitable for those new to *A Course in Miracles* and those familiar with its teaching but wishing to go deeper". The fee was £79 for the eight classes, which met in Patrick's flat near Hyde Park from 7.00 to 9.30 p.m. on Monday nights. Potential students were urged to "consider your commitment to completing all 8 weeks before booking".⁶²

There were six in the class. In retrospect, the class was representative of *Course* gatherings I attended in the next three years. Participants were educated, middle class professionals, some of whom had independent means. There were two members in their twenties, a higher percentage than those who later filled in my survey. Two of the six were trained or were training in psychotherapy. There was an ethnic mix with one black, one Jewish and one Greek woman whose parents and home are in Greece. One was a postgraduate student. The only way in which the group of six differed significantly from larger gatherings I attended (and from my survey) was in the lack of men: in the group of six, there was only one man. Whilst there were usually more women than men at *Course* conferences generally (and represented in the survey), they were not overwhelmingly in the ascendancy. I surmised that older men in the

⁶² *Miracle Worker*, November/December 2001, 4.

midst of careers and families might not have the time to commit themselves to eight evenings.

Class Participants

Patrick began the first evening by asking us to explain why we had joined the class.

1) Amy, middle-aged and single, explained that she had never been a church member, but had always thought of herself as spiritual. She had a background in Buddhism and felt she was now ready “to see the ‘self’ go into divine energy”. Disappointed in Buddhist ideas of the ‘self’, she felt that the *Course* might be the right next step for her spiritual development. Trained as a psycho-therapist but having independent means, she chose not to work at this time. 2) Rose, in her thirties, also single but living with her small son, works for a corporation in human resources. Like Amy, she has never belonged to a church but always viewed herself as a spiritual person. She was “probably agnostic” when she encountered the *Course* three years ago and began to do the *Workbook* lessons. So far the *Course* has not been a significant part of her life; however a new year’s resolution had been to work on herself: “by developing myself, I hoped to achieve my desires”. She concluded, “I want to find the person God wants me to be”. 3) Tina, a maths teacher in her thirties, had studied the *Course* for a long time. Without elaborating, she said she had experienced much suffering. The fifty miracles principles at the beginning of the *Text* have helped her. In later discussion, she revealed a detailed knowledge of the *Course*. 4) James, in his twenties, was the only male in the group besides Patrick. He shared that he had recently taken a “psychical awareness” course which brought him to a point of spiritual crisis. A friend recommended *A Course in Miracles*; he had a superficial knowledge of it and felt it might help him to resolve his spiritual difficulties. 5)

Athena, in her early twenties, and a post-graduate student in psychotherapy at Middlesex University, is from Greece; her parents live in Greece but she owns a home in W2 where she lives with her partner. Like Amy, she has independent means. She had first encountered the *Course* in Athens. Having studied Buddhism and Judaism, she felt drawn to esoteric teaching. She was on an esoteric path when she found the *Course* and felt that there was no contradiction between esotericism and *Course* spirituality. An eclectic, she also continues membership and attendance of the Greek Orthodox Church; she reads the Bible regularly. For her, loyalty to traditional Greek Orthodoxy, esoteric practice and *Course* spirituality fit happily together. 6) When my turn came I explained that I was a member of the Church of England, had found personal spirituality more significant in my life than church membership, and had begun doctoral research into the spirituality of *A Course in Miracles* in the context of other spiritual self help literature. The group, including Patrick, reacted positively, showing interest in the research and offering to help. Patrick concluded the first half of the evening by saying that all of us, including himself, were together for essentially the same reason: “there isn’t anyone here tonight who doesn’t feel unhappy with themselves”. When I interviewed Patrick in August 2005, he confessed that at this first class he thought I was too shy to admit a need for spiritual growth and had used the story of doing research as a ruse to explain my presence in the group.⁶³ 7) Finally, Patrick shared how he had come to the *Course* after hearing Check Spezzano (founder of Psychology of Vision and author of IHIL) speak in 1982. The Christian vocabulary of the *Course* had put him off until he heard Marianne Williamson speak. She helped him “to make sense of words like ‘crucifixion’ and ‘resurrection’ for the first time”. She showed him that “Jesus as the Son of God doesn’t exclude any of us; we are all

⁶³ Interview, Ian Patrick, 25 August, 2005.

part of the ‘Son of God’”. He had trained as a geologist and worked for an oil company when he founded *Miracle Worker* in 1984. Soon after, he began to work full time as director of the Miracle Network. Because of the *Course*, he said, he is “generally more at peace with himself and with others, is happier and has a purpose in life”.⁶⁴ Patrick rounded off the first half of the evening with the idea that all of us had been “guided” to the meeting, that the composition of the class was no accident. We were chosen to be together to help the spiritual growth of each other. When one of the group said she might have to miss the next meeting because of visitors from abroad, Patrick replied “If you are meant to be here you will be here”, emphasising a determinism which I found present in many subsequent *Course* meetings. What happens is ‘right’ and has a benign purpose, regardless of how hurtful it may seem.

The first half of the evening ended with Patrick laying out the ground rules for the eight meetings of the group. 1) We should view the meetings as a class and not as therapy; whilst we were welcome to share personal experience related to the material studied, the class should not be seen as group therapy. 2) Classes would build on one another; we should try not to miss one. 3) Whilst the classes largely taught theory, it is the application of theory that is important. 4) Group members should understand that coming to classes is not a substitute for doing the daily lessons of the *Workbook*. 5) The purpose of the classes is not to compare and contrast the *Course* with other religions. 6) It is not necessary to believe the *Course* to apply it to one’s life to test how it works. 7) Group members should be aware of resistance within when Patrick talks about the ‘ego’, ‘fear’ and ‘guilt’. (Amy, at this point, offered help as a trained psychotherapist to any in the group who might have a “bad experience” during a

⁶⁴ Lecture, Ian Patrick, 21 January 2002.

session.) 8) The *Course*, in a nutshell, is about “learning to remember that there is a chance to make another choice against the ego”. 9) Patrick hoped group members would not have a problem with the Course’s use of the name ‘Jesus’ because of past negative experiences with churches.

Evenings were divided into a first and second half with an interval for tea or coffee and snacks. Patrick provided the drinks and we made a rota assigning each of us to bring snacks on a specified evening. It struck me that this was a model not unlike what I had heard of the Alpha Course used by churches to introduce seekers to Christianity: sometimes meeting on neutral territory, friendship is implicitly offered through the social/food aspect of the meeting. The meetings were in Patrick’s flat and there was always time to chat informally at the beginning, in the interval and at the end. Like the Alpha newspaper which displays a map with dots round the country showing where Alpha groups are meeting, Patrick’s *Miracle Worker* has a map which shows where *Course* groups meet and it gives contact details for those interested in finding a *Course* group near them.

During the second half of the evening Patrick showed the first half of the video, produced for FIP by the BBC called ‘The Forgotten Song’. It tells the story of how Schucman and Thetford came to produce *A Course in Miracles*. Made after Schucman died, an actress reads excerpts from Schucman’s unpublished biography; Thetford himself speaks, explaining the genesis of the *Course*, as do Skutch Whitson and Wapnick. During this first session, Patrick thus emphasised to us the importance of the story of the *Course*; points were made in the video of Schucman’s unwillingness as scribe, her and Thetford’s ‘joining’, Wapnick’s role as teacher and interpreter of

the *Course*, and Skutch Whitson's near miraculous receiving of a gift to publish the first 5000 copies after Schucman, Thetford, Wapnick and Skutch Whitson had asked the Holy Spirit for guidance about publication. Schucman's ambivalence, Patrick emphasised, gives validity to the teaching of the *Course*: it is a text authored not by Schucman but by Jesus, and the story illustrates key themes of teaching: joining, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance, and realising that the person you find most difficult is the one who is going to teach you the most. After the showing of the video, Patrick emphasised that the *Course* is a unique path to God but that we should remember that all paths lead to God. One member of the group asked why one should struggle with such a difficult and rigorous path as the *Course* if all paths lead to the same destination. Patrick replied that the practice of *Course* spirituality can save one time in the journey back to God, "perhaps thousands of years". Implicit in his answer was the belief in reincarnation. No one in the group questioned this; it appeared to be a 'given' accepted by all.

During the last half of the second meeting the final part of the video was shown. This shows how *Course* spirituality developed after the publication of the *Course*. In it, Jampolsky tells how the *Course* helped him and how he used its teaching to help dying children and their families. Skutch Whitson talks about the ongoing translation programme of her foundation (FIP). There are several testimonies from people including psychologists as well as drug addicts and rehabilitated prisoners who had been helped by the *Course*. Thetford and Skutch Whitson are shown, in 1986, talking to Lillian Carpenter, the wife of the Dean of Westminster Abbey, who taught the *Course* to a class in the Abbey and who, with Thetford and Skutch Whitson, launched an edition of the *A Course in Miracles* for the UK. In the video Mrs. Carpenter agrees

with Thetford when he says that the *Course* has been sent “at this time” because of a “celestial speed up” which is needed by the whole world now because of the “exceptionally challenging times”.

Class Meditation

The second meeting of the class, on 28th January, began with a meditation led by Patrick.⁶⁵ He asked us to close our eyes, put both feet on the floor, sit in a comfortable position and breathe deeply. He asked us to relax each part of the body; he led us through relaxing “the top of the head, the face, shoulders, arms, hands, stomach, abdomen, legs, feet and toes”. He encouraged us to be aware of the tension flowing out of each part of our bodies. Patrick then guided us to a place of peace deep within ourselves where there is “a pool of quiet water”. He encouraged us to rest by the pool. After a few moments of visualisation, Patrick invited us to become aware of our bodies again and, when we were ready, “to return to the room” and open our eyes.

All subsequent meetings began with a meditation led by Patrick. Several members of the group commented on the helpfulness of these moments at the beginning of the class. Those who came from a busy, perhaps fraught, day at work found themselves alert and less tired after a meditation led by Patrick. There seemed to be a progression in the meditations over the following weeks. All meditations began with a conscious relaxation of all parts of the body and a “going within” ourselves. In the first meditation Patrick guided us to a place “of peace within our selves by a pool of quiet water”. The next meditation asked us to be aware of thoughts coming and going as we

⁶⁵ In my Interview with Patrick in 2005, in response to my question as to whether he had tried other spiritualities, he explained that he had done a course in Buddhist meditation techniques. However, he said he had not done this out of an interest in Buddhism but rather to learn meditation techniques to use privately as well as in classes and conferences (Interview, 25 August 2005).

went “within”. We were then guided to a place “deeper within” ourselves, to the pool of water which was described as a place of “perfect peace” before returning to the room. The fourth session was similar, but Patrick told us to be aware that the Holy Spirit was guiding us to this “perfect place” which was “home”. In the fifth session we were guided by Patrick to “a place behind the mind, the still silent place where we can see Jesus”. There was a “bright light around him which is the Holy Spirit”. Patrick asked us to think of a recent hurt or something that had made us angry, or “an unforgiveness” and encouraged us to give this to Jesus and “watch him take it in his hands and deal with it and heal it”.

After the meditation, group members were asked to share what they had “given to Jesus” in the meditation. Athena said she had given Jesus a dead plant in a pot (her frustration in her studies). In the hands of Jesus the plant became “revived and luminous”. She said she felt more positive about her studies as a result. Amy said she brought to Jesus her angry relationship with her sister, but was less sure anything had changed. Rose said she had given to Jesus an incident that happened the previous evening when she was shopping for groceries in a supermarket. Her trolley had bumped into a man in the check-out queue and she had knocked his French bread on to the floor. In spite of her apology, the man abused and cursed her obscenely out of all proportion for several minutes in front of the other shoppers. At first she tried to help him to calm down but he continued, referring to her blackness, her parentage and she felt too frightened to do anything. Still shaken by the incident, she asked Patrick what she should have done at the time. Patrick replied that the man was trying to “rid himself of his own guilt and belief in guilt by projecting it on to someone outside of himself”. Rose persisted, “But what specifically should I have done as he shouted at

me?” Patrick said she should have asked the Holy Spirit for help by saying a quick prayer. The fact of praying would take her out of the situation. She could pray, “Show me another way to see this situation”, or “Help me to love this man”, or “Tell me what to do and say”. Then Rose should have realised that his anger was a call for help. The *Course* teaches that all words and actions are either an act of love or a call for help. A group member suggested that Rose may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time: the attack may have had nothing to do with her. The man may have just learned that his small son has cancer, and he is projecting his grief and anger on to the first person he encounters. Patrick replied that this proves the *Course*'s teaching: the man's actions are a call for love; the *Course* teaches that all attacks are expressions that a person doesn't feel loved. “If your response comes from love, whatever you say will be right; if your response comes from the ego, whatever you say will be wrong”.

Amy did not agree with Patrick's application of the *Course* to the attack on Rose in the supermarket. She said, “As a psycho-therapist, I know there is a time and place for healthy self-assertion. In my career I have tried to teach women to become more self-assertive. Sometimes people need to be challenged about their behaviour for their own good and for the good of society. To treat every seeming attack as a call for love was not to take seriously the issues raised by the other person when there is a genuine disagreement”. Amy also cited the example of child abuse and felt it was simplistic and harmful to treat a child abuser as blameless and calling for love. Patrick replied that *Course* teaching on this issue concerns a personal hurtful attack, not areas of genuine disagreement. He pointed to the present “state of tit-for-tat and cycle of blame” existing between the Palestinians and Israel. “Blame and attack create more

blame and attack in a futile, never-ending cycle”, he said. As for the child molester, Patrick said that forgiving someone does not condone what he has done; its purpose is to release you from the path of holding judgements. Forgiveness changes your perception of the person “that he is bad”. Amy was not convinced and said that this teaching should not apply to every occasion. Patrick insisted that the choice to forgive someone else is the choice to forgive ourselves since what we see in him is what we can not face in ourselves: “all people and circumstances offer us the opportunity of seeing what is inside the projector of our own minds and offer the opportunity to make another choice”. Amy continued to disagree: she could not believe that to feel anger at a child molester implied that there was something of the child molester within herself.

On occasions such as this when a meditation session led to a longer than intended discussion, Patrick worked to keep the group focused on the *Course* material to be taught. His purpose was not to “defend the *Course*, or prove it”, he said, but to teach it.

In the meditation beginning the sixth meeting, Patrick asked us to “see Jesus standing in bright light next to a peaceful pond of water with trees and flowers overhanging the edges”. He invited us to tell Jesus about any problem that had come up during the week and to ask the Holy Spirit to deal with it. He told us to look into the eyes of Jesus and listen to what Jesus might say to us about the problem. When we were finished, we should “become aware” of our bodies and return to the room. Athena said she had been greatly helped as she told Jesus about problems with her mother, with whom she had had several angry telephone conversations during the week. No

matter how she tried, she could not satisfy her mother's expectations for her in any area. She said Jesus had told her to see her mother as holy and guiltless just as she is and she felt released from the anger of the past week. She believed her next conversation would be easier.

