

A Course in Miracles – Part 1

by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon

To date, *A Course in Miracles* has sold over one million sets and has had great impact. It has been or is being translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Hebrew, and many other languages.¹ Over a thousand *Course* study groups now exist in the United States and Europe.

The printer for *A Course in Miracles*, Coleman Graphics, Inc., publishes over 50 additional book titles, most of them written by students of the *Course* who have incorporated *Course* philosophy into their writings. One influential example is psychologist Kenneth Wapnick's book, *Christian Psychology in A Course in Miracles*. Wapnick, a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism, has apparently devoted his life to spreading the good news of the *Course*. His "Foundation for a *Course in Miracles*" in Roscoe, New York, has published six books on the *Course* that attempt to show its supposed relevance to Christian belief and practice.

According to *New Realities* magazine, even a brief, partial listing of the organizations who recommend the *Course* to their constituents, or who have incorporated it into their curriculum, is impressive: est (The Forum); the Association for Humanistic Psychology; the Center for Attitudinal Healing; the Association for Research and Enlightenment (Edgar Cayce); the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship (founded by famous trance medium Arthur Ford); the Association for Transpersonal Psychology; the Institute of Noetic (consciousness) Sciences; Stuart Emery's Actualizations seminar.² From university presidents (such as Glen Olds, former president of Kent State University) to owners of football teams – to "various researchers and authors that read like a 'Who's Who' of the consciousness movement",³ the *Course* continues to expand in popularity. Psychic researcher Willis Harmon, head of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, has called it "the most important book in the English language".⁴

Also, scores of individuals in numerous occupations have incorporated *Course* teachings into their professions. New Age pianist Steven Halpern has set material from the *Course* to music. Michael Stillwater has used its concepts for gardening in his *A Course in Marigolds*. Centerlink, Inc., has even put the *Course* on computer disk.

In light of its sales, the number of its teachers, and its indirect influence through other mediums, a conservative estimate would be that at least five million people have been exposed to the *Course* teachings. For example, prominent New Ager Marianne Williamson is author of the million-copy bestseller, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (Harper-Collins, 1992), which is heavily based on the *Course*. Her promotions of the *Course* on TV are also numerous. Popular TV host Oprah Winfrey was so enthralled with

¹ Dean C. Halverson, "Seeing Yourself as Sinless," *SCP* (Spiritual Counterfeits Project) *Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1987, p. 18.

² Brian Van Der Horst, "Update on A Course in Miracles," *New Realities*, vol. 3, no. 1, August 1979, p. 48; cf. *New Realities*, vol. 1, no. 1, lead article, 1977.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Martin Gardner, "Marianne Williamson and 'A Course in Miracles,'" *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall 1992, p. 19.

Williamson's book that she bought a thousand copies for her friends and others, many of noted influence.⁵

Influential psychiatrist Gerald Jampolsky also extols *Course* virtues throughout the country, in his lectures and books. He has appeared on the "Phil Donahue Show," "Today," and "60 Minutes." Robert Schuller has hosted Jampolsky at his famous Garden Grove Community Church.⁶ Jampolsky's bestselling books, *There Is a Rainbow Behind Every Cloud*, *Good-bye to Guilt*, *Out of Darkness into the Light*, *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*, *Teach Only Love*, and *Children as Teachers of Peace* condense basic themes of the *Course*. His Center for Attitudinal Healing was founded in 1975 under the direction of an "inner voice," which instructed him to establish a center where the principles of the *Course* could be taught and demonstrated.

Jampolsky's *Teach Only Love* asserts that the *Course* is "central to attitudinal healing".⁷ In *Good-Bye to Guilt* he describes his conversion to the *Course* and its relation to the Center:

I began to change my way of looking at the world in 1975. Until then I had considered myself a militant atheist, and the last thing I was consciously interested in was being on a spiritual pathway that would lead to God. In that year I was introduced to... *A Course in Miracles*.... My resistance was immediate.... Nevertheless, after reading just one page, I had a sudden and dramatic experience. There was an instantaneous memory of God, a feeling of oneness with everyone in the world, and the belief that my only function on earth was to serve God.

Because of my Jewish background, however, I found that, as I got into the course, I developed a great deal of resistance to its Christian terminology....

Because of the profound effect the course had on my life, I decided to apply its principles in working with catastrophically ill children. In 1975, my inner guidance led me to help establish The Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon, California, to fulfill that function.⁸

He explains that the *Course* itself is not used at the Center (the full *Course* program requires a minimum of a year to complete); however, the staff are expected to "adopt and demonstrate the principles of attitudinal healing" taught by the *Course*.⁹

The Christian church has also been influenced by the *Course*. "Evangelical" Christians, such as author and lesbianism supporter Virginia Mollenkott, in *Speech, Silence, Action*, attest to its alleged benefits in their lives.¹⁰ Some mainline churches use it as part of their educational programs, because it has received glowing endorsements by numerous Catholic and Protestant clergy.

