

New Thought—Part 3

by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

Theology of New Thought

Christianity

Claims to being “fully Christian,” or “true Christianity,” or “based on the teachings of Jesus” and so on are abundant in New Thought groups. We have also documented this claim in the chapters on the New Thought religions Unity School of Christianity and Religious Science, and readers may turn there for examples. Here we will simply illustrate that, despite its claim to be Christian, New Thought is not Christian. New Thought leaders recognize they have reinterpreted historic Christianity and distorted it to teach their own views. For example, Roy Eugene Davis of the New Thought-oriented Center for Spiritual Awareness (also known as Christian Spiritual Alliance) calls the former Rosicrucian Neville Goddard “one of America’s great New Thought teachers” and refers to him as rising “to the peak of professional brilliance,” being a “supremely powerful influential teacher in the New Thought field.”¹ Goddard reportedly “spent at least eight hours a day reading” the Bible,² concluding that God was human imagination. “God is human imagination,” he declared, and, “When you hear any priest, any rabbi or any minister speaking of the Lord on the outside [apart from man], bear in mind they do not know the Lord.”³

William Warch, in his *The New Thought Christian*, declares that New Thought Christians “seek a new definition of God, Christ and Holy Spirit.”⁴ Reminiscent of Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science, who said, “I did not like the religions I knew of so I made up my own,” Warch tells us that we must *reject* the biblical view of God and make up our own ideas.⁵ And the Bible must not be interpreted literally because “certainly literal Biblical descriptions do nothing but terrorize the soul.”⁶ As a result, he argues that the best “visual aid” for the New Thought journey “is the Holy Bible, metaphysically interpreted.”⁷ Indeed, Warch reassures his readers that even though the fundamentals of biblical teaching may be tossed aside one can still claim to be a Christian. “If someone asks you, ‘Are you a Christian? Do you believe Jesus died for your sins? Are you born again and know that you are a sinner and live with a good deal of guilt and shame?’ you can honestly answer, ‘Even though I may not believe in those humiliating details, I am a Christian. I am a New Thought Christian because I am developing an awareness of God and my true nature.’”⁸

Veiled and not so veiled sentiments rejecting Christianity are regular features in *New Thought*, the principal journal of INTA.⁹ Generally, New Thought members believe that Christians are too rigid, that their “closed theology,” their “defining” of God and their “self-defeating experiences of their duality” (human/divine; evil/good, etc.) place them in a spiritually regressive state with little more than “grasshopper consciousness.”¹⁰ Christian theology is logically recognized as an “enemy.” “Our birthright is wholeness. Our task is to isolate and identify the enemies that keep the potential from being realized.”¹¹ Christianity is “dead dogma,” “outrageous theology,” “false beliefs” and so on.¹²

The Christian religion was not revealed by God but fabricated by man. “And that kind of religion was thought to be God’s way, God’s religion. How we like to make God into our image and likeness, and to assign Him with laws and regulations that originated from our own developing and struggling consciousness.”¹³

New Thought ministers have little problem justifying their particular theology as divine truth, but in its own way their theology is just as “rigid and closed” as the Christian beliefs they condemn. One *must* hold New Thought truths to function properly spiritually and to advance metaphysically. As a result, the ministers do not hesitate to infer that those without the proper spiritual mentality are spiritually unevolved and ignorant of divine truth.

God

I am one with God.... I am one with all life [God is] one spirit [who] dispenses himself in various bodies, all of us need to adopt the code, “I am the one with God.”... —Della Reese preaching before standing-room only crowds at her church (Internet; cf. her interview with Anita Belk, *Angel Times* magazine, Vol. 1, No. 4.)

Our future is guided by God. You can’t go wrong with that kind of compass point. —Della Reese, speaking of her and her husband, *ET Spotlight Interview* (Internet)

Perhaps the Christian doctrine most consistently rejected by New Thought is that of creation, of God and people as fundamentally distinct. Obviously, if everyone is not one essence with God, virtually every New Thought doctrine is nullified. “We shall forever be frustrated until we abandon any concept of a ‘God-out-there’ doing anything to or for us.”¹⁴ Biblically, however, God is not our enemy. We can trust in the God “out there,” and He will do abundantly well by us. All He asks is that we acknowledge our sin and creaturehood, have faith in His Son, Jesus, and live in dependence, trust and enjoyment of Him rather than attempt to control Him as some “sea of Intelligence which awaits our command.”¹⁵ Indeed, the scriptural testimony is that the God of the Bible is far more positive than New Thought practitioners are willing to grant.