At the end of the seventh session meditation time, Patrick asked us to think of someone who causes us pain or irritation. Patrick asked us to write down the negative qualities we perceive in the person. Then we should write down the things in the relationship about which we feel guilty, e.g. negative thoughts we have had, things we have wanted to do to the person. Patrick then led us in a step-by-step meditation asking us to close our eyes and to see the person as holy, to take the anger we feel and make it like an object in the hand (like a ball of mud) and to give this to Jesus, standing by the quiet pool of water. We can know that Jesus will take care of it. Patrick reminded us that the way we look on other people is the way we look at ourselves. We can thank a difficult person for helping us to heal that part of ourselves which we might not otherwise have known was wrong and thus to heal our relationship with God. Patrick ended the meditation by telling us that the way of forgiveness is the way "home"; home is that place where we live in the reality that all of us are holy and innocent. He reminded us that Lesson 62 of the *Workbook* teaches that "forgiveness is a gift to yourself" (1996: 104). James asked about Osama bin Laden: how could God or we forgive him for what he did on 11 September 2001? Patrick replied that God knows the truth about him as well as about all of us, namely that none of us need forgiveness because nothing has happened. Patrick then asked the group to do "homework" on forgiveness in the coming week: each should select one person who causes problems and work on forgiveness of that person.

In the final meeting, Patrick substituted the time usually given to guided meditation to a report on our forgiveness homework. Amy felt the homework had been a failure. She had been unable to change her perception of her jealous sister. In contrast Athena felt her mother in Greece was changed when they spoke on the telephone. She had concentrated on seeing her mother as guiltless and though her mother couldn't have known about Athena's new perception of her, there was a different tone to their conversation. Athena felt it had been a miracle. Patrick himself shared that he had "bumped into an old girlfriend" and the old acrimony (feelings of anger and worthlessness) which he thought had been healed returned. He confessed to feeling discouraged and wondered if he was making any progress. However, he turned his negative experience into a learning lesson: we should believe we are making progress on the path "home" even when it doesn't appear so; there is something to be learned from the setbacks and they should be viewed as a gift. The group appreciated Patrick's transparency about his own difficulties in practising *Course* spirituality.

The content of the eight evenings, apart from the guided meditations and videos, followed Wapnick's booklet, *A Talk Given on 'A Course in Miracles': An Introduction* (1983). I have given an overview of Wapnick's interpretation of the Course in Chapter Six, so I will not give a detailed summary of the evening class teaching. In week two, we studied 'The Metaphysics of ACIM': God (level one, also called one-mindedness) as the only reality and the split mind that believes in separation and believes in the physical world (level two, also called wrong-mindedness). In week three, Patrick explained the 'ego thought system' which arose from the false belief in the possibility of separation from God; the dynamics of the

ego – the cycle of attack and defence – were described and we were urged to adopt an attitude of defencelessness. Week four dealt with ‘Relationships’: special relationships are the ego’s trick to make us believe that we can find what we lack in someone else; special relationships need to be changed into ‘holy relationships’ which are possible when we believe that we lack nothing, that we are one with God and with everyone else. In week five, Patrick explained that there is a stage in level two when the student emerges from ‘wrong-mindedness’ to ‘right-mindedness’ before attaining the ‘one-mindedness’ of level one. ‘Right-mindedness’ is achieved through the practice of ‘forgiveness’. Patrick (and Wapnick) define forgiveness as “the undoing of the projection of guilt on to others; by forgiving the guilt in the other person, I am forgiving it in myself. When we choose to look at the other person as the Holy Spirit would have us look – through Christ’s vision – we are able then to reverse our thinking about ourselves”.⁶⁶ Patrick suggested three steps to achieve forgiveness: 1) withdraw the projection of our guilt on to someone else; 2) look at the guilt we have and recognise we are Sons of God by a) acknowledging that we made up our guilt and God didn’t make us guilty, and b) letting it go; Patrick pointed to *Workbook* Lessons 170 and 196 as helpful at this stage; 3) experience that the Holy Spirit takes the guilt away – this is the ‘miracle’. Wapnick sees ‘forgiveness’, as explained above, as the *Course*’s central teaching and week six was given to the practice of forgiveness. Week seven dealt with ‘Miracles’. Patrick offered more definitions of miracles: a miracle is “a correction, the undoing of a false perception, a shift in perception. It has nothing to do with anything external. It is an inner shift from the ego to the Holy Spirit, a means of healing the mind. We don’t try to change another person, but we change how we look at the other person”. He quoted the *Course*: “The holiest of all

⁶⁶ Lecture, Ian Patrick. 18 February 2002.

the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (*Text*, 1996: 562).

Patrick closed this session with a brief explanation of sickness and prayer as the *Course* views them. He explained that the *Course* teaches that only the mind can be sick: the sickness of the mind is the projection that we can be separate from God, that we are in the body. In fact we live in a dream world, so everything is in the mind, even things like viruses. The body exists in the mind, viruses exist in the mind, genes exist only in the mind. We are the cause; the world, viruses, genes, etc are the effect. It is the right belief in the mind that causes healing; oils, reiki, medicine may be the mechanism of healing. Patrick quoted what Marianne Williamson had told him: “Jesus believed so totally in lepers’ wholeness that they believed it too and were healed”. Patrick explained that some don’t really want to be healed; there is always a pay-off to being ill. This is an area of struggle for Patrick as he is diabetic.

On prayer, Patrick said that the *Course* views prayer like a ladder with several rungs representing different levels. The lowest rung is praying for things, asking out of need, praying for specific situations. The second rung involves asking for things for others. The third rung involves praying for others, joining with them. The fourth rung, what is called ‘true prayer’ is praying with others only for what you truly share; it is praise, celebration.⁶⁷

The final session, in week eight, dealt with Jesus as the *Course* views him. Again, this follows Wapnick’s understanding of Jesus, that he was no different from anyone

⁶⁷ The teaching about prayer is drawn from a booklet by Helen Schucman, *Song of Prayer* (Foundation for Inner Peace: 1976).

else as part of God's 'sonship' except that his resurrection proved the unreality of death. For Wapnick (and Patrick) Jesus is useful in *Course* spirituality as a symbol, but as part of the dream: he is not real any more than our physical existence is real. Yet, Patrick taught, Jesus "is important". In this final session he was more polemical than he had been in previous sessions, contrasting the church's "incorrect" view of Jesus with that of the *Course*. The church has had a "distorted" view of Jesus down through the centuries, according to Patrick, and "through the *Course* Jesus tries to give the right view of himself and to correct the church's view of him as special or different from the rest of humankind". Patrick said, "The church portrays Jesus as a figure of guilt, judgement and suffering. In the *Course* Jesus shows that he is like our elder brother, not different from us, just further along the spiritual path so he can help us in our paths. The greatest help Jesus gives us is to show that suffering, even death on a cross couldn't touch his true self; it was meaningless".⁶⁸ Athena, who mixes esoteric beliefs and *Course* practice with loyalty to the Greek Orthodox Church, asked if he was consistent in criticising the church if "all paths lead to God". She wondered if this were not a form of "attack"? Patrick replied that all paths do lead to God and, therefore, theoretically, one can find God through Christianity, but he believes that the *Course* has been sent as a corrective to the distortions of the church. If one can find God through Christianity, one can also save thousands of years of spiritual growth by following the *Course*. Whilst acknowledging that some combine *Course* practice with Christian belief, he personally does not see them as compatible. In this too, he follows Wapnick's teaching.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Lecture, Ian Patrick, 11 March 2002.

⁶⁹ Patrick referred the class to the dialogue between Wapnick and a Roman Catholic priest, Father, Norris Clarke. See Wapnick and Clarke, 1995.

Patrick concluded the eight weeks of classes, paradoxically, by emphasising the importance of Jesus: “By proving that death is not real, Jesus proved that our suffering and death are not real. Jesus showed that the world of suffering, sin and death have no meaning for him” According to Patrick, “the whole basis of the *Course* rests on the understanding that the resurrection of Jesus actually occurred”. He quoted the *Course*: “Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you” (*Text*, 1996: 209), and explained that Jesus “took on the most compelling witness to the reality of this world – death – and showed that it had no hold over him”. During the course of the eight weeks of classes Patrick had frequently encouraged us by saying we did not have to believe the *Course* in order to practise it and derive help from it. Now however, he said, “It is not necessary to believe in Jesus as saviour or lord, but you cannot benefit from the *Course* unless you accept that the resurrection happened. At the core of the *Course* is the belief that death, suffering and separation are not real and the resurrection proved this”. The unreality of death is the goal toward which the *Course* student works; it is an essential part of the entire system.

As Patrick understands it, “Jesus in the *Course* is inviting us to awaken from the dream, the unreality of this world. Instead the church has invited Jesus into the dream: the church deifies Jesus’ body, thus perpetuating the belief that we have bodies. It emphasises Jesus’ bodily miracles; it insists that Jesus’ body died and was resurrected. The communion service of the church perpetuates body belief through eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus.” In conclusion Patrick said that we don’t have to “accept Jesus as our saviour” (we have nothing from which to be saved since we have never been separate from God); we do have to accept the resurrection

of Jesus which is the belief that death is an illusion.” When we forgive, we become “the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in this world just as Jesus was. Jesus reached the point of no longer having an ego, so the only voice available to him was that of the Holy Spirit.” Patrick taught that we can also be helped by following Jesus’ example: the meaning of his death forms a model which shows us that “when we are unfairly treated, we should recall Jesus’ example”. The world saw him as an innocent victim, but that was not his perception; he did not see himself as a victim. He knew that we can only be victimised by our thoughts. He showed that the peace and love of God (our true identity) can never be affected by anything in the world.

I have said that this final emphasis on Jesus seemed to me to be paradoxical because it formed a discontinuity with some of the teaching of the previous weeks. In almost every class we were reminded that Jesus was not special; he is the Son of God (or “part of the Sonship”) as much as any of us are. Second, another theme of the evenings was the importance of practising *Course* spirituality, whether or not it made sense or we believed it. The phrase, “You don’t have to believe it to practise it and derive benefit from it”, was a *leitmotif* of the evenings. In the final class Patrick taught that we had to believe in the reality of the resurrection; none of it would hang together without that belief. There seemed to be a contradiction in the belief in the ordinariness of Jesus and the teaching that his resurrection was unique. On the one hand, Jesus was only our “elder brother” a little further along the path than we are and eager to help us; on the other hand his “resurrection” is seen as pivotal to the edifice of *Course* spirituality; without Jesus’ resurrection the logic of the system breaks down, according to Patrick. Whilst a low christology is taught, in practice Jesus seemed to have an uniquely privileged position in the *Course* belief system.

Patrick can be seen as a Wapnick ‘disciple’ in the sense that his teaching closely follows that of Wapnick. However, when I spoke with him, he said he tries to adopt an even-handed approach in *Miracle Worker*: Robert Perry who (as noted in Chapter Six) is viewed by many in the *Course* community as offering the most important alternative *Course* interpretation to that of Wapnick, has probably had more articles published in *Miracle Worker* than Wapnick. Whilst Patrick openly supported Wapnick and Skutch Whitson in the copyright controversies, he reported the court proceedings with a neutral voice. He has opened *Miracle Worker* to all who wish to contribute articles, including Ted Poppe of Endeavor Academy.

A Course Weekend

The Miracle Network frequently advertises various types of *Course* weekends round the country sponsored by a variety of *Course* organisations. I chose to sample a weekend in a home in Kensington Gardens in the October of 2002 because it gave me an experience of another type of *Course* student, that of the more affluent. The location of the meeting – a private home in Kensington Park Gardens - and the price - £69 for two mornings and afternoons of meetings – suggested that the clientele might be more wealthy than those of the meetings I had attended up to that point. These meetings had drawn largely middle class professionals, notable for their ordinariness. Advertised in *Miracle Worker* as “*A Course in Miracles Revealed! A weekend intensive workshop with Ian Patrick*”, the teaching at the weekend was a summary of the eight weeks of lessons, but with an emphasis on “how to use relationships for healing and realising an authentic experience of your true self”.

I was correct in thinking the *Course* students at this weekend differed from those I had met at previous meetings in several respects. At the eight-week course, all participants (except me) lived locally and worked in a profession or in middle management in business. The thirty-six participants at Patrick's weekend came from as far away as Scotland. There was a soap opera star and a well-known comedy actor. Most of the others were independently wealthy and didn't work, or they owned their business. The exceptions were three psycho-therapists who provided continuity with previous *Course* meetings. The other difference between this group and larger gatherings I attended was that most of them were not *Course* students exclusively but mixed *Course* spirituality with other options. Participants brought their own sandwiches or went out to restaurants for lunch during the two days. The couple hosting the weekend in their home invited me to have lunch with them. They were Hungarian/Dutch, refugees from the holocaust and were about to put their home on the market as their children were grown. He had prospered in an import-export business and subsequently sold their home for £4.5 million. Over lunch the first day they explained to me that they opened their home to many groups following alternative spiritualities. On the table in their entrance hall were pamphlets advertising nearly a dozen groups. They personally did not feel drawn to the *Course* - both had problems with certain aspects of its teaching - but they were happy to give the use of their home for meetings such as this. He seemed specially eclectic in his knowledge of religion and had sympathy for Buddhism as well as the theology of dissident Catholic theologian Hans Kung. They proved to be typical of others on the weekend in their eclecticism. Group discussions as well as chats over coffee (or herb tea) revealed that most of the participants mixed *Course* spirituality with other spiritualities, Buddhism being the spirituality mentioned most frequently. However,

nine of the participants were *Course* devotees and several of these had studied the *Course* for more than five years. In this respect, Patrick's weekend could be viewed as a "missionary" as much as a teaching event. When I questioned Patrick about this later, he seemed happy with the composition of weekends such as this. "If every path leads to God, the path for some might be a combination of paths, or a combination may be a person's first step on the road to *Course* practice." In this I wondered if he differed from Wapnick (though not from Thetford) who views the *Course* as a unique path and urges potential *Course* students to consider whether or not the *Course* is the right path for them. Patrick followed Wapnick in his consistent form of determinism: everyone at a meeting had been guided to it and was there for a purpose.⁷⁰ This bedrock belief gives him a palpable serenity and seems central to his interpretation of the *Course*. As the interviews in the next section reveal, this belief in a person being "guided to the *Course*" in almost magical ways appears to be an important part of the developing religious discourse of *A Course in Miracles*.

Miracle Tenth Anniversary Event

The final conference included in this section is the conference on 30–31 October 2004, which marked the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Miracle Network. Advertised in *Miracle Worker* as their "10th Birthday Bash", it included "representatives of all the major ACIM-based organisations in the UK" who would "share from the heart how the *Course* has inspired their lives and work, and offer tools that will be effective for you, too". There was also music, entertainment and mini-workshops. The event was called 'Experiencing Miracles'. The venue was the Study Society, Colet House in London W14 and there were three tiers of payment. If

⁷⁰ Interview, Ian Patrick, 25 August 2005.

one booked before 1st September, the price was £100; before 29 October it was £130. If one paid at the door, it was £140. The price did not include lunch, but participants were urged to try a vegetarian lunch provided by the Hare Krishna Café nearby for £5 per head; some brought packed lunches. Teas, coffee and biscuits were provided for a donation. Everyone entering received a card with a *Course* quotation. Mine read, “The Holy Spirit will, of Himself, fill every mind that so makes room for Him” (*Text*, 1996: 278).

Besides Patrick, representing the Miracle Network, there were ten speakers from different *Course* organisations. Nick Williams, founder of Dreambuilders Community Programmes and author of *The Work We Were Born to Do* (1999), spoke on the twelve principles that inspire successful entrepreneurs.⁷¹ Lindsay Willcocks, director of “Attitudinal Healing” (Jampolsky’s organisation) in the UK, spoke about Jampolsky’s twelve principles which can give emotional support to those suffering catastrophic illnesses and the help which very ill people can give in return to their carers.⁷² Nick Davis represented the Centre for Inner Peace, which runs group meetings, seminars and workshops, one-to-one sessions, and meditations in Worcester.⁷³ Robert Perry’s “Circle of Atonement” was represented by Nicola Harvey, who emphasised the practical path laid out by the text of *A Course in Miracles*.⁷⁴ Caroline Cole represented “Clearmind International Institute”, founded by Duane O’Kane; in her interactive workshop Cole blended principles of psychology with *Course* teaching.⁷⁵ Robert Holden represented the “Happiness Project” which he

⁷¹ Dreambuilders’ website can be found at www.dreambuilderscommunity.com.