In fact, the *Course* specifically commends itself toward acceptance within the Christian church. For example, its spirit author claims to be "Jesus Christ" Himself; and distinctively Christian

⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶ Frances Adeny, "Re-visioning Reality: A Critique of A Course in Miracles," *SCP Newsletter*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1981, p. 3.

⁷ Gerald Jampolsky, *Teach Only Love*, New York: Bantam, 1985, p. 23.

⁸ Gerald Jampolsky, *Good-Bye to Guilt: Releasing Fear Through Forgiveness*, New York: Bantam, 1985, pp. 4,11.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Adeny, Re-visioning, p. 3.

terminology is utilized throughout. Spiritual Counterfeits Project [SCP] researcher Robert Burroughs observes:

It has also found a ready and expanding audience within the Christian Church, which is not surprising either. Biblical illiteracy is rampant and commitment to orthodoxy often less than vigorous and sometimes consciously absent. Those conditions are aggravated by the very nature of the *Course* writings. Couched in biblical terminology and allegedly dictated by Jesus Christ, they easily confuse and seem designed specifically for that purpose.¹¹

Of course, other non-Christian spiritistic writings have these themes, i.e., 1) the biblical God or Jesus is the alleged author, 2) spiritistic contact in one form or another is encouraged, and 3) a claim to be a message for the Church (e.g., medium Levi M. Arnold's *History of the Origin of All Things*¹²; the occult *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible*¹³; A.J. Russell's (ed.) *God Calling*.¹⁴ In each case new revelations seek to revise and discredit biblical teachings, usually through sophisticated-sounding spiritual explanations and methods.

Nevertheless, in all such revelations, "God" denies His earlier teachings in Scripture.¹⁵

Background

A Course in Miracles was channeled through an atheistic psychologist named Helen Schucman. Dr. Schucman, who had an early background in New Thought metaphysics and the occult,¹⁶ would not permit public knowledge of her role as the medium and eight-year channel for the *Course* until after her death in 1981.

As it happens, dream work played a role in the formation of the *Course* material. Due to job-related stress and a crisis at work, Schucman began to write down and explore her "highly symbolic dreams." This exploration went on for several months. Unexpectedly, one day she heard an inner voice say, "This is a course in miracles. Please take notes." And from this ensued a form of inner dictation. Although it was not a form of automatic writing or trance, the otherworldly nature of the phenomenon made her "very uncomfortable".¹⁷

The method of transmission was a clear, distinct inner voice that promised "to direct [her] very specifically." The "voice" did just that, and the same spiritistic direction is promised to students of the *Course*.¹⁸ Dr. Schucman described the process as the kind of inner dictation common to many other channeled works. She wrote, "It can't be an hallucination, really, because the Voice does not come from outside. It's all internal. There's no actual sound, and the words come

¹¹ Dean C. Halverson, Kenneth Wapnick, "A Matter of Course: Conversation with Kenneth Wapnick," *SCP Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1987, p. 9.

¹² Willis H. Kinnear, ed., *The Creative Power of Mind*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John Weldon, Christian Science, mms.; cf. Edmund Gruss, "God Calling: A Critical Look at a Christian Best Seller," *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*, vol. 6, no. 3. L. M. Arnold's text and Oahspe are much more blatantly anti-Christian.

¹⁵ Gruss, "God Calling".

¹⁶ Gardner, "Marianne Williamson".

¹⁷ Robert Basil, ed., *Not Necessarily the New Age: Critical Essays*, New York: Prometheus, 1977, p. 23.

¹⁸ *A Course in Miracles, Volume 2: Workbook for Students*, Huntington Station, NY: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1977, pp. 417-78.

mentally but very clearly. It's a kind of inner dictation you might say."¹⁹ Schucman took shorthand dictation from the voice almost daily: "It always resumed dictation precisely where it had left off, no matter how much time had elapsed between sessions."²⁰

Dr. Schucman was a most unlikely channel. She was a respected research psychologist, a pragmatic materialist, and a committed atheist before receiving the revelations. Among her prestigious appointments, she had been associate professor at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, and associate research scientist and chief psychologist at the Neurological Institute of The Presbyterian Hospital. Her Jewish background and commitment to atheism made her uncomfortable with the "Christian" tone of the messages. Her co-scribe on the project was the late Dr. William Thetford, an agnostic, teacher, and research assistant to the famed psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers (whose humanistic psychology also finally catapulted him into spiritism.²¹ Thetford held appointments at the Washington School of Psychiatry, Cornell University Medical College, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. Before his death he was a civilian medical specialist in family medicine at the David Grant USAF Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, California, and director of the Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon, California.²² His prestigious appointments and wide influence gave him many opportunities to publicize the *Course*.

