

# New Thought—Part 1

by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

## Quotes:

But even though you are the Christ, you might not be fully aware of the fact.<sup>1</sup>

The Truth is so shrouded by false dogmas that we have created God and a heaven of our making.<sup>2</sup>

New Thought emerged because there were, as there still are, those who wished to be liberated from restrictions of outdated religious doctrine. We want to be free from sin and guilt and condemnation, and from the resulting sickness and poverty. We want the truth that would set us free.<sup>3</sup>

## Doctrinal Summary

**God:** Universal Law, “personified” impersonal energy.

**Jesus:** A great man who attained a high state of awareness and realized his oneness with God.

**The Christ:** The individualized God-part of mankind.

**Holy Spirit:** Often, a synonym for God.

**Salvation:** By proper thought, increased spiritual awareness and inner development leading to knowledge of the truth of who one is.

**Man:** One essence with God.

**Sin:** Errors or mistakes resulting from unenlightened consciousness.

**The Fall:** Into wrong thinking.

**The Bible:** A spiritually relevant text when interpreted metaphysically in accordance with New Thought principles.

**Death:** Various interpretations; generally seen as personal advancement.

**Hell and Heaven:** Mental or physical conditions on earth.

## Introduction and History

I am God. I am not a god—I *am* God.<sup>4</sup>

This declaration by Robert Sicking, a minister of the Unity School of Christianity, reflects a typical sentiment within the religion of New Thought. New Thought is an umbrella designation covering hundreds, possibly thousands, of independent churches around the world. Broadly speaking, Religious Science (Science of Mind),<sup>5</sup> Divine Science, Unity School of Christianity and scores of smaller independent organizations constitute New Thought. Millions of people have been reached with the basic message of New Thought. In the 1950s and 1940s, New Thought was brought to millions by Frank B. Robinson, head of the Psychiana movement, and today hundreds of leaders have replaced him, all spreading their new “Gospel” of positive thinking with

great fervor.

Hundreds of churches and organizations make up the International New Thought Alliance (INTA) headquartered in Mesa, Arizona. Many more exist outside INTA desiring more freedom than its organizational structure and “statement of belief” would restrict them to.<sup>6</sup> Roy Eugene Davis’ “Center for Spiritual Awareness,” is one example. Often, New Thought groups can be recognized by their allegedly Christian or “New Age” names or emphases.

The Annual INTA Congresses have provided glimpses of the message and influence of New Thought. The Sixty-Fifth Congress featured influential persons such as: Dr. C. Norman Shealy, author of *Occult Medicine Can Save Your Life* and, with spiritist Carolyn Myss, *The Creation of Health*; Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, who uses spiritistic literature in his healing practice with children<sup>7</sup>; Roy Eugene Davis, head of the Center for Spiritual Awareness; Anne Francis, movie-TV actress and head of the Inner Space Foundation and other notables.<sup>8</sup>

The 83rd Annual INTA Congress (1998) held in Scottsdale, Arizona, July 14-19, offered topics such as: “Out of All Chaos We Can Produce Harmony”; “Hidden Bible Secrets”; “Developing Your Healing Hover Touch Skills” (Energy Balancing or Psychic Healing); “Prosperity Step by Step: The Secrets of the Universe in 30 Minutes”; “A Proposal to Establish a New Thought College Worthy of Universally Recognized Accreditation”; “It’s All God: The Judaic/Christian Myth in the 21st Century Paradigm.”

Some INTA celebrities have even had their own TV shows—for example, Dale Balesoles’ New Thought-oriented “There is a Way” boasted a half million daily viewers in Southern California.<sup>9</sup> There is also Della Reese, of the hit series “Touched By An Angel,” a New Thought minister since 1983 who believes she was guided by God to that vocation. The “Christian” church she founded is called: “Understanding Principles for Better Living” in Los Angeles. (According to its website, Reese was ordained by The Universal Foundation for Better Living in Chicago, an association of 22 independent New Thought churches founded by Reverend Johnnie Coleman in 1974.) Popular speakers such as moneyman Reverend Ike (“God is money”) and V. T. Minto (Alpha Truth Awareness Seminars) are also New Thought oriented. The influential New Age occultist Barbara Marx Hubbard, who receives revelation from “Christ” and has influenced millions of people, has stated, “New Thought is now or will become in the next 30 to 50 years the most important single movement on earth.”<sup>10</sup> When someone like Hubbard, the “author” of *The Book of Co-Creation*, and *The Hunger of Eve* and *The Revelation* makes a statement like that, it may be wise to listen.

Two more recent New Thought influences include the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion (SSMR), an outgrowth of the American Academy of Religion, and “Process New Thought,” which combines the process theology and panentheism of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne and emphasizes practical learning about “offering new opportunities for most wisely engaging in co-creation with God.”<sup>11</sup> Concerning the SSMR, its website states:

The SSMR was formed in the mid-1980s largely by people associated with the delivery of certain academic papers at meetings of the American Academy of Religions. These papers related to the New Thought Movement.... The “Father of New Thought” was Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a Maine clockmaker who practiced mesmerism.... Among his patients and students were former Methodist minister and Swedenborgian lay leader Warren Felt Evans, who wrote the first books in the field, and Mary Baker Eddy, who later developed Christian Science. A one-time Eddy associate, Emma Curtis Hopkins, founded the first New Thought school and taught founders of the New Thought groups known as Divine Science, Unity, and Religious Science (Science of Mind).... New Thought themes are found in teachings of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller, as well as Alcoholics Anonymous and much success literature.... The Society is

concerned with metaphysics both in its traditional philosophical meaning (the study of the basic nature of all reality) and in its popular meaning (whatever is beyond the physical)... Any group—whether esoteric, theosophical, New Age, or Christian Science—with such emphases would come within the purview of the Society...<sup>12</sup>