⁷² The Attitudinal Healing website for the UK is www.healingcenter.org. In the spring of 2006, if one typed ‘Attitudinal Healing’ into the Google search engine, one found 124,000 ‘hits’.

⁷³ The Centre for Inner Peace’s website is www.centreforinnerpeace.co.uk

⁷⁴ The Circle of Atonement website is www.circleofa.com

⁷⁵ Clearmind’s website is www.clearmind.com

founded in 1996; his organisation includes psychologists, life coaches, business leaders, spiritual ministers (trained at the Interfaith Seminary directed by his wife), doctors, actors musicians and poets. The “Happiness Project” became nationally known when it was featured in a BBC ‘QED’ documentary ‘How to be Happy’, seen by five million viewers.⁷⁶ Miranda Holden, wife of Robert, spoke on ‘loving the present’, accepting whatever happens in one’s life as the best circumstance for one’s spiritual growth. She founded Interfaith Seminary to train ministers, spiritual counsellors for people of all faiths.⁷⁷ “Psychology of Vision” (founded by Chuck Spezzano) was represented by Jeff Allen and Julie Wookey.⁷⁸ Lastly, Tom McCabe represented Colin Tipping’s “Radical Forgiveness” organisation.⁷⁹ McCabe spoke of achieving a state of forgiveness by releasing all old victim stories and self-destructive patterns that “block your joy”.

For purposes of comparison, I attended workshops at the conference run by Jeff Allen of “Psychology of Vision”, and Lindsay Willcocks of “Attitudinal Healing”. Their approaches are quite different and it struck me that they are related only through the *Course*. “Attitudinal Healing” involves passive listening; it provides a space for people to share and to be unconditionally accepted and loved in a non-judgemental way. “Psychology of Vision” seemed to be more directive: Willcocks led our group through a step-by-step process, relating psychological principles to one’s professional life. By contrast, the “Attitudinal Healing” workshop was built around a period of silence. We were divided into pairs and I found myself paired with the man sitting

⁷⁶ The Happiness Project’s website is www.happiness.co.uk

⁷⁷ The Interfaith Seminary website is www.interfaithseminary.org.uk

⁷⁸ Psychology of Vision’s website is www.psychologyofvision.co.uk. In the spring of 2006, if one typed ‘Psychology of Vision’ into the Google search engine, there were 15,900,000 ‘hits’.

⁷⁹ The Radical Forgiveness website is www.radicalforgiveness.com

next to me. As music played we were told to sit for ten minutes. Looking at one another, participants were meant to realise a sense of ‘oneness’ with the other person.

Comparing the sixth annual *Course* conference, my first Miracle Network event, with this celebration, I felt a different atmosphere: there was a pronounced feeling of confidence. At the risk of generalising, I think it is true to say that at the meeting four years previously, there had occasionally been the feeling of a beleaguered minority. The opposite was true of the ten-year anniversary event. In casual conversations I didn’t encounter anyone who was less than enthusiastic about the *Course’s* effect on their daily lives. There was also a feeling that they, together with other new spiritualities, represented the mainstream; the “paradigm shift” famously written about by Marilyn Ferguson had finally happened, even if the results were not yet evident in the world. This prompted me to add to the questionnaire in Appendix C a question about whether the respondent saw herself as ‘mainstream’. In every case this was affirmed, sometimes with a question about why such a question needed to be asked. Secondly, there was a sense of a group, or network, maturing. This was seen in the friendly banter between Nick Williams and Robert Holden; both pretended to do ‘put downs’ of one another and sometimes I realised that I was hearing ‘in jokes’ which the cognoscenti understood and found hilarious but which I didn’t always understand. Nick Williams now runs “Alternatives” at St. James’ Piccadilly, so has broader responsibilities in the overlapping network of new spiritualities that use St. James’ Church as a venue. Some of the jokes referred to his new “exalted status” and the hope that he would not compromise *Course* principles; perhaps an unspoken subtext of this banter was pride in the fact that a *Course* person now organised “Alternatives”. Patrick who had organised the event, spoke at the end about our

arrival “together” at the end of the journey home. Usually giving the impression of a public-school-educated, buttoned-up English man, he spoke with emotion; he and others were briefly tearful as the conference ended.

Miracle Cafe

This section on meetings attended as a participant observer would not be complete without mentioning the Miracle Café. This takes place in a vegetarian restaurant the last Thursday of every month. I have attended from time to time throughout my years researching *Course* spirituality because it offered me more opportunities than the more formal meetings to speak to *Course* students in a relaxed way. The venue is a first floor room in Neal’s Yard Salad Bar, London WC2, near Covent Garden tube station. The accent is on “fun and community with a higher purpose”. There is a vegetarian meal, meditation, music, socialising, networking and a different speaker each month. Nicola Harvey (Circle of Atonement), Miranda Holden (Interfaith Seminary), Anna Powell (The Journey Home), Julie Wookey (Psychology of Vision), Tom McCabe (Radical Forgiveness) are regular speakers along with occasional speakers from outside the *Course* community. William Bloom has spoken twice, as have members of the Findhorn community. The evening costs £15, starts at 7 p.m. and usually finishes between 9.30 and 10.00 p.m.

The Survey

As a preliminary ‘way in’ to letting *Course* devotees speak for themselves, and also to gain a ‘snapshot’ of *Course* students, I wrote a questionnaire for *Course* devotees in 2002. This was enclosed with all copies of the *Miracle Worker* magazine in its July/August 2002 edition. The questionnaire was also placed on a website

(www.bradby.org.uk) for those who wished to fill it in on line. The writing of the questionnaire was helped by the group of eight *Course* students with whom I did Ian Patrick's weekly 'Introduction to *A Course in Miracles*' class. I am grateful to Patrick and my fellow students in the course for allowing me to do a pilot questionnaire on them during the tea break in the penultimate session. As a relatively new student of the *Course*, I was concerned that the vocabulary used in the questionnaire might not be accessible to those steeped in the *Course* religious discourse. Would they understand what a question hoped to reveal about their spirituality? Was my vocabulary from such an etic perspective that it was meaningless to them? Part of the last half of this session was given over to discussing and filling in the questionnaire. Several explained their difficulties with some of the wording. I am grateful for their suggestions. Not all of them were incorporated, but I believe that this discussion helped me to construct a questionnaire that was comprehensible to *Course* students.

During the following three years, I used the questionnaire as a starting point with *Course* devotees who were willing to be interviewed by me before and after *Course* related meetings and conferences.⁸⁰ I am grateful to Ian Patrick, editor of *Miracle Worker* for placing the questionnaire in the magazine. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire. Appendix B gives the response in detail.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire had five distinct sections. Section A focused on the respondents, eliciting factual information (age, occupation etc.). Section B focused on the respondent's relationship to the *Course*. This section invited respondents to comment

⁸⁰ A subsequent questionnaire was used for those who agreed to talk to me in greater depth. See Appendix D for a template of this questionnaire. This was modified according to the circumstances of the person interviewed.

on their lives before they encountered the *Course*, and to share how the *Course* had changed their day to day lives. Section C was the longest section with 28 questions. This section probed the respondents' spiritual beliefs and practices. Section D, entitled 'Spirituality and Society', questioned respondents as to their views on society. Section E, the final section, asked two questions about *Miracle Worker* and its readership.

The Response

One thousand copies of *Miracle Worker* are printed, most of which are sent to subscribers of the magazine. A few dozen (Patrick, interview 25 August 2005) are kept for distribution at meetings and saved for the Miracle Network archives. Of the over nine hundred distributed, I received 144 completed questionnaires. Respondents were requested to "fold the form, place it in an envelope and post it to me" at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the (then) Chester College. I was pleased with the response and the care with which respondents answered the questions. Many added written comments supplementing the yes/no answers.

Commentary on the Responses

Section A - B revealed that there were twice as many female as male respondents. Most respondents were in the age category of 30-49 years old, or 50-65 years old. Most live alone. The list of occupations is striking in its variety. Forty-eight respondents were church members before they encountered the *Course* but only thirty-five maintained links with a church after they began to practise *Course* spirituality. Whilst I was surprised that less than half of the respondents had links with a church, it is also true that the overwhelming majority have had no contact with a

Christian group before or after contact with the *Course*. Slightly less than half the respondents saw themselves as 'spiritual' people before studying the *Course* and slightly over half saw themselves in this light after. Most were introduced to the *Course* through a friend. Books about the *Course* as well as the *Course* itself were the second most frequent mode of encountering the *Course*. It was a surprise to note that many students of the *Course* do not think of themselves as 'spiritual'. There was a strong indication that many were attracted to *A Course in Miracles*, not as traditional religious seekers, but out of a desire for personal growth and fulfilment (nearly half of the respondents). This desire for personal growth then grew into an experience described as spiritual growth. The second most powerful motive for involvement in *Course* spirituality was the desire for 'healing'. About a third of respondents wrote of receiving enjoyment and nearly as many mentioned receiving emotional support from *Course* spirituality.

B6 – B7 showed respondents giving the highest possible importance to spiritual growth in their lives. It is possible that those who didn't respond misunderstood the question. B8 revealed that more than half of the respondents had family members who showed no interest in the *Course*. The percentage of respondents who had family members with no interest in any sort of spirituality was about half that of those with no interest in *Course* spirituality.

The most helpful aspect of *Course* spirituality was clearly the daily lessons in the *Workbook*. Slightly less than half the respondents mentioned doing the daily lessons in the *Workbook* as the most practically helpful aspect of their spirituality. More specifically, the areas where *A Course in Miracles* has changed people's lives are:

spiritual growth (112), Forgiveness (106), Purpose in Life (84) and Help in Relationships (77).

Section C revealed a strong correlation between the number who had been brought up in a religious tradition (125) and those who found this religious tradition inadequate (111). These respondents felt that the *Course* had been helpful where the childhood religious tradition had been inadequate for their spiritual needs. Only one respondent argued forcefully (on a separate paper) that the *Course* had failed for him. He wrote that the *Course* “had not come up with the goods for him”. However, he had been helped through Eckhart Tolle’s writings which, as noted in Chapter Nine, are largely based on *Course* teaching. The respondent appeared not to realise the relationship between Tolle and the *Course*. This individual perhaps highlights several aspects of the relationship of spiritual self help literature and the *Course*: 1) self help books such as Tolle’s *The Power of Now*, make *Course* teaching accessible to individuals who do not find the *Course* ‘works’ for them, 2) those practising the spirituality purveyed in a spiritual self help book do not always understand the theoretical foundations of the spirituality they are practising, in this case the relationship between the *Course* and a self help book largely based on the *Course*’s teachings, 3) spiritual self help books make the radical teachings of a spirituality acceptable to a larger number of people than would be interested in the original teaching, 4) spiritual self help books have diffused the teaching of a relatively little-known spirituality to a mass audience.

C3 lists the religious traditions from which the respondents came. It is noteworthy that the largest number came from a Roman Catholic background (41) followed by Church

of England (31) and other Protestant churches (17). There were 25 who said they had been involved with a Christian church but did not specify a denomination.

C4 – C6 encouraged the respondents to ‘define’ their spiritualities. In spite of *Course* teaching that God is the only reality, only 115 believe that spirituality must include some idea of God. It is possible that this response was as low as it was because respondents connected the word with Christian or theistic understandings of the word ‘God’. Nearly all of the respondents, however, said that spirituality must include ‘love’. Where provided with a number of definitions of spirituality, most respondents chose the following: reconnecting with God (114), inner peace (105), overcoming ego (83) and forgiveness (82).

In C7, from the large range of options about what people believe about God, there was a remarkable correlation of responses: God is within us (108), God is a life force (81) and God is the sum of everything (130). In these responses, respondents showed themselves to be closer to other holistic spiritualities than to *Course* teaching about God.

C9 revealed that the vast majority of respondents believe in life after death, while exactly half believe that death is unreal. The latter response is surprisingly low, given the centrality of *Course* teaching on the unreality of death. However, a comparison of this response with the number of years respondents have studied the *Course* shows that those who expressed belief in the unreality of death had studied the *Course* for longer than 5 years. Far more (42) believe in heaven than believe in hell (7). Again, given the strength of *Course* teaching regarding the impossibility of any negative

reality, it is surprising to find any belief in 'hell'. C10 revealed a positive response to beliefs related to *Course* spirituality: in 'the power of prayer' (135), miracles (125) and healing (117)

In C11, testing beliefs not specifically related to *Course* spirituality but common in other many spiritualities, there was a positive response to belief in Chakras (113), energy channels (110) and ESP (93).

As noted in Chapter Five, the *Course* is believed to have been channelled by Jesus and contains much teaching quoting Jesus, correcting traditional Christian understandings of Jesus' teachings and offering its own understanding of Jesus. C12 allowed respondents to identify their beliefs about Jesus as *a* Son of God (91), *the* Son of God (38). There is affirmation for the views that Jesus is a teacher (102) and the most spiritually evolved man (78), as both divine and human (80), but only 56 see Jesus as an example. The latter is in line with *Course* teaching that Jesus is the same as any other human, except that he proved by his resurrection that death is unreal. One might expect to find a larger number of correspondents who see Jesus as an example, however the idea of being an example might imply 'specialness' for *Course* students.

C13 revealed a strong support for the belief in the Holy Spirit (130), another Christian term co-opted by the *Course*. Spirit guides (104) and angels (91) also feature in the in *Course* students' beliefs, and several respondents claimed to have seen angels. There is an exact correlation between those who believe in 'hell' (7) and those who believe in a 'Satan' (7). These respondents ticked all choices in this question so one is

tempted to believe that carelessness, rather than misunderstanding or a settled belief, was responsible for these two answers.

In the light of the response to question C10 (revealing a strong belief in prayer, miracles and healing), it is not surprising that C14 showed an overwhelming majority (118) had received help in answer to prayer. 108 had felt God's presence, while 110 had felt "great peace" or "inner bliss" (82). The proof of the spirituality of the *Course* is shown to be in the experience of the devotee. Indeed several respondents chided me for using the questionnaire to ask about *beliefs* instead of keeping a focus on *experience* as the only important aspect of spirituality. C15 revealed that 43 respondents have taken part in healing workshops; surprisingly, for devotees of a spirituality based on a channelled text, only seven have tried to channel spiritual wisdom themselves. Most of the respondents answering C16 buy books with spiritual content (111) or self help texts other than the *Course* (104). The popularity of several authors is of significance. Marianne Williamson was read the most widely (91), followed by Deepak Chopra (84), Jerry Jampolsky (82), Louise Hay (78), N.D. Walsch (68), Chuck Spezzano (59) and Scott Peck (57). Also written in were Ken Wapnick (8) and Eckhart Tolle (6). The survey went out before the publication of Gary Renard's book; it is likely that many, perhaps most, respondents would have referred to his *The Disappearance of the Universe*.