Robert Skutch, publisher of the *Course*, says that the power and tenacity of the "voice" became all the more impressive because of Dr. Schucman's obvious reluctance:

She did know that the material was coming from an unusually authoritative source – one she did not intellectually believe in.

Thus began the actual transmission of the material which Helen would take down in more than 100 shorthand notebooks over a period of seven-and-a-half years. The situation proved to be tremendously paradoxical. On the one hand, she resented the Voice, objected to taking down the material, was extremely fearful of the content and had to overcome great personal resistance, especially in the beginning stages, in order to continue. On the other hand, it never seriously occurred to her not to do it, even though she frequently was tremendously resentful of the often infuriating interference....²³

The *Course* illustrates two characteristics of spiritistic inspiration: 1) when possible, seek a contact that will provide the most impact or credence for the revelation produced (Schucman's scholarly standing provided this credibility), and 2) force production of the material, regardless of personal cost to the channeler.

Some might argue that Schucman simply wanted to discredit orthodox Christianity. But nothing in her life or personality suggests she would deliberately go to such lengths merely to undermine Christian belief. Furthermore, the "voice," like the spirits in general, was merciless and unrelenting. This was clearly a force controlling Schucman, not a personally desired writing project to reinvent Christianity:

¹⁹ James Bolen, "Interview: William N. Thetford," *New Realities*, vol. 6, no. 2, September/October 1984, Part 2, p. 20.

²⁰ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience*, San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1991, p. 2.

²¹ Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980, pp. 88-92.

²² Jampolsky, *Goodbye*, p. 214.

²³ Adeny, *Re-visioning*, p. 20.

The Voice would dictate to Helen almost daily, and sometimes several times a day.... She could, and very often did, refuse to cooperate, at least initially. But she soon discovered she could have no peace until she relented and joined in once again. Despite being aware of this, she still sometimes refused to write for extended periods. When this occurred, it was usually at the urging of her husband that she did return to work, for he knew full well that she could only eliminate her distress by resuming her function as *Course* “scribe,” and he was able to convince her that to continue fighting the inevitable could only have a deleterious effect on their relationship....

The acute terror Helen felt at the beginning did gradually recede, but part of her mind simply never allowed her to get completely used to the idea of being a channel for the Voice.... For the most part she was bleakly unbelieving, suspicious and afraid.²⁴

Afraid, indeed. Mysterious powers that take control of one’s life are something to be feared. Robert Skutch also recorded Schucman’s own perception of the phenomenon:

Was the Voice that Helen heard dictating the material really that of Jesus? Both Helen and Bill believed the material must stand on its own, regardless of its alleged authorship. At her deepest level, Helen was certain that the Voice was that of Jesus, and yet she still had ambivalent feelings on the subject. In her own words:

“Having no belief in God, I resented the material I was taking down, and was strongly impelled to attack it and prove it wrong....

But where did the writing come from? Certainly the subject matter itself was the last thing I would have expected to write about, since I knew nothing about the subject. Subsequent to the writing I learned that many of the concepts and even some of the actual terms in the writing are found in both Eastern and Western mystical thought, but I knew nothing of them at the time. Nor did I understand the calm but impressive authority with which the Voice dictated. It was largely because of the strangely compelling nature of this authority that I refer to the Voice with a capital ‘V’.”²⁵

Dr. Schucman proceeded to admit her complete bafflement: “I do not understand the [control of] events that led up to the writing. I do not understand the process and I certainly do not understand the authorship. It would be pointless for me to attempt an explanation.”²⁶

Her co-scribe, Dr. Thetford, recorded his own observations in an interview in *New Realities*:

... the material was something that transcended anything that either of us could possibly conceive of. And since the content was quite alien to our backgrounds, interests and training, it was obvious to me that it came from an inspired source. The quality of the material was very compelling, and its poetic beauty added to its impact.

I think that if it had not been for many of the extraordinary experiences that occurred during the summer of 1965, neither Helen nor I would have been willing to accept the material she scribed.²⁷

(This article excerpted from John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996)

²⁴ Bolen, “Interview: William N. Thetford,” *New Realities*, vol. 6, no. 1, July/August 1984 Part 1, pp. 20-23.

²⁵ Bolen, “Interview” Part 2, p. 78.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 18.