That God is good to everyone is indeed the scriptural testimony. Consider just a few Scriptures which tell us that God is there, that He is personal, that He is gracious and that He desires we enjoy life. God desires that “none should perish” and that men should “love life and see good days” (1 Peter 3:10). God “gives generously to all without finding fault” (James 1:5). In all past generations, God “did good [to you] and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17 NAS). “I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and to do good while they live. That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13). Truly, “the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD” (Psalm 33:5 NAS). “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.... The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.... You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:8-9,13-14,16).

In New Thought, God is described in many ways. The almost endless variety of descriptions and definitions illustrate the individualist manner of New Thought theology. God is, in the end, whatever one wishes Him to be.¹⁶

Although New Thought readily berates Christianity for “imprisoning our consciousness in archaic human concepts of the Infinite God,”¹⁷ it fails to realize that its ambiguous theology imprisons Him even more. If God is everything, what is he not? But then, what is he? They like to quote Emerson: “To define God is to defile God.” However, this leaves us with little more than a practical agnosti-

cism that allows us to make God whatever we wish, which hardly leaves us with any God at all. One wonders what, essentially, *is* a God that is “Absolute On-goingness,” “a Something,”¹⁸ “neither person, place or thing,” “Divine Urge,” “the Only Presence” and “Infinite Mellowness”? Terms like these are about as vague as it gets. Even the more concrete New Thought descriptions of God still leave one wondering. God is supposedly “All Good” and “Beauty and Joy,” but who defines these terms except the individual New Thought practitioner, who can make them mean anything or everything? In the end, God is more like nothing than something divine to love and worship.

It is precisely because the New Thought God remains impersonal and nebulous that He cannot be related to, except perhaps in one’s imagination. (Recall Neville Goddard’s conclusion earlier.) There is no objective God “out there” to know; there is only oneself. Hence the necessity for borrowing from Christianity becomes evident, and the ineffable thing that is not a Person is called “Good,” “Wise,” “Presence,” “Loving,” “Beautiful,” “Perfect,” “Father” and so on.

In the end, God is impersonal and ultimately reduced to various human feelings and states of consciousness such as emotional love, peace, joy, contentment and psychic consciousness. However, isn’t it true that these go only so far in providing meaning to life? If there is no personal God “out there” to worship, no God to obey, no God to love, no God to look forward to eternal fellowship with, what are we really left with? There is no relationship with God at all, and that is the essence of hell. Of course, a “relationship” to “the mood of the good” or to “the Wonder of Life”—to “Something”—can be manufactured by positive thinking, but it comes solely from the human side and cannot be a relationship with the true God, which comes only through Jesus Christ

One thing we do know is that the New Thought God appreciates money. Reminiscent of Reverend Ike’s declaration that “God is money,” some New Thought teachers believe “God is financial wealth” and describe God as opulent and opulence. “New Thought calls God opulent. It is the basic idea undergirding all the concepts of a prosperity principle in the Universe. Prosperity and Supply can be demonstrated by Man when he connects himself to Nature and the Universal Life Force.”¹⁹ “There is no lack in my life now. There is only rich abundance because I am the child of my rich rich Father-Mother-God.”²⁰ New Thought may tell us that “God appears as the food on your table,”²¹ but would this comfort the hungry? Would the New Thought dictum “all appearance is erroneous,” satisfy the poverty-stricken or war ravaged?

The God of New Thought is thus unlike the God of the Bible, who in the Person of Jesus experienced poverty, hardship, suffering and shame. The God of New Thought recognizes none of this and sees only one Good, which is one reason why this God is so attractive to the affluent and to those whose goal is personal peace and security.

Jesus Christ

New Thought believes Jesus was only a man who, like some others, became “the Christ” and thus recognized his own divinity. All people are potential Christs. All people are the Son of God in nature, if not yet in consciousness, because anyone can think like Jesus and thus become like Jesus. If Jesus was “unique” in anything, it was His conscious awareness of the truths of New Thought and how He applied them.