C18 asked about money spent on spiritual literature and tapes and videos. Thirty respondents said they had spent more than £100 in the last year on spiritual self help materials. All of the above authors have connections with the *Course*, with the exception of Deepak Chopra who teaches a spirituality based on Hinduism and

ayurvedic medicine. However, C19 revealed that a majority of respondents (105) believed the spirituality taught by these books was different from that of the *Course*, yet was compatible with it. There were 51 who thought the spiritualities taught in these books were the same as that of the *Course*. In C20, 95 respondents found that self help books were “life enhancing”, while 30 went further and said they were “life changing”. Surprisingly, since the *Course* contains no overt meditation teaching, nearly all respondents meditate (133). A significant number (43) report that they meditate daily.

C22 questioned the need to include a community aspect to one’s spirituality. Most respondents (114) feel it is important to be with those who share their spirituality although 28 do not regard this as a high priority, perhaps reflecting the importance of individualism and distrust of organised spirituality amongst respondents.

In response to C23, “Do you believe evil exists in the world?” a surprising 62 said yes; slightly more 69 said no. Some were unhappy with the question or disputed its validity. Their views were expounded in a number of interesting ways in C24.

C25 asked respondents what changes their spirituality had made to their lives. Nearly all (143) felt that their spirituality had brought positive changes to their lives and many added explanatory notes explaining how they had been helped by the study of the *Course*. Conversely, C26 asked if their spirituality had brought negative changes to their lives. There were a majority (110) who saw no negative changes through practising *Course* spirituality. However, it perhaps should not have been surprising that as many as 34 had experienced difficulties through *Course* practice. The *Course*

teaches that real struggle is involved in rejecting all barriers to “the awareness of love”. Those respondents who had studied the *Course* for more than five years had clearly come up against these barriers within themselves and wrote honestly about this.

Section D examined the respondents’ attitudes towards organised religion and to the wider society. There was a strong consensus that society is entering a more spiritual era (122) and that there has been an increased interest in spirituality in the years since the turn of the millennium (129). They believe people have less confidence in the church than they had twenty years ago (133). Responses to this question led me, as I used the questionnaire as a starting point for interviews with individuals at *Course* meetings and conferences, to ask whether respondents viewed themselves as being part of an “alternative milieu” or whether their spirituality placed them broadly in the “mainstream” of society. Overwhelmingly, the response was the respondents viewed themselves as part of the mainstream. There was not one person whom I interviewed who perceived themselves as being “alternative”. Some commented on the shift in medicine: what used to be called “alternative medicine” is now largely seen as “complementary medicine” and indeed is championed by a member of the Royal family (Prince Charles). Whilst they warmed toward sincere devotees of the traditional denominations, reminding me that *all* ways can lead to God, they felt that ‘church’ and organised religion had not, in the words of one respondent “delivered the goods”.

Conversely, D3 asked respondents about their attitude towards science: 79 believe there is less confidence in science and technology than was the case 20 years ago.

However, a substantial minority (50) disagree and feel that science and technology continue to have the confidence of people. This may reflect the belief in many new spiritualities that science, especially various branches of physics, can ‘prove’ and validate mystical experience. Paradoxically the desire for such proof (while alien to *Course* spirituality) appears to be an important need in new spiritualities and locates them within the values of modernity.

Given the *Course*’s emphasis on mind training and the unreality of the physical world, one might expect devotees to have little interest in issues of environmental responsibility or social justice. D5 showed that not to be the case: 92 respondents regard “being green” as a part of their spirituality while 65 see themselves as working for social justice; 89 mentioned a desire to make the world a better place. This does not contradict *Course* teaching as much as may be thought: although Wapnick stresses that the *Course* is a system of mind training which accepts that there is literally “no world”, even he admits that when the mind is changed there will follow changes in the environment around the devotee.

Question D7 revealed that respondents are optimistic about the future of humankind on this planet (114). Only 19 have a pessimistic outlook. Not surprisingly, D8 reveals that respondents are not greatly interested in conventional political affiliations. This may reflect their distrust of organisations and “top down” movements. The main interests listed, after *A Course in Miracles* are Friends of the Earth (32), Amnesty International (29), Christian Aid (17) and Green Party (4).

Question E1 revealed that the most frequently read magazines in addition to *Miracle Worker* are *Kindred Spirit* and *Cygnus Book Club Magazine*.

The results of the survey were interesting for the following reasons. First, the number of respondents was encouraging as they had to produce their own envelope and stamp to answer the survey. Second, their attitude was cooperative. Several wrote in additional comments and sent their names and address in case they could be of further help. Third, the strong response to the question about whether making the world a better place should be a part of one's spirituality, and on the importance of "being green", suggests that *Course* devotees are involved in causes outside themselves. Fourth, the large number of respondents who are involved in non-*Course* spiritual activities reflects the overlap which exists between adherents of various holistic spiritualities and lends support to my contention that *Course* spirituality fits appropriately in the holistic milieu. Fifth, there is a breadth of economic diversity amongst *Course* students: a significant number are on income support, a few earn more than £100,000 per year, but the largest number earn less than £15,000 per year.

This chapter has described a representative selection of *Course* meetings attended, and laid out the results of a survey of *Course* students. The following chapter will allow *Course* students and readers of *Course*-related self help literature tell their stories.

Chapter Eleven

Unstructured Interviews: 'Narratives of Experience'

During my research I was fortunate to encounter in *Course* circles, as well as in the wider community, people who were willing to speak of their personal spiritual life as it related to *A Course in Miracles* or to a self help book derived from the *Course*. After attending the eight week 'Fundamentals of the *Course*' I realised that I was 'spoilt for choice' as regards the number of people eager to speak of the impact of the *Course* on their lives. This became even more evident after Ian Patrick allowed me to publish the survey in the *Miracle Worker* magazine. I received many letters from people who had filled in the survey and sent their names and addresses, eager to help or to tell me more of their spiritual journeys. For that reason I limited the stories of *Course* students to those who had practised *Course* spirituality for more than ten years. I was fortunate to have access to leaders such as Patrick, Perry and Skutch (one of the original four), who were willing to talk at length about the *Course* and its spiritual impact on their lives. I was also able to talk to Marianne Williamson, Colin Tipping, Jon Mundy and other leading figures in the *Course* community when they came to the UK to lecture. I was impressed by their openness, un-self-consciousness and confidence in the *Course* as a spiritual path that works. Also impressive was their honesty about struggles with aspects of *Course* teaching, or setbacks in their spiritual lives as they tried to practise it. I am conscious that there is more research to be done. Areas which could be pursued are surveys and interviews with the many people who have known the *Course* for less than ten years and are eager to speak of their experience and with people for whom the *Course* failed. One, but only one respondent who answered the survey, wrote emphatically that "the *Course* did not come up with

the goods” for him. However, he explained that he had found a ‘better’ path using the books of Eckhart Tolle, perhaps not realising that Tolle’s writing (see Chapter Nine) quotes from the *Course* and in many respects derives its teaching from it. There is also more research to be done in the area of channelling. This study has focused on an influential ‘spontaneously’ channelled text. More research in channelling is needed through interviews with those using techniques to spark the process of ‘intentional’ channelling. I met many students of the *Course* who spoke of the value of their own channelling experiences and this is another area to be explored. This chapter tries to let those influenced by the *Course* and *Course*-related self help books speak for themselves.

Lily: *Conversations with God*

Lily is 31, doing an M.A. in anthropology in London at Goldsmiths College. I met her at the tenth anniversary celebration of the *Course* in the UK and we talked at length on three occasions. She was raised in an academic home, her mother being a university lecturer. Her undergraduate study had been cut short because of a heroin drug addiction, which lasted for ten years. In 2000, at the premature end of a stay in a rehabilitation clinic in the west country, she was given a copy of Neale Walsch’s *Conversations with God*, Book I. Through Walsch she came to hear of the *Course*. Having been raised in a home suspicious of religion, Lily felt, for the first time, that God was accessible to her. Speaking about it five years later, in the summer of 2005, she said, “There are things that immediately speak to me now of what made so much sense on the long train journey from rehab back to London in 2000; Walsch writes, ‘I want you to get into this dialogue as soon as you can, because what’s really important here is not *my* story but *yours*’” (1995: 2- italics in original). Feeling she had failed in the rehabilitation clinic, she found herself at an all time low.

“This opening statement gave me an in-road right away, and made me feel like I wasn’t just reading someone else’s clever world view according to their rational ability. I didn’t mind that it was in reality an extremely clever literary technique to invite me in. I was sure that every reader would fill in their own testimony in their own way and therefore my ‘unique experience’ was not being cheapened and manipulated as addicts’ stories so often are in Christian causes.” She continued, “In some Christian circles I’d noticed that the experiences of addicts and prisoners are appropriated as evidence for their form of religion without really giving these people a voice”.⁸¹

Lily was also drawn by Walsch’s emphasis on experience as the ultimate vehicle of religious truth: “On page 3, Walsch writes, ‘...I also use the vehicle of experience as a grand communicator’ and on page 5, ‘My most powerful messenger is experience’. This appealed to me together with his teaching that words are the last resort. The power of words misspoken and angry exchanges and ‘talking crap’, something that addicts do to themselves and others, was not set in stone.” Lily continued, “It somehow seemed unsurprising that someone as lost as me had never been able to hear the words of God in a dialogue clearly before. I felt forgiven and like it was no big deal that I had never ‘heard’ these words before. In fact I felt I had heard glimmers of them before but always in a time of crazy calamity or in mid-withdrawal.” Lily realised that on this occasion, when she was six weeks completely free of drugs, “that my experience viewed with ‘clean eyes’ was as good a frame of reference as any for a dialogue with God, no better and no worse. His words, ‘Words may help you to understand something. Experience allows you to know’ (1995: 4) summed up my

⁸¹ Interview, 13 March 2005.

feelings that not only could I understand as well as anyone the content of the ideas in the book, but I might be better placed than some to understand.”⁸²

Lily was attracted by the simplicity of Walsch’s prose, which she called “almost childlike in its assumptions”, for example “The highest thought is always the thought which contains joy. The clearest words are those which contain truth” [1995:5]. “This simplicity, coupled with God’s statement ‘I will never coerce you, for I gave you a free will...’ [ibid.: 5], seemed to justify my experience and affirm me in choosing a spiritual path in spite of everything that had happened. I had always feared the pity and shame that my experience would generate in a spiritual arena from experience of my father’s brand of religion which gave no room for choice or plurality in spiritual journeys. Lily’s father, separated from her mother, practised a form of fundamentalist Christianity. This voice said ‘You’re not wrong or bad for having rejected these simple truths before and even now you don’t *have to* adhere to them forever, it’s just great that you now know you have the potential to hear them.’”⁸³

Lily related that “one of the last things my counsellor at the rehab clinic told me as I stormed out was, ‘You don’t have to do anything’. He could see that the 12 Step drill wasn’t working for me and he gave me a copy of *Conversations with God*. I knew he wasn’t supposed to offer counsel outside of the 12 Step approach. Perhaps in the way this happened I was led to a feeling of secrecy and being particularly privileged to have access to the ideas of *Conversations with God*. This feeling of being ‘led’ to the book in an extraordinary way comes back to me today as I reread it.”⁸⁴ I shall comment in the conclusion on the frequency with which respondents spoke of “being

⁸² Interview, 31 October 2004..

⁸³ Interview, 5 March 2005.

⁸⁴ Interview, 31 October 2004.

led” or “guided” to the *Course* or to a self-help book. Lily clearly felt that having been given an “illicit” book as she prematurely left a drug rehabilitation clinic added to the authority which the book had for her.

Lily felt that several passages in *Conversations with God* spoke directly to her as an addict. Quoting again from Walsch’s first chapter, “It is not God’s function to create or uncreate the circumstances of your life” [1995: 13], she said, “This made so much sense. It took the whole idea of being saved from myself out of the equation (a dangerous idea for an addict, as the only one who can save an addict is the addict herself) and made me feel safe and challenged again without feeling judged. She liked the phrase, “You have created the devil” [1995: 14] because “it also fit perfectly with the wild imaginings of an addict, where the drug is the devil. There is no devil and no drug rules one of God’s creatures”. Lily felt the book had helped her with her self-esteem problems: “I am a fearful person by nature and so the discussion of fear (1995: 19) caught my attention. ‘Fear wraps our bodies in clothing, love allows us to stand naked.’ This was such a daring and brilliant simplification that had echoes of Adam and Eve, of whom I know little, except for the fact that the God they had was cruel and not one I’d ever want to be with.” I was interested to see that the *Course*’s most basic teaching – that of choosing ‘love’ instead of ‘fear’ - as interpreted by Walsch – had been so significant for Lily.⁸⁵

Finally, Lily felt that the book had helped to keep her “on course” following occasions when she relapsed into drug use. She referred to the following passage:

⁸⁵ Interview, 13 March 2005.

There is only one purpose for all of life, and that is for you and all that lives to experience fullest glory....The wonder of this purpose is that it is never-ending. An ending is a limitation, and God's purpose is without such a boundary. Should there come a moment in which you experience yourself in your fullest glory, you will in that instant imagine an ever greater glory to fulfil. The more you are, the more you can become, and the more you can become, the more you can yet be (1995: 20).

I noted that Walsch's version of point five of my definition of holistic spiritualities - the belief in limitless, positive personal development - had been specially helpful to Lily. She explained that

this passage spoke to me of how relapse into addiction does not seal the addict's fate. This was so much more plausible as an approach than others I'd encountered in the 12 Step ideology". I would say that this is the thing that has stayed with me in my attendance at the harm reduction centre and that has helped me to stay clean. On the few occasions when I relapsed I didn't feel a spell had been cast on me as I had before when I went back to drugs. I felt I was becoming a creative person rather than one of life's losers".⁸⁶

It seems clear that Lily believed she had been helped in a transforming way by Walsch's book. I noticed that her copy of CWG was worn and there were many underlinings and markings in the margins of the first half. She confessed that she had never finished reading it, but went back and read the helpful bits for several months. When I spoke to her toward the end of 2005, she said that CWG does not figure largely in her life any more, but she would "always want it on my bookshelf". If she had never finished reading it she felt this was because "it's just one of those books that I will never be finished with". Spirituality does not figure very much in her life now and she admitted that she might not be in "great spiritual shape". However, she was happily drug-free and the turbulence of the addiction years seemed to be in the past. She was in a happy relationship with a civil servant and was embarked on an academic career as an anthropologist. For Lily, Walsch's book did not lead on to a practice of *Course* spirituality. She could "never accept" the application of *Course*

⁸⁶ Interview, 13 March 2005.

teaching to the trauma of child abuse and was critical of a speaker at the tenth anniversary conference who taught that the abuser and the abused are equally holy (or equally needy) in God's eyes. She felt this teaching could be deeply damaging to someone who had suffered abuse as a child and she dismissed *Course* spirituality as dangerous. However, several years on, Lily remained loyal to CWG and the help she had derived from it:

A good summary of what appealed to me in the *Conversations with God* book was the fact that I was able to clearly identify so many thoughts that were familiar to me from completely different contexts, like Kurt Vonegut's *Cat's Cradle*, Khalil Gibran, AA and the rationality of my family, not forgetting its antithesis. I guess the appropriate term is 'dialogical'. The text is undoubtedly dialogical, and the writer is so clever as he doesn't try to take all the credit for these ideas. Nor does he pay into the whole business of copyrighting of ideas (paying homage to other individuals working from within our tightly controlled 'economy' of ideas). The most ingenious ideas are credited to the God each reader constructs. This is very clever. As these thoughts are somewhat decontextualised, they no longer appear to be in competition, and yet they do not escape their original contexts completely. Otherwise I wouldn't have recognised them from my own life's encounters through reading and experience".⁸⁷

Is Walsch's writing as 'clever' as Lily perceived it to be? Part of his genius may be that he leaves spaces in the dialogue which act as mirrors of the reader's own experience, giving the reader an illusion of authentic participation through identification with what the reader perceives to be there. Having grown up in the midst of academia, Lily, in her final interview, viewed the 'God' referred to by Walsch as the God "each reader constructs", using the language of structuralism. This understanding of Walsch's spirituality may not be what he intended. Therein, perhaps, may lie the secret of his popular appeal. Although she eschews *Course* spirituality, her narrative offers an example of the *Course* fall/redemption story, with her "low point" being reached when she prematurely "stormed out" of her rehabilitation centre

⁸⁷ Interview, 28 October 2005.

at which point she was “guided” in unusual circumstances to the book CWG; this proved to be the point where she changed her mind about herself and was led by Walsch to see herself, not as a hopeless drug addict but as one of God’s treasured creatures.