INTA recommends the following “basic texts” as representative of New Thought: Dr. Catherine Ponders’ *Dynamic Laws of Prosperity* (Dr. Ponders is known as a “prosperity expert” in the movement, having written extensively on all the “millionaires” in the Bible; for example, *The Millionaires of Genesis*, *The Millionaire Moses*, *The Millionaire Joshua*, *The Millionaire from Nazarus*, etc.); Fannie James’ *Fundamentals of Divine Science*; H. Emily Cady’s *Lessons in Truth*; Dr. Joseph Murphy’s *Power of the Subconscious*; Dr. Maxwell Maltz’ *Psycho-Cybernetics*; and Dr. Ernest Holmes’ *Science of Mind*.<sup>13</sup> Periodicals include *Bright Ideas*, *Creative Thought*, *Science of Mind*, *Daily Word* and *Unity*.

Leading figures within the movement include H. Emile Cady, Dr. Joseph Murphy, Dr. Evarts Loomis, Dr. Marcus Bach, Dr. Gene Emmet Clark, Dr. Vernon A. Shields, Dr. Catherine Ponder, Dr. Joel Goldsmith (head of the “Infinite Way” movement) and lesser notables such as Martha Jean “The Queen” (head of the Order of the Fishermen Ministry).

Almost every leader in the New Thought and Mind Science movement is either a “doctor,” reverend or both, but it appears that only a relatively few have legitimate Ph.D.s or the equivalent from accredited institutions. Generally speaking, in New Thought the designation of “minister” or “doctor” does not mean the person is qualified as to the normal Christian or academic meaning of that degree. It is true that some of the New Thought groups do offer more rigorous training courses for ministers at their “colleges,” but the course of instruction is often little more than instruction in their particular brand of metaphysics. For example, INTA district president Dr. Anna Maye Dahl offers B.M. degrees (that is, Bachelor of Metaphysics) along with Ph.D.s and D.D.s from her “Academy of Universal Truth,” claiming “chartered authority” to issue the degrees.<sup>14</sup>

New Thought can be historically traced to P. P. Quimby (1802-1866), often considered the founder of New Thought. A psychic (then, “magnetic”) healer in the Mesmerist movement (our own research has indicated spiritistic influences in his work),<sup>15</sup> Quimby’s “healing” of Mary Baker Eddy influenced the beginning of her “Christian Science.” In his authoritative work, *Spirits in Rebellion*, C. S. Braden traces other influences on New Thought.<sup>16</sup>

The INTA website indicates the considerable influence of New Thought, both historically and at present. Besides pointing out the influence of New Thought in Christian Science, Divine Science, Unity and Science of Mind, the website also mentions the influence of New Thought on the modern New Age movement, which is now the third largest religious “denomination” in America: “New Thought is one of the sources of present-day New Age outlooks, as well as much success literature and the positive thinking teachings of Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller, and others. New Thought also contributed significantly to the beliefs of Alcoholics Anonymous (12-step programs), especially through the writings of popular New Thought minister Emmet Fox.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the influence of New Thought on Alcoholics Anonymous, which has also had a tradition of occult and Christian interests,<sup>18</sup> is more than incidental:

The most important connection of AA and New Thought was by means of the writings of popular New Thought writer Emmet Fox [described by] Igo I. Sikorsky, Jr., in his *AA’s Godparents: Carl Jung, Emmet Fox, Jack Alexander* (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1990)... Sikorsky says, “Five of the original stories in

the Big Book were by early AA members deeply influenced by Emmet Fox (p. 25).” Sikorsky also notes (p. 19) that an early recovering alcoholic who worked with co-founder Bill Wilson was Al Steckman, whose mother was Fox’s secretary, and that as a result of this connection early AA groups would often go to listen to Fox. A valuable writing is *New Thought and 12 Step Recovery from Addiction: Practical American Spiritualities* by Kenneth E. Hart....<sup>19</sup>

(to be continued)

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> William A. Warch, *The New Thought Christian* (Anaheim, CA: Christian Living Publishing, 1977), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Murphy, *New Thought*, Winter, 1980, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Herman J. Aaftink, *New Thought a Way of Life* (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: The Centre for Positive Living), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> “Faith for Today,” November 1980, p. 25, publication of Christ Church Unity in San Diego.

<sup>5</sup> Religious Science International and United Religious Science are identical, with the exception that the former refused to join the URS in 1949 and comprises an independent group of 50+ churches.

<sup>6</sup> For a partial list, see our *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), pp. 342-342.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., the second volume, *A Course in Miracles* (see *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996)

<sup>8</sup> *New Thought*, Summer 1980, pp. 44-52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> INTA website. See the critique of Hubbard in the *SCP Journal*, Vol. 19, no. 2/3, 1995, pp. 32-49.

<sup>11</sup> *New Thought*, Spring 1978, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> INTA website.

<sup>13</sup> *New Thought*, Spring 1978, p. 11

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Summer 1980, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> See John Weldon, Zola Levitt, *Psychic Healing*, under “Mesmerism” (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> C. S. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press), 1977, ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> INTA website.

<sup>18</sup> See our *Facts on Self Esteem, Psychology and the Recovery Movement*, pp. 37, 49, note 144.

<sup>19</sup> INTA website.