James: *The Road Less Travelled*

When I was carrying out research into *Course* spirituality and popular spiritual self help books, James gave me Scott Peck’s *The Road Less Travelled*. He felt it was important that the book should figure in my research as it had “changed his life”. This surprised me as James is a barrister, a Reader in his parish Anglican Church and a pillar of his community. He did not seem to be the sort to buy popular spiritual self help books, so I was pleased when he agreed to be interviewed. James grew up in a church-going family and attended a prep school and a public school with Christian foundations. Until the lower sixth form he was a “committed Christian”.

In my final year I became rather disillusioned with it all for reasons I cannot now remember. Instead of coming clean, I carried on as before: a member of the Chapel committee, helping to organise services, regular attendance at the post-chapel Christian group on Sunday mornings. Taking this easier option meant that by the time I left I was very disillusioned indeed and took the opportunity to break with Christianity when I left. That position continued through University, pupillage, marriage and children. My problems were mainly physical, but they caused a crisis of confidence when I began to work as a barrister. I was born with mild cerebral palsy, probably the result of a difficult birth. I was left with slight left sided hemiplegia which showed itself as extreme righthandedness and a slightly shorter left leg. They tried to fix the leg surgically but were only partly successful and I was left with a slight limp. I also found that I tended to tense up physically when under stress. I bought TRLT at this time. It was recommended by a man in the firm and the book struck a real chord. I recall his explaining that one of the great truths is that “life is hard” and that delaying gratification is a sign of maturity. It was as if he expressed many ideas which I recognised as true as soon as I read them but which I’d not thought of for myself. Having them made explicit was a real help. By facing the fact that life is difficult – Peck urges us to look the worst scenario in the face – I gradually became less tense. My limp often disappeared and I was less tense when stressed by maintaining a certain attitude. When I read the book I assumed that Peck was a Christian who had decided not to declare himself in case it skewed the viewpoint of his readers. I started going to Evensong at the parish

church. I was not conscious of returning to Christianity. Looking back, it may have been an excuse to get an hour's peace and quiet. I was grateful that the vicar didn't 'welcome' me but recognised that I needed to be left alone. Over a period of a year, the grounding I had had at school came flooding back and I came home to Christianity.⁸⁸

James' narrative seems very different from that of Lily. It is also unusual in the context of this study in that, to date, his spiritual journey has positioned him as a committed member of a traditional, liberal, Anglo Catholic parish church where, as a Reader, he preaches once every couple of months. He was able to derive help from Peck's book without acknowledging (or being aware of) the 'Eastern wisdom' found in TRLT; he avoided Peck's preoccupation with evil. Hearing James' story, however, I wondered if, perhaps, a process similar to Lily's had taken place. Coming from a Christian background, James assumed that Peck was writing as a Christian (though Peck was a Buddhist when he wrote TRLT), and, whilst he is not certain that his move back to a traditional form of Christianity was specifically prompted by his reading of Peck's book, it seemed that Peck had been an important part of the process. Nearly twenty years on, he continues to recommend Peck's books to friends. He has never heard of *A Course in Miracles* nor is he particularly aware of alternative spiritualities. In James' understated rhetoric there is no feeling of reaching a desperate low point, nor a distinct belief that he was "guided" in an unusual way to read Peck's book. However, the enthusiasm with which he recommends Peck's books perhaps reveals a closer identity with this paradigm than appears to be the case.

Vera: *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*

Like James, Vera has had no contact with alternative spiritualities. She was linked to a fundamentalist Christian group, believes her life was transformed through reading

⁸⁸ Interview, 14 May 2005.

Jeffers' FFDIA and continues to be active in an evangelical Christian church. In the early 1990s Vera was a busy mother of five lively sons all below the age of eleven. She and her husband were active members of an independent fundamentalist church not linked to a denomination. Her husband was often away on evangelistic trips leaving her to cope with the five boys. At times she felt desperate from exhaustion, but was helped by friendship with other mothers in her church. She tried to adopt a generous attitude about her husband's frequent absences: she believed she was "helping the cause" by keeping the house well run and caring for the boys in his absence. Therefore, she tried to be uncomplaining about his many absences.

When all but one of the boys were teenagers, Vera's husband suddenly abandoned his faith, his marriage and his family to live with a younger woman whom he had counselled on a church trip. Vera described how her universe and identity seemed to vanish: "The boys had already reached a phase where things were going to be difficult even if he had been home with us. Two of them blamed me for his leaving; the other three were too hurt and angry to speak of it, but I was frequently called to speak to school authorities about their poor behaviour. Not only had I lost my husband whom I'd supported sacrificially, I had lost my sons as well." Perhaps as difficult was the attitude of many in the church. "In our church, divorce was not considered an option. The church was rather male dominated, so I believed that I was perceived to be the one at fault although I was the one who had been faithful in the marriage. Many seemed to avoid talking to me at church." Her low self-esteem meant that she believed that on some level she must be at fault. When she felt she could not go on any longer, a Christian friend from an evangelical Anglican church invited her out for

lunch and gave her Jeffers' book, "urging me to read it and saying how much the book had helped her". Vera read the first chapters that afternoon.

For the first time I was able to look at my life clearly instead of looking at myself wondering if I was a good enough Christian. Jeffers says that emotional dependency of any type is unhealthy but we buy into it because we believe there will be "pay-offs" for us. There was a chapter on 'taking responsibility'. I'd always thought I did this, but realised I hadn't when I read the chapter. She says that "taking responsibility means being aware of payoffs that keep you stuck" The moment I read that I understood the dynamics of my unhealthy marriage. Jeffers also warns us not to blame others and not to blame ourselves. She showed me that only I can create the sort of life that is right for me. I can't expect a husband to do that, or children or Christian friends. As a Christian, I realised that I had to find out what God expected of me and not worry about anyone else. In Chapter Eight there was a story about a lady whose life had revolved around her husband until he left her. This woman's husband had been the basis of her identity just as mine had. Jeffers explained that "Dependency in a relationship creates unattractive side effects – anger, jealousy, resentment, clinging, nagging." I realised this was the basis of my low self-esteem. I had feared losing what was the basis of my identity, my life. In the same chapter there was a story of a woman who had made her children "the totality of her life", like I had done. I felt the book had been written specifically for me. Jeffers leads the readers through exercises which helped me deal with anger. She recommended Louise Hay's, *You Can Heal Your Life*. I bought this book and found more exercises that helped me to release my anger, pain and resentment. I'd thought that I would never truly love or trust anyone, but Jeffers showed me the basis of true love and trust which I think is self-esteem. I needed to work to support the boys and this became a positive experience. I interviewed for a job in HR with a firm and after two years I became head of the department. I had stopped going to church, hurt by the reactions of former friends. Now I had the courage to go back. I found that the new self-respect and wholeness which I had forced them to react to me positively. I have now moved on to an evangelical church that is less male dominated.⁸⁹

Vera remembers the lunch invitation from her friend and the introduction to Jeffers' FFDIA. "I had told her I couldn't make it that day, I was too low to talk to anyone. This lady was a Christian and I wasn't sure what her agenda would be." Did Vera change her religious beliefs because of Jeffers' teaching about the 'higher self' and 'universal energy'? "I realised that Jeffers was not a Christian in any sense, but much of what she said affirmed my Christian beliefs. She gave me a bigger sense of God's love. She writes about the 'Chatterbox' putting negative thoughts in our heads; I

⁸⁹ Interview, 14 August 2004.

believe the devil does this to us, so she uses different names for the same things.” Vera’s relationship with her church has been strengthened by her new self-confidence. She occupies positions of leadership that might not have been offered to her before.⁹⁰

Vera’s narrative is interesting for several reasons. First it shows that spiritual self help literature is used and recommended outside the circles of alternative spiritualities. An evangelical Christian, believing herself to have been helped by FFDIA, gives it to an evangelical Christian friend going through a painful divorce. Both continue to practise their evangelical form of Christianity whilst using the techniques offered by Jeffers and, in the case of Vera, also offered by Hay. Both perceive themselves to have been helped profoundly; neither changed their core Christian beliefs. Whether either was aware of the monistic teaching in the final chapters of FFDIA is not clear. Both believed the book’s teachings helped them to be more effective as Christians. Second, as with Lily and James, the spiritual self-help books appear to resonate with the beliefs and spiritual backgrounds of the respondents in such a way that they are encouraged in the spiritual paths (or lack of spiritual path, in the case of Lily) upon which they have embarked. Third, Vera’s narrative demonstrates the importance of the stories embedded in the self help literature; the reader instantly identifies with some of the stories, thinking, “That is just like me,” and is then prepared to hear the more didactic passages in the books. Fourth, use of spiritual self help literature based on a new spirituality (that of *A Course in Miracles*) by traditional Christians is evidence of the broad appeal and acceptance of the techniques if not the metaphysical system of the new spiritualities. This may buttress the self perception shared by many

⁹⁰ Interview, 14 August 2004.

in the *Course* community that they are not an alternative spirituality but are part of a network of spiritualities that occupy space in the mainstream of cultural discourse.

Harry: *A Course in Miracles*

Harry, an educational psychologist, was first introduced to *A Course in Miracles* 17 years ago by Robert, a friend in his Masonic Lodge who frequently referred to various spiritualities in casual conversation.

This friend was someone I'd wanted to know better but couldn't seem to make contact with him or to understand his way of thought although I felt instinctively drawn to it. Towards the end of June 1989 I spoke about this with another friend in the lodge, asking if he understood Robert's references to spirituality, and saying I found it too abstract. He replied, "Yes, I do; it is abstract but you of all people – a psychologist – should be well placed to understand these thoughts and principles. Spirituality is simply the application of psychological theory in practice". He suggested that I talk with Robert to learn more. The following week my wife and I left for a caravan holiday in France with our two sons. A week later, at the camping site in Jura, I took a walk and, in the woods nearby, who did I see to my amazement but Robert walking with his wife and three daughters. I called to him, "How is this possible? I didn't know you were coming here." At that time I'd not had much experience with chance encounters and miracles. For years my wife and I had gone on yearly climbing holidays in Austria. Our marriage ran into difficulties and after a year's separation we decided to try again and had come (for the first time) on a camping holiday in France. France is a country with thousands of camping sites so I was overwhelmed at the coincidence of meeting the very person I wanted to talk to here. Later Robert told me that just before leaving on holiday he had drawn the I Ching and had received the message, "The discussion will carry on where ever you go". Because of this he was not surprised to meet me and we had many helpful discussion during the holiday.⁹¹

Harry's friendship with Robert continued after the holiday and Harry came to believe that his life was "running parallel" to that of Robert. Robert separated from his wife and Harry did the same. When he next met Robert it was in a restaurant to discuss "the problems of divorce: custody, child access and alimony". Harry was paying for the meal and was dismayed that Robert chose an expensive restaurant and ordered a fine wine along with one of the most expensive puddings after the meal. At the start

⁹¹ Interview, 8 June 2005.

of the meal, Robert announced that they would speak only about spiritual themes. Harry remembered, “Although I had set up the meeting to get advice about my divorce, I was also very frightened of the future having failed in my marriage and I was happy to talk about spirituality”. A week later Robert invited Harry to his bachelor flat where they ate a meal consisting largely of Brussels sprouts. In the future, one of his sons always referred to Robert as ‘Sprouts’. Robert says, “Only recently I realised that, thanks to Robert, my mustard seed of faith changed into sprouts and in the autumn of 2002 into a full-grown plant. I believe that this triangle of mustard seed, sprouts and plant is a model which the *Course* uses again and again.”⁹²

By their next meeting, Robert had found *A Course in Miracles* and he urged Harry to study the *Course*. Encouraged by Robert, Harry bought “a pile of books” on esoteric subjects. He began to read one book which attracted him as a Freemason because of its title, *From Darkness to Light*, also by Jampolsky. In Jampolsky’s book he found quotations from *A Course in Miracles*. The moment he read the first quotation from the *Course*, Harry says that he “realised something important was taking place”. Again, from two sources (Robert and Jampolsky’s book), “I had been given the same directions which would appear to be important signposts in showing me the way on my spiritual journey. Harry was too busy to order a copy of the *Course* until months later. When he telephoned his local bookshop to order the *Course*, thinking he would have to wait a week or two for it, the voice on the line said, “That book sounds familiar; we sell about three copies per year. Let me look. Oh! That is a coincidence: a book with that title has just arrived in the post. It was meant for internal use, but if

⁹² Interview, 8 June 2005.

you really want it you can have it". In Harry's words, "Half an hour later I had the *Course* in my hands and knew that I had found my spiritual path. I rang Robert to tell him that I had my own copy of the *Course*. Robert replied, 'The book was ready and waiting for you'". Harry believes that the *Course* found him at the right moment, as he was in transition, setting up a new bachelor life. Looking back on his spiritual journey, he quoted the *Course*, "...meetings are not accidental" (*Manual for Teachers*, 1996: 8), and "The pupil comes at the right time to the right place. This is inevitable, because he made the right choice in the ancient instant which he now relives" (*Manual for Teachers*, 1996: 5).

In 2002 Harry took early retirement and teaches several *Course* study groups. When I asked about his daily spiritual practice, he replied that he still does a *Workbook* lesson each day, refrains from reading newspapers or anything that is not *Course*-related and during moments of decision sometimes finds it helpful to open the *Course* at random. Invariably, his eye finds a passage which guides him regarding the decision or problem. He hopes to write a spiritual self help book based on *Course* spirituality. He believes his story of finding the *Course* through "triangles of coincidence" together with his personal study of the *Course* may help potential *Course* students to recognise the "triangles" in their lives which are "signposts" pointing them "home" to the *Course*. When I asked first Harry how he had found the *Course*, he replied that he hadn't "found the *Course* but that the *Course* had found him"⁹³ This theme was repeated to me in the narratives of many *Course* students.

⁹³ Interview, 8 June 2005.

Harry's story shows how *Course* students place supreme faith in "guidance" in their lives. The deterministic nature of *Course* spirituality is shown in Harry's belief that his "choice" to buy the *Course*, and his attraction to Robert, were predetermined outside the "illusion" of time. As will be seen in the following two stories, as well as in the stories of famous *Course* personalities already noted (Marianne Williamson, Kenneth Wapnick and Judith Skutch Whitson), a low point is followed by the instant "recognition" that the *Course* is their life path. The similarity of this part of their narratives shows that this belief forms an important part of the development of the religious discourse of the *Course*.

Robert Perry: *A Course in Miracles* (Circle of Atonement)

If Harry believes that "the *Course* found me", Robert Perry says that "the *Course* chose me".⁹⁴ Perry, as noted in Chapter Six, is one of the most prolific *Course* authors and the founder of the *Course* organisation, Circle of Atonement. He commands great respect within the international *Course* community and frequently speaks at *Course* conferences organised by the Miracle Network as well as meetings of his own organisation. When I asked him what he meant by the *Course* "choosing" him, Robert replied,

When I say that the *Course* chose me, what I mean is that I had other plans for my path and my life, which didn't seem to matter once the *Course* came in and started pushing further and further into my life. I was passionately eclectic and had no intention of focusing myself on a single path, especially one that had so many strange and unfamiliar teachings. I remember reading Judy Skutch say in an interview, after I had been into the *Course* for a number of months, that the *Course* is not for everyone, and I remember my exact thought: "Well Thank God because I know it's not for *me*." In terms of my vocational life, I had a different career in mind. I was going to be a professional philosopher. But the *Course* entered my life and just pushed its way in. It took over my spiritual life, to where, after several years, I became eclectic only in name. In actuality, all I was doing was the *Course*. Perhaps more significantly it surrounded me on the outside. My best friend, whom

⁹⁴ Interview, 11 May 2004.

I had known since school, started working for a *Course* organisation. Then my wife started working there and they asked me to do projects for them, then teach, then write. Then I started to get invitations to speak elsewhere. After a number of years, despite my staunch resistance, the *Course* had invaded my life on both the inside and the outside, to where it had become my life.⁹⁵

Like Harry, Perry believes that his story illustrates *Course* teaching and he points to Part I of the *Workbook*, Lesson 35: “What would you not accept, if you but knew that everything that happens, all events, past, present and to come, are gently planned by One Whose only purpose is your good? ...your defences did not let you see His loving blessing shine in every step you ever took” (*Workbook*,1996: 255). Perry believes he has had many experiences that reveal the “workings of a higher plan and these experiences have taught me a great deal about how the plan actually works”⁹⁶

I asked Perry how the *Course* dealt with proof of God’s existence; it seemed to me that the *Course* assumed this belief and this struck me as surprising, given Schucman’s atheism. Perry replied with another story from his life:

In my teens and early twenties I knew where my life was going. I was heading for a career in philosophy. In my mid-teens I had begun asking questions about life and trying to figure out the answers. I wrote my insights down and, after a few years, the beginnings of a philosophical system began to emerge. It addressed traditional philosophical questions and many psychological questions. I loved this sort of thing. I had a passion for truth and felt completely at home creating a system of ideas aimed at finding it. My system attempted to explain the nature of consciousness, including the workings of thought, will, emotion and memory, from a novel vantage point (one that I still think has great promise). It contained a proof of God’s existence which was not a variation on the traditional proofs. I was pleased when Huston Smith, a great scholar of world religions, said he thought the proof worked and recommended a firm that might publish it (though he admitted to not being excited about such proofs). On my twenty-first birthday something pivotal occurred. I had gone to a local park to think. There, my thoughts turned to my magnum opus, which I planned to write in about ten years, when my system was more developed. This would be a huge book – at least 1000 pages – in which I would present my system to the world. Whilst at the park an unusual and significant thing happened: it felt as if a title for my magnum opus was just dropped into my mind. You may have experienced something similar, where an

⁹⁵ Letter, 26 July 2005.

⁹⁶ Interview, 11 May 2004.

idea pops into your head fully formed, feeling as if it has just been downloaded from somewhere else, rather than conceived by you. The title was *Behold the Man*. This comes from the scene in the Gospel of John where Pilate is presenting Jesus to the crowd. He brings out Jesus, who has just been beaten scourged and crowned with thorns, and says to the mob, “Behold the man”.⁹⁷

Perry believed this was a perfect title for two reasons: his system claimed to reveal human nature (therefore, “behold the nature of man”), and his system claimed that human frailty, the fundamental nature of humans is “spiritual or divine”. Perry felt these two truths were perfectly captured by this scene in Jesus’ life: “Here he was a divine being yet he looked all too human – broken, bloody, on the verge of death. My title seemed to say, ‘Behold the nature of man; though he looks all too human, he is really divine.’ This title was so sacred to me that for several years I refused to tell it to more than one other person.”⁹⁸

Perry continued his story:

It was my twenty-first birthday and when I got back from the park I met friends who took me out to dinner. When we got back I received my birthday present. My friends had chipped in to buy me a book I had read about a couple of months before but didn’t care to buy: *A Course in Miracles*. As we sat there with me holding the blue books (they were three separate volumes back then), it felt like an important moment, and as it turned out, it was the moment that changed my whole life. That night I realised that something strange had happened that day. On the same day I had received the perfect title for my book, I had also been given *A Course in Miracles*. I had been given someone else’s 1000-plus page magnum opus, which presented an intellectual system that, like mine, was philosophical, psychological and ultimately, spiritual. This system claimed, like mine, to reveal how our minds and emotions work and to reveal what we fundamentally are. Like mine, it presented Jesus as a symbol for the rest of us, human in appearance but divine in truth, whose brutal end was a poignant symbol of the human condition. Finally, its title, just like my title, subtly likened us to Jesus. The title of *A Course in Miracles* claims that it will teach us to do what Jesus did: that is, work miracles.⁹⁹

Perry was amazed at the parallels of the *Course* with his own idea for a book and felt this could not be chance: “It was as if someone had given me the book I planned to

⁹⁷ Letter, 26 July 2005.

⁹⁸ Letter, 26 July 2005.

⁹⁹ Letter, 26 July 2005.

write. I intuitively felt that this simply had to mean something, and concluded that there must be something important about the *Course* for me.” Perry realised that:

My book was already written by *Jesus*. My book merely held Jesus up as the symbol for our true nature; this book was supposedly *written* by him. If this was true (and I eventually came to believe it was) it changed everything. Why would the student think of writing the book which the master had already written? At that point what could the student do but devote himself to the master’s book? However, I would not even consider this possibility. No power on earth could have caused me to consider that possibility.¹⁰⁰

As Perry related when I spoke to him in May 2004, he gradually got drawn in to *Course* related work, all the while seeing it as a sideline while he pursued his life work in academia as a philosopher. He believed he had an original contribution to make to humanity’s quest for truth. For ten years he resisted the idea of promoting someone else’s contribution. Finally on his *thirty-first* birthday, the year after receiving the *Course* as a birthday present and knowing something important had happened, he came to a second realisation: “As I was returning home from teaching a *Course* workshop, I realised that the *Course* had importance not just for a few New Agers, but for the entire world. I had also come to realise that, as an intellectual system, it towered above anything I could ever have produced. I also realised it would require intellectual work to draw out that system and make its wisdom clear to others.” After ten years of resistance, Perry realised that was to be his life work: “I was to take the same passion for truth and the same intellectual abilities that I planned to devote to my system and devote them to this. I have never looked back”.¹⁰¹

When I questioned Perry about his daily spiritual practice, he found it difficult to answer. It appears to be so much a part of him that it was difficult for him to isolate *Course* practices from the rest of his life. He feels his approach to the *Course* may be

¹⁰⁰ Letter, 26 July 2005.

¹⁰¹ Interview, 11 May 2004.

different from that of other *Course* teachers in that he views it primarily as a handbook or self help text, rather than a set of theoretical teachings or doctrines. Therefore, he has tried to incorporate the *Course* into the whole of his life. When he reads the *Course*, where it says “you” he believes it refers personally to himself and he looks within to see what particular condition in himself needs help. He continues to do the *Workbook* lessons each day and believes this has helped him to meditate, using Lessons 41 and 44, Lessons 183, 184 and 189 especially. He prays the prayers in part II of the *Workbook*, making them his own. As a discipline, he tries to give himself frequent reminders – on the half hour if possible, or even more often – of the *Course* lesson and finds “sustenance” which improves the state of his mind. This practice also helps him not to give in to temptation. He has chosen a personal collection of practices from all over the *Text* and *Workbook* which he draws on when he needs emotional relief. Simply repeating these texts helps him to regain his peace during times of stress. Above all, he has never questioned that the Holy Spirit has given him a specific job to do. When I asked if this does not give him delusions of specialness (against *Course* teaching on there being no distinctions), he replied that the *Course* teaching on extension - that one’s purpose is always to help others - has, he hoped, kept him from messianic tendencies.

It seemed to me that most precious of all to Perry was the *Course* teaching on “guidance”. “I have worked on forming the habit (which is stressed in all three volumes of the *Course*) of asking for guidance many times throughout the day. I don’t hear a voice, but I do get an inner sense (usually), which is definitely not infallible but is far more wise and practical than my own unaided thoughts.” He claims that his “most trusted guidance, however, comes from meaningful coincidences, that I call

‘signs’, which I have developed a way to interpret over the last twenty-five years.” He says that this form of guidance is not talked about in the *Course*, “but the early story of the *Course* was replete with examples of it – only there the interpretation was often provided by Jesus himself.” Finally, Perry believes it is in relationships that *Course* spirituality “proves” itself. “I really believe that our ability to be loving and forgiving and to join, both with strangers in the moment and with ‘significant others’ over decades, is the measure of our progress on this path. Few are fooled by the ‘spiritually advanced’ who can’t get along with anyone.” I was struck by Perry’s honesty and humility:

How am I progressing? Definitely very slowly, but I can see that I am progressing. The *Course* is slowly teaching me how to look impartially at my ego as well as how to forgive others for theirs, with no small help from its many forgiveness practices. The ego is inherently unfair. It always wants to make me more pure, more right, and more important than you. What the *Course* has taught me about the darkness within my own ego and about the divinity within others is, I believe, slowly balancing the scales. Even though it has been over twenty years, in some ways I feel as if I am just starting down this path.¹⁰²

Given how totally his life has been given to the *Course* and its promotion through books, commentaries, glossaries and speaking engagements besides his all-encompassing personal “living” of it, I asked Perry if he did not think the *Course* was, if not the only path, perhaps the best one? He replied vehemently to the contrary. All paths lead to God, he affirmed, and each person must decide if the *Course* is right for her. It struck me, that whilst this was unlikely to have been Perry’s intention, this anti-exclusive attitude, could be seen as a strategy which serves to make *Course* spirituality more attractive and more authentic, rather than less so. The inquirer is disarmed. Perry might say it is a living example of the *Course* teaching that ‘defencelessness’ is one’s most potent defence.

¹⁰²Interview. 8 May 2004.

Ian Patrick: *A Course in Miracles* (Miracle Network)

I began my interview with Patrick, using the questionnaire in Appendix C. He had not had a religious upbringing: his parents had dropped him off at Sunday school on Sundays though they did not attend church. He was not sure why they did so; he was not baptised or confirmed. I noticed that a Buddha sat on his mantelpiece and I asked him if he had tried other spiritualities or religious traditions before finding the *Course*. He said he had not, but he likes having the Buddha in his home. After becoming a *Course* teacher, he took a course in Buddhist meditation to help him to lead meditations at *Course* meetings, but this did not imply an interest in Buddhism itself. He was satisfied with the *Course* and didn't try to combine it with other spiritualities. He had read geology at university and was working as a geologist with an oil company when he read Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love*. The book prompted him to find out more about the *Course*. Williamson is still important to him and he keeps Louise Hay on his shelf to consult when he has physical symptoms of illness. He also reads books by Susan Jeffers as they appear and had her most recent book on his coffee table. Whilst he agrees with Wapnick that the *Course* is a unique spiritual path in its own right and, as noted earlier, much of his own teaching is based on Wapnick's books, yet he combines this view with the belief that the *Course* is a contemporary restatement of the perennial philosophy at the heart of all religions. For Patrick, its uniqueness lies in its use of personal relationships for spiritual growth. He feels other spiritualities encourage a person to "go within" but lack this horizontal dimension. Perry believes the *Course* teaches that all our relationships reflect our relationship with God.

Remembering how other *Course* students have had a defining moment when they realised the *Course* was their path, I asked if Patrick had experienced such a moment. He replied that after reading Williamson and hearing her speak, he had bought a copy of *A Course in Miracles*, but had been put off at first by the Christian language. Williamson had helped him over this hurdle and then it was what he called “a slow drip”, until he founded the Miracle Network and became editor of *Miracle Worker*.

Perry seemed comfortable talking about the various differences between *Course* interpreters. He had backed Wapnick in the copyright battles because he felt that, if the copyright were lost, the *Course* could become like the Bible with many versions, shortened versions and even paraphrases published. He felt it was important for it to be published exactly as it was. He also identifies with Wapnick’s interpretation of the *Course* (as a metaphorical symbol) rather than Perry’s understanding, which he feels is too literal. He compared Perry to a biblical fundamentalist in Christianity.

Regarding his own spiritual journey, Patrick exhibited the same honesty and humility that I had noticed in Perry. He feels he is still in denial about areas of his life to which he has not yet “faced up”. But he feels that the Holy Spirit will lead him to do so in the right time so he is relaxed about it. Did he feel he was in the mainstream in society in following a spirituality? “I believe those following spiritualities like the *Course* will soon be in the mainstream”. He referred to the excitement caused by Gary Renard’s book, *The Disappearance of the Universe*, with its teaching that, as more people reincarnate who have been *Course* students in a previous life, the world will reach the point where the physical will disappear and everyone will be ‘home’.

Patrick's opinion of those in mainline denominations was one of pity: "So many are in it for social status or to meet a lack in themselves, or for loneliness. However, I believe there are genuine seekers after God in churches and even some truly holy people." When I asked him to sum up his spirituality in a sentence, he replied, "I came from a place of unconscious searching and found a context for purpose in my life". Did he ever feel embarrassed if, at a party, someone asked "what do you do"? He admitted that he used to feel embarrassment, but now that the Miracle Network has charitable status, he can say that he runs a charity and this is acceptable to the majority of casual acquaintances. Finally, Patrick agreed with me that *Course* spirituality has often been promoted by the bestselling spiritual self help books which refer to it. The latest example of this is Renard's book. Attendance at meetings, correspondence and subscriptions are up and many mention Renard when asked what has brought them to the *Course*. In conclusion, when I asked Patrick what the *Course* meant to him personally, like Perry, he said simply, "It is my life; my life is a spiritual journey."¹⁰³

I have tried to include a representative cross section of interviews with people involved in *Course* leadership, devotees and consumers of *Course*-related self help books. The interviewees contrast with one another in many ways: for some respondents spiritual experience was helpful at a point of crisis; for others it encompasses their life. If there is one common strand running through most of the interviews it is the belief that the individual was 'guided' either to the *Course* or to the self help book in a manner that was out of the ordinary. This 'guidance' serves to give experiential legitimacy to the belief systems they have espoused.

¹⁰³ Interview, 25 August 2005.

Conclusion

Course Spiritualities and the Milieu of Holistic Spiritualities

The thesis has examined the formation and legitimation of the religious discourse that developed around the channelled text, *A Course in Miracles*. The analysis of the *Course* text, emic literature, self help books derived from the *Course* and interviews with *Course* students all suggest that *Course* spirituality fits appropriately within the larger network of holistic spiritualities as I defined them in Chapter One.

The first point of my definition, that the Self is in some sense divine, finds resonance with *Course* spirituality in its belief that we have never been separate from God. Wapnick and LoSasso point to this as a point of distinction between 'New Age' spiritualities and the *Course*. However, the belief in God as Source (and belief in the impossibility of separation from God) was one of several forms of 1980s New Age holism explored in Chapter One. Second, the belief in the interconnectedness of all reality can be seen to have links with the *Course*'s uncompromising non-dualism, centred round the belief that there is only one reality, that of God (level one). Many holistic spiritualities emphasise the oneness of matter and the spiritual, whilst the *Course* teaches that only the spiritual is real; yet both types of interconnectedness can be seen as versions of a monistic ontology. Third, the belief that an experience of the Self has transforming powers for the individual and for the cosmos finds resonance in the *Course* concept of 'joining' and experiencing 'one mind': this in turn brings an experience of 'miracles' which are transforming for the individual as well as for the whole 'Sonship'. Fourth, the belief that in our minds we create our own reality is central to *Course* teaching. In the

words of the *Course*, “I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me, I ask for and receive as I have asked” (*Text*, 1996: 343). Fifth, the belief in optimistic, limitless evolution for the individual and the cosmos is more problematic. The *Course* speaks not of evolution but rather of the student being on a journey ‘home’ to true identity with God. However, the optimism inherent in the Self’s limitless evolution finds its counterpart in the radical optimism of *Course* belief that one has never been separate from God. The evolution cherished in many holistic spiritualities involves this journey back to God within. The concepts are not as different as they appear to be. In both, a change within a person causes change on the larger canvas outside the individual. In the Seth texts, both views (a return to the source and endless optimistic evolution) are accommodated.

Hammer writes that channelled texts of this period reveal variations on a few common themes. These themes reflect Eastern influence. He suggests that all of them claim we have forgotten our true identities. We are not the limited beings that everyday experience suggests; rather, we are sparks of the divine and only fear has blocked us from realising our true nature. We can create the world we live in because our inner states are reflected in the outer world. Having forgotten our true identities, we create a flawed reality. Echoing point five of my definition, he finds that the texts teach that “we have reincarnated again and again, have learned our spiritual lessons, and are now ready for a great spiritual leap. To help us, a variety of spiritually advanced beings such as angels, spirits or extraterrestrials are ready to help us” (2004a: 417). Hanegraaff suggests that

the immediate antecedents to these channelled texts are the UFO channelled texts of the 1950s (see p. 14 above for examples) and he cites David Spangler as the figure who was involved in both periods of channelling (1996: 96). Melton looks further back to the Theosophy movement when the phrase 'new age' and ideas similar to those cited by Hammer were channelled by Alice Bailey (1998: 138). Hammer argues that these channelled texts have now "attained the status of 'standards of reference'. New messages must conform to the standard set by these texts" (2004a: 416). My research suggests that spiritual experience also conforms to the vocabulary and themes of Hammer's 'standards of reference'.

Legitimation Strategies and Power

The thesis has used Weber's three-part scheme to investigate how *Course* spirituality establishes legitimacy for its followers. The study concludes that even in a spirituality as other-worldly as that of the *Course*, which decries 'specialness', the role of interpreter of the teaching appears to confer power on the teacher. This is especially true in the case of Wapnick, who claims the role of original interpreter. *Course* teacher Robert Perry's challenge to Wapnick's interpretation of the *Course* only serves to strengthen the point that the battle of hermeneutics involves power.

The thesis has shown that the new discourse of *A Course in Miracles* fits Weber's model in many ways. Interviews with *Course* students showed that power is closely linked with legitimation. This was seen through narratives of experience which emphasise the individual's encounter with the divine through coincidence, synchronicity or mystical

experience. It was linked with legitimation through tradition as a teaching hermeneutic (and counter hermeneutic, as well as heretical hermeneutic) develops. Power is linked with legitimation also through charisma, the receiving of channelled messages which have didactic power over devotees. Tradition, developed around the details of the life of the channeller and the story of the channelling experience, became as powerful a teaching device as the channelled message itself. However, the thesis challenges Weber's linear model of development: either routinisation happens earlier than usually experienced, or institutionalisation shows parallel development with charismatic leadership.

Charisma was later replicated in recent self help books: Renard's new 'revelation' introduces an eschatological theme, creating excitement in the community of devotees and drawing in new young seekers. Renard positions himself in the line of succession which runs from Schucman through Wapnick to himself. His work breaks new ground for *Course* spirituality, aligning it more firmly within the community of holistic spiritualities: the entities who appear to him are his own Self (or Higher Self), one in a former reincarnation and one in a future reincarnation. The eschatological implication of Renard's title, *The Disappearance of the Universe*, also introduces an exclusivist strain with the belief that, when enough people who practised *Course* spirituality in a former life have reincarnated, the universe will disappear and everyone will be 'home' with God in level one. This leaves little space for other religious interpretations of reality.

This aspect of Renard's teaching is not entirely novel: the "better way" of Thetford's speech to Schucman at the beginning of the *Course* narrative implies superiority. The

Course teaching that all paths lead to God is compromised in two ways: the belief that following the *Course* can save the devotee “thousands of years” implies superiority over other spiritual paths, and the ‘correction’ in the *Course* of New Testament passages also implies a claim of superiority for the *Course* religious discourse.

Secularisation: The Legitimation of *Course* Spirituality in Society

The question of the legitimacy of a religious discourse in society goes beyond Weber’s taxonomy, but it is important for holistic spiritualities. This thesis has questioned the stereotype of holistic spiritualities as undisciplined, commerce-driven and superficial by demonstrating the comprehensive nature of *Course* spirituality, the rigours of its discipline of mind training and the devotion and enthusiasm it commands.

Much has been written about secularisation, what it means and what it does not mean (Berger, 2001; Brown, 2001; Bruce, 2002; Partridge, 2004: 8-16). Bruce makes the point that the belief systems of “New Age” religions are too diffuse to command commitment and consensus, to make an impact on those who practise them, to make a social impact and to reproduce themselves in the next generation. Thus they are likely to “dissolve” (2002: 90-103). He quotes Stuart Rose’s survey of *Kindred Spirit* readers (1998: 10) to argue that the “New Age” has an ageing population (Bruce, 2002: 101). My study of the *Course* community does not wholly bear out his conclusions. *Course* spirituality commands loyalty and long-term commitment. *Course* themes are the subject of internal debates, but they are specific and link clearly with the larger network of holistic spiritualities covered by the definition offered in Chapter One.

The prediction that New Age beliefs will become more diffuse and are unlikely to be passed on to the second generation has not proved true of the *Course*. My survey showed that the age groups of 30-49 and 50-65 were almost equal to one another, and 88.5 percent of respondents came from these two age groups. It is possible that when the 50-65 age group moves on, *Course* students will represent an ageing population as the 40-49 segment in my younger group represents 'baby boomers'. However, the robust hermeneutical battles within the *Course* community, the identification of heresy and development of new strands of *Course* doctrine, suggest that defined beliefs continue to be important to devotees. Jampolsky's work with dying children, Williamson's campaign for peace and her 'meals on wheels' programme for AIDS patients, the production of self help materials for those with addictions by Jampolsky's son, Lee, and Ian Patrick's work for reconciliation between communities in Northern Ireland, all suggest that even a largely private holistic spirituality, one which is more world-rejecting than others (Wallis, 1984: 4), can influence the public sphere more than Bruce and other advocates of secularisation have been prepared to accept. Bruce's argument that diffuse belief systems are too precarious to make an impact on the individual or on the wider society (2002: 95-99) must therefore be questioned.

What Partridge described as 'occulture' has moved out from the margins of society (2004: 186; 2005: 2-3). Hammer's point about common themes found in channelled texts suggests that the distribution in millions of specific spiritual self help texts has contributed to the construction of a new collective identity (2004a: 416). There remains

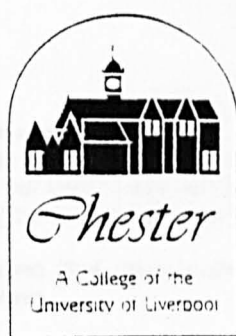
the tension between the holistic belief that truth/God is within each person, and the acceptance of the authority of channelled wisdom from without - wisdom which even prescribes specific techniques or rules on how people should live their daily lives. Nevertheless, these self help texts resonate with the real difficulties of contemporary people. More and more, their practices and beliefs are reinforced by the social networks of ordinary people who would not see themselves as esoteric. It is true that holistic spiritualities do not follow patterns of hierarchical organization; yet, there is a sense in which a new form of community with 'taken for granted' presuppositions has emerged. The cross-fertilisation between holistic spiritualities and Christianity (for example, Kemp, 2003) has precedents in Theosophy, the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ and the development of a New Age Jesus, but it also suggests that the impact of holistic spiritualities outside esoteric circles is growing. Whereas some religious authorities may be sceptical, many Christians believe they can receive help from Peck, Hay, Williamson and Jeffers whilst continuing as Christians. My field work reinforced this aspect of holistic spiritualities.

I believe that the widespread distribution of spiritual self help texts indicates that holistic spiritualities are no longer confined to the margins of society. This was borne out in my fieldwork as I noted a change of self perception among *Course* students: at the beginning of my research, holistic spiritualities were frequently referred to as 'alternative'; recent interviews with *Course* students suggest that they now perceive themselves, along with devotees of other holistic spiritualities, as having left the margins of society. Conversely, the established religions are sometimes viewed as minority positions. This was

highlighted for me in the BBC Sunday morning *Heaven and Earth* programme (18 February 2006) featuring a Jewish former scriptwriter for a soap opera and a Christian from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Both complained of the portrayal of Christians and Jews in soap operas: other minorities such as blacks and gays were now portrayed as positive characters, they argued. However, Christians were portrayed as either old ladies (e.g. Dot in *East Enders*) or dodderly clergymen, whilst Jews were portrayed as rabbis or religious zealots rather than as ordinary people. The point is that both representatives of two of the oldest traditions in this country viewed themselves as representing minorities. A representative of a holistic spirituality appearing later in the programme exuded self confidence: she seemed to assume that her position was a 'given' for most listeners to the programme.

This thesis has argued that the millions who have read spiritual self help texts have developed a new form of community with a 'given' language and common understandings of reality. Whether or not this will prove to be a transitory phase of late modernity (Giddens, 1991) or the development of a new form of religion, remains to be seen (see Heelas and Woodhead, 2000: 307-308). However, there is a sense in which Ferguson's 'paradigm shift' has taken place. Even if the turn of the millennium did not usher in the promised era of love and harmony, this millennial hope was routinised into the promise of unlimited personal development, described in point five of my definition, as more and more people began to search for "a better way".

A Course in Miracles Survey



Dear Reader

As a reader of the *Miracle Worker*, your help would be appreciated in a national study which assesses the place of Course spirituality in people's lives. The research is being carried out from the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Chester College, Liverpool University. It is hoped that the findings will be shared with you through the *Miracle Worker* in the future.

Please answer each question by placing a tick in the correct box (tick more than one if appropriate) or by writing your comments in the space provided. Please feel free to photocopy the questionnaire if your partner or friends would like to participate. Every response is important. You may post the form to me at the address below. Alternatively, you may fill in the questionnaire at my website: www.bradby.org.uk. I hope you will enjoy filling in the questionnaire.

R. Bradby
Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies
Chester College
Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ

A. About You (tick more than one if appropriate)

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: Under 20 20-29 30-49 50-65 65+
3. Marital Status: Married Divorced Separated
 Widowed Never Married
4. Household: Living alone Living with husband/wife
 Living with partner Living with non-family.
5. Employment and Annual Income:
 Employed Unemployed
 Income support 0-£15,000 £15,000-25,000 £25,000-50,000 £50,000-100,000 above £100,000
6. Occupation: _____
7. Education: GCSE/O Levels A Levels Diplomas
 Bachelors Degree Masters Degree Ph.D
8. Home:
 Own your home Rent your home Council house Other

B. You and A Course in Miracles

(tick more than one if appropriate)

1. Do these apply to you before you knew the Course?
 Church member Involved in Asian religion (Hinduism, Buddhism etc) Religious Spiritual Not spiritual Agnostic
 Atheist Unsure Other _____
2. Do any of these apply to you now?
 Church member Involved in Asian religion (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc) Not spiritual Agnostic Atheist Unsure
 Religious Spiritual Other _____
3. How did you first hear of ACIM?
 Found ACIM in bookshop ACIM website Through a friend
 A meeting Book about ACIM in bookshop
 Other _____

4. What attracted you to ACIM?

Unhappiness with church Guilt Fear Stress Personal growth Social outlet Healing Enjoyment Mental health Help in relationships Emotional support Enjoyment Healing Other _____

5. Why are you now involved with ACIM?

Unhappiness with church Guilt Fear Stress Spiritual growth Personal growth Social outlet Mental health Help in relationships Emotional support Enjoyment Health Other _____

6. If you were to rank the importance of spiritual growth in your life on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 indicates insignificance and 1 great importance) what number would you give? _____

7. Indicate the importance of ACIM for your spiritual growth on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 indicates insignificance and 1 great importance) _____

8. Do family members share your interest in spirituality?

Yes No Some do

Do family members share your interest in ACIM?

Yes No Some do

Do friends share your interest in spiritual growth?

Yes No Some do

Do friends share your interest in ACIM?

Yes No Some do

9. What part of ACIM do you find most helpful?

The daily lessons ACIM meetings ACIM meditation Books (by Marianne Williamson etc) about ACIM Other _____

10. How long have you been involved with ACIM?

Less than 1 yr 1-2 yrs 3-5 yrs 5-10 yrs. 10+

How long have you done the daily lessons?

Less than 1 yr 1-2 yrs 3-5 yrs 5-10 yrs 10+

11. Have you taught ACIM? Yes No

12. How has ACIM changed your life?

Understand purpose of life Helped relationships Conflict resolution Health Spiritual growth Forgiveness More loving Confidence in work Social confidence Environment awareness More caring for social justice Other _____

C. Your Spirituality (tick more than one if appropriate)

1. Were you brought up within a religious tradition?

Yes No

If yes, which one? _____

2. Did you find this tradition inadequate for your spiritual needs? Yes No

If yes, in what way? _____

3. What attracted you to a spiritual path? _____

4. Do you believe spirituality *must* include some idea of God or the divine/sacred? Yes No

5. How do you define spirituality?

Caring Healing oneself/others Overcoming ego Living life fully Reconnecting with God Loving Forgiving One with nature Creating one's own reality In touch with cosmic energies Inner peace Living at peace with others Other _____

6. Do you believe spirituality *must* include love?

Yes No

Why? _____

7. What do you believe about God/the divine/the sacred?

Personal God Life force God as sum of everything God is within us One's unconscious is God God is nature God is in everything but bigger than all God is the sum of everything God is the projection of our values God is man's creation Other _____

8. What do you believe about the Self?

- the Self can be united with God the Self can know God
- the Self is God the Self longs to return to God the Self remains one with God the Self will dissolve into God other

9. Do you believe in

- life after death heaven hell the unreality of death
- reality of only God/heaven

10. Do you believe in

- the power of prayer healing powers miracles

11. Do you believe in

- chakras energy channels in the body precognition extra sensory perception (ESP) humankind evolving positively

12. What do you believe about Jesus?

- just a story a son of God the son of God not sure if he lived just another man an example a teacher
- both human and divine most spiritually evolved man

13. Do you believe in

- Satan angels spirit guides UFO's extraterrestrials
- Gaia ley lines the Holy Spirit ghosts the ego
- ascended masters holy, higher beings other _____

14. Are any of the following true of you?

- received help in answer to prayer felt God's presence
- been in touch with someone who died known God through nature felt the presence of spirits/ghosts felt great peace felt inner bliss had an 'out of body' experience felt what happened is my destiny had a near-death experience had a spiritual experience through giving birth had a spiritual experience through sex had a spiritual experience from drugs had extra sensory perception of events or someone else's thoughts other _____

15. Are you involved in spiritual activities other than ACIM?

- yoga healing workshops palm reading pagan ritual
- tarot card reading rebirthing reflexology Tai Chi Reiki
- relaxation groups Sai Baba group Acupuncture
- Transcendental meditation astrological reading past life therapy spiritualism channelling other _____

16. Do you buy

- spiritual books spiritual videos spiritual music tapes/CDs
- crystals spiritual self-help books spiritual self-help tapes

17. Do you buy books by

- Deepak Chopra Gary Zukav N.D. Walsch Jon Mundy
- Louise Hay F. Scott Peck Chuck Spazzano Ken Wilber
- David Spangler William Bloom Jerry Jampolsky
- Marianne Williamson other _____

18. How much have you spent on spiritual self-help books/tapes/videos in the last 12 months?

- none 0-£25 £25-50 £50-100 over £100

19. Do you see these self-help books teaching the same spirituality as ACIM?

- same different but compatible contradicting ACIM

20. How important to your spiritual growth are self-help books?

- life changing life enhancing a little helpful not helpful

21. Does meditation play a part in your spirituality?

- yes no

If yes, how often do you meditate?

- more than once a day daily several times weekly
- once a week occasionally rarely never

22. Is it important to you to be with people who share your spirituality?

- yes no

23. Do you believe evil exists in the world?

- yes no

24. How would you define evil? _____

25. Has your spirituality brought positive changes to your life?

- yes no

If yes, what are these? _____

26. Has your spirituality brought negative changes to your life?

- yes no

If yes, what are these? _____

27. Do you find it easy to speak about spirituality in social situations?

- yes no sometimes

28. Is there anything else you wish to share about your spirituality? _____

D. Spirituality and Society

(tick more than one if appropriate)

1. Do you believe society is entering a more spiritual era?

- yes no

2. Do you feel there has been increased interest in spirituality in the last 5 years?

- yes no

3. Do you believe there is less confidence in science and technology than 20 years ago?

- yes no

4. Do you believe there is less confidence in the church than 20 years ago?

- yes no

Why? _____

5. Do you see any of the following as a part of your spirituality?

- being 'green' (environmentally responsible) working for social justice making the world a better place

Why or why not? _____

6. What do you think society needs most? _____

7. Are you optimistic about the future of humankind on this planet?

- yes no

Why, or why not? _____

8. Outside interests:

- Amnesty International Friends of the Earth Green Party
- Labour Party Lib. Dem. Party Conservative Party Vegan Society Christian Aid Other _____

E. Miracle Worker

1. Do you subscribe or read other spiritual magazines or newsletters?

- yes no

If yes, list the titles _____

2. How many people usually read your copy of Miracle Worker? _____

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please fold the form, place it in an envelope and post it to me at the above address.

Tabulated Survey Responses

Total number of respondents 144

Question:

Number of
Respondents

A1 Gender

Male	40
Female	104

A2 Age

<20	0
20-29	1
30-49	64
50-65	66
>65	13

A3 Marital Status

Married	54
Divorced	33
Separated	6
Widowed	7
Never Married	41

A4 Household

Living Alone	62
Husband/ Wife	57
Partner	18
Living with kids	5

A5 Employment Status

Employed	70
Unemployed	39

A6 Income

Income Support	12
0-15,000	43
15-25k	26
25-50k	25
50-100k	13
1000+k	3

A7 Educational background

GCSEs	24
A Levels	11
Diplomas	40
BA	41
MA	13
PhD	3
None	3

A8 Living Situation

Own Home	111
Rent Home	20
Council Home	5
Other	4

B1 Do these apply to you before you knew the course:

Church Member	48
Asian Religion	17
Religious	22
Spiritual	80
Not Spiritual	6
Agnostic	6
Atheist	1
Unsure	12
Other	3

B2 Do any of these apply to you now:

Church Member	35
Asian Religion	14
Not spiritual	0
Agnostic	0
Atheist	0
Unsure	1
Religious	15
Spiritual	102

B3 First heard of ACIM from:

Book shop	27
Website	0
Friend	65
Meeting	21
Book	26
Other	13

B4 What attracted you to ACIM:

Unhappy with Church	28
Guilt	14
Fear	19
Stress	16
Personal Growth	97
Social outlet	6
Healing	57
Enjoyment	20
Mental Health	20
Help in relationships	25
Emotional Support	27
Healing	0
Other	3

B5 Why are you now involved in ACIM:

Unhappy with church	16
Guilt	7
Fear	10
Stress	8
Spiritual Growth	111
Personal Growth	83
Social outlet	6
Mental Health	22
Help in relationships	21
Emotional Support	39
Enjoyment	41
Health	13
Other	2

B6 Importance of Spiritual Growth (1 most important)

1	92
2	10
3	13
4	3
5	1
6	2
7	1
8	1
9	4
10	12

B7 Importance of ACIM (1 most important)

1	63
2	22
3	15
4	7
5	14
6	4
7	10
8	2
9	2
10	4

B8 Family Members with interest in spirituality

Yes	34
No	55
Some	53

B8A Family Members with interest in ACIM

Yes	12
No	103
Some	29

B8B Friends with interest in spiritual growth

Yes	55
No	12
Some	78

B8C Friends with interest in ACIM

Yes	16
No	43
Some	84

B9 What part of ACIM was most helpful?

Daily lessons	92
ACIM meetings	32
ACIM Meditation	30
Books about ACIM	58
Other (inc. Text)	30

B10 How long have you been involved with ACIM?

<1 yr	1
1-2 yrs	15
3-5 yrs	42
5-10 yrs	49
10 + yrs	35

B10 How long have you done daily lessons?

<1 yr	16
1-2 yrs	36
3-5 yrs	32
5-10 yrs	22
10 + yrs	9

B11 Have you taught ACIM?

Yes	23
No	107

B12 How has ACIM changed your life?

Understand purpose in life	84
Helped relationships	77
Conflict Resolution	64
Health	40
Spiritual growth	112
Forgiveness	106
More Loving	67
Confidence in work	30
Social Confidence	34
Environment Awareness	21
More caring for Social Justice	20
Other	2

C1 Were you brought up in a religious tradition?

Yes	125
No	19

C2 Did you find this tradition inadequate for your spiritual needs?

Yes	111
No	93

C4 Do you believe spirituality MUST include some idea of God or the divine sacred?

Yes	115
No	25

C6 Do you believe spirituality must include love?

Yes	140
No	3

C5 How do you define spirituality?

Caring	49
Healing	67
Overcoming Ego	83
Living life fully	62
Reconnecting with God	114
Loving	78
Forgiving	82
One with Nature	54
Creating own reality	47
Tough with cosmic energies	41
Inner Peace	105
Living out peace with others	77

C7 What do you believe about God/ the Divine/ the Sacred?

Personal God	41
Life force	81
God as sum of everything	130
God within us	108
One's unconsciouness is God	27
God is nature	28
God is everything but bigger than all	67
God is the projection of our values	10
God is man'screation	11
Other	1

C8 What do you believe about the self?

Can be united with God	49
Can know God	45
Is God	62
Long to return to God	70
Remains one with God	83
Will dissolve into God	34
Other	0

C9 Do you believe in...

Life after death	93
Heaven	42
Hell	7
Unreality of death	72
Reality of only God and Heaven	73

C10 Do you believe in...

Power of prayer	135
Healing Powers	117
Miracles	125

C11 Do you believe in...

Chakras	113
Energy Channels in body	110
Precognition	84
ESP	93
Humankind evolving positively	91

C12 What do you believe about Jesus?

Just a story	1
A son of God	91
The son of God	38
Not sure if he lived	2
Just another man	4
Example	56
Teacher	102
Both human and Devine	80
Most spiritually evolved man	78

C13 Do you believe in...

Satan	7
Angels	91
Spirit Guides	104
UFOs	39
Extra terrestrials	39
Gaia	39
Leylines	62
Holy Spirit	130
Ghosts	49
Ego	88
Ascended Masters	67
Holy Higher Beings	83
Other	1

C14 Are any of these true for you?

Help in answer to prayer	118
Felt God's presence	108
In touch with someone who died.	53
Known God Through nature	70
Felt presence of spirits/ghosts	47
Felt great peace	110
Felt inner bliss	82
Had out of body experience	40
Felt what happened is my destiny	41
Had near death experience	19
Had spiritual experience through giving birth	6
Special experience through sex	20
Special experience through drugs	13
ESP of events or thoughts	47
Other	1

C15 Are you involved in special activities other than ACIM?

Yoga	40
Healing workshops	43
Palm readings	0
Pagan rituals	7
Tarot cards	10
Rebirthing	15
Reflexology	19
Tai Chi	17
Reiki	24
Relaxation Groups	15
Sai Baba group	4
Acupuncture	16
TM	16
Astrological reading	14
Past life therapy	9
Spiritualism	17
Channeling	7

C16 Do you buy...

Spiritual books	111
Spiritual videos	25
Spiritual music/ tapes/ CD	66
Crystals	64
Spiritual self help books	104
Spiritual self help tapes	78

C17 Do you buy books by...

Deepak Chopra	84
Gary Zukav	44
N D Walsch	68
Jon Mundy	22
Louise Hay	78
F Scott Peck	57
Chuck Spezzano	59
Ken Wilber	14
David Spangler	6
William Bloom	13
Jerry Jampolsky	82
Marianne Williamson	91
Ken Wapnick	8
Eckart Tolle	6
W Dyer	4
Diana Cooper	3
CS Lewis	1

C18 How much (£) have you spent in the last year on spiritual self help books/tapes/videos?

None	6
0-25	38
25-50	39
50-100	28
100+	30

C19 Do these self help books teach the same spirituality as ACIM?

Same	51
Different but compatible	105
Contradict ACIM	6

C20 Self help books are:

Life Changing	30
Life Enhancing	95
A little Helpful	32
Not Helpful	3

C21 Does meditation play a part in your spirituality?

Yes	133
No	15

C21A If yes, how often do you meditate?

More than once a day	23
Daily	43
Several times weekly	32
Once a week	4
Occasionally	21
Rarely	0
Never	0

C22 Is it important for you to be with people who share your spirituality?

Yes	114
No	28

C23 Do you believe evil exists in the world?

Yes	62
No	69

C25 Has your spirituality brought positive changes to your life?

Yes	143
No	3

C26 Has your spirituality brought negative changes to your life?

Yes	34
No	110

C27 Do you find it easy to speak about spirituality in social situations?

Yes	52
No	19
Sometimes	73

D1 Is society entering a more spiritual era?

Yes	122
No	12

D2 Do you feel there has been increased interest in spirituality in the last 5 yrs?

Yes	129
No	10

D3 Do you believe there is less confidence in science and technology than 20 years ago?

Yes	79
No	50

D4 Less confidence in the church than 20 years ago?

Yes	133
No	8

D5 Do you see any of the following as a part of your spirituality?

Being Green	92
Working for social justice	65
Making the world a better place	89

D7 Are you optimistic about the future of humankind on this planet?

Yes	114
No	19

D8 Outside interests?

Amnesty	29
Friends of the Earth	32
Green Party	18
Labor Party	4
Liberal Democrats	4
Conservatives	0
Vegan	4
Chrisitian Aid	17

E1 Do you read other spiritual magazines/ newsletters?

Yes	71
No	71

E2 How many read your copy of the miracle worker?

1	95
2	34
3	7
4	2
5	3
6	0
6+	1

Appendix C: List of Interviews

In-Depth Unstructured Interviews.

The starting point of these interviews was the survey (Appendix A) and the questionnaire (Appendix D). However, typically, the respondent moved into areas not covered by the questions. I began interviews by expressing my interest in understanding more about a respondent's daily spiritual practice and how this affected the rest of life in terms of job, relationships, family, help during difficulties and attitude toward society. If respondents did not wish to reveal their names, I assigned a first name to them and used only that in the thesis. I have excluded interviewees who spoke at length but did not wish to appear in the thesis. I have also been selective so as not to be repetitive.

James, 10 June 2004
Harry, 6 November 2005
Lily, 31 October 2004
Ian Patrick, 25 August 2005
Robert Perry, 8 May 2004
Vera, 25 August 2004
Judith Skutch Whitson, 23 September 2005

Shorter Interviews

If there were time constraints or other factors which limited my time with a respondent, (e.g. meeting after a lecture), I did not use the sheet.

Nicola Harvey, 30 October 2004
Jon Mundy, 2 June 2000
Colin Tipping, 25 January 2002
Marrienne Williamson, 11 October 2003

Letters

Rosemarie LoSasso, Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*, to Library of Congress, 19 January 1991
Rosemarie, LoSasso, Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*, 14 February 2003

Appendix D

Questions to Begin In-depth Interviews with *Course* Students

1. I am most interested in hearing the story of your spiritual journey. I am collecting the stories of people who have followed ACIM for more than ten years.
 - a. What caused you to be interested in spirituality? (a crisis, a slow process, hearing a *Course* speaker, reading a book, a friend, etc)
 - b. Did you grow up in a religious tradition?
 - c. Was the *Course* the first spirituality you have followed? If not, what others (Buddhism, yoga, etc.)
 - d. Do you combine *Course* spirituality with other spiritualities, if so which? Do you find that they complement each other or is there a conflict between them?
 - e. How did you come to know that the *Course* was the path for you?
 - f. What does your practice of *Course* spirituality involve? (e.g. doing a workbook lesson each day, reading books by writers on the *Course* (Wapnick, Perry, etc., meditation, or ?)
 - g. Has your *Course* practice changed over the years?
 - h. Have you read/appreciated spiritual self help authors? (e.g. Deepak Chopra, Louise Hay, Scott Peck, Susan Jeffers, Eckhart Tolle, Neale Donald Walsch etc.) How did they help or not help you?
 - i. Have you any other sources of spiritual information, have you any other spiritual activities?
 - j. Is there anything else you care to add?
2. People no longer speak of alternative medicine because it has become a common feature of people's lives. They now speak of complementary medicine. Are you happy with the term 'alternative spirituality'? Do you see yourself as a 'mainstream' person? Do you see the *Course* becoming a mainstream spirituality?
3. What is your opinion of mainstream society?
4. Are most (or none) of your friends also involved in the *Course* or are they a mix?
5. Are you ever embarrassed to tell anyone that you are involved in a spirituality?
6. What is your opinion of mainline religions?
7. If you had to summarise the story of your spiritual journey in one sentence, what would it be?

8. How would you evaluate your spiritual journey? (e.g. happy, a struggle, satisfying, etc)
9. What does your spiritual journey mean to you right now, as of this moment?
10. One author talks about people having 'identifying moments' that 'touch the Self directly'. Another other speaks of 'peak experiences'. Have you ever had such an experience. If so, could you describe it?
11. Does your daily life present you with challenges to your spiritual beliefs? Can you give an example? How do you resolve it?
12. Kenneth Wapnick speaks of the *Course* as a 'unique path'. In your opinion is there a great difference between *Course* spirituality and other new spiritualities. Do you think they all say the same thing using different language? Is there a difference between *Course* practice and, for example, neo-paganism?
13. Do you have any special feelings about the copyright battles? Do you think they have damaged the *Course* community?
14. If you were conducting the interview instead of me, is there anything you would ask that I haven't asked?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?
16. Age
17. Occupation

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