What “saved” Jesus Christ was His recognition that He was not the mere limited creature He once thought He was but that He was truly one essence with God. “The Christ is a point of awareness in the mind of God.... That is exactly what you are in reality.... Many years ago a man named Jesus discovered that all His potential was actually within His own being.... He had developed full Christ awareness.”²² According to New Thought, numerous Scriptures describing God (for example, Isaiah 49:26) are interpreted as describing the incarnation of God in man as man. These verses are “talking about the same thing [proper awareness] that saved Him [Jesus] and worked through

Him to save others.”²³ By making every person Christ, New Thought undermines the biblical uniqueness of Jesus and His message. “Jesus didn’t ask us to follow him as a person.”²⁴ “We revere Jesus the man... as one who exemplified... the great Principle of perfection and wholeness. Jesus was a Way-Shower—the Savior—in the sense that He drew us out of our limitations.”²⁵

Biblically, however, Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) not “a” way-shower. And He teaches us to follow Him. He said, “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Biblically Jesus is “the Savior of the world” who “bore our sins in His body on the tree” so that “in Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (John 4:42; 1 Peter 2:24; Ephesians 1:7). He is God’s one and only Son, the incarnation of God (John 3:16). He alone is Christ (or Messiah); He alone was born the Messiah and fulfilled Old Testament prophecies predicting the Messiah (Luke 2:11; 24:25-27, 44-49).

But in New Thought, every person’s true nature is the “Christ”:

You are the [enlightened] Lord Jesus.²⁶

Where is the Christ? Wherever you see a man, woman or child.²⁷

The Christ is the individual expression of God in and through each one of us.²⁸

The word “Christ” is used in many ways. Some think... that Jesus had an exclusive association with the word. The New Thought Christian associates the word Christ with that perfect God part of you.... It is who you really are.²⁹

Perhaps the most bizarre New Thought view of Jesus comes from one of the most influential and celebrated New Thought practitioners, “Neville” (Neville Goddard), cited earlier:

Your own Wonderful Human Imagination is the God of the Universe. That is the one spoken of as the Lord Jesus.... I know the truth of what I speak, for I have found him of whom the prophets spoke, Jesus of Nazareth.... And that one is man’s own wonderful human imagination. That’s Jesus, and there is no other.... The Lord is your own Wonderful Human Imagination. That’s God and there is no other God. That is the Jesus of Scripture. That’s the Jehovah of the Old Testament.³⁰

Neville teaches that Jesus “incarnated” in human consciousness so that people could become God. “There is no other cross he bears other than the body you wear. He became man that man may become God. I have proved that He is my Imagination.”³¹ He also believes that no one can come to know God through the Person of Jesus, for the Person of Jesus was only “an acted parable,” and Jesus is *not* God’s only Son. “When you know God,... you aren’t going to know him through Jesus....”³²

Notes:

¹ “Neville,” edited by Marge Broome, *Immortal Man* (Lakemont, GA: CSA Press, 1977), front and back covers.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴ William A. Warch, *The New Thought Christian* (Anaheim, CA: Christian Living Publishing, 1977), p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ For example, Spring 1980, p. 20.

¹⁰ *New Thought*, Winter 1980; Summer 1979, p. 50; Winter 1979, p. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, Autumn 1979, pp. 22-23, 40; Winter 1980, p. 33.

- ¹³ Ibid., Spring 1978, p. 19.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., Winter 1980, p. 47.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 47.
- ¹⁶ John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), p. 348, chart.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Warch, p. 5; Herman J. Aaftink, *New Thought a Way of Life* (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: The Centre for Positive Living), pp. 23-24; *New Thought*, Autumn 1978, p. 36; Spring 1980, pp. 7, 24; Winter 1980, p. 33; Spring 1979, pp. 13, 17, 37; Summer 1979, pp. 3, 9, 19, 26, 58, 60; Winter 1979, p. 9; Summer 1980, pp. 23-27, 73.
- ¹⁹ *New Thought*, Summer 1980, p. 80.
- ²⁰ Ibid., Spring, 1978, p. 9.
- ²¹ Ibid., Autumn 1979, pp. 22-23, 40; Winter 1980, p. 33.
- ²² Warch, p. 15.
- ²³ *New Thought*, Summer, 1980, p. 31.
- ²⁴ Ibid., Autumn 1978, p. 12.
- ²⁵ Neville, p. 76.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 42; cf. 25.
- ²⁷ Warch, p. 7.
- ²⁸ *New Thought*, Autumn 1979, p. 16.
- ²⁹ Warch, p. 81.
- ³⁰ Neville, pp. 55 56, 58.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 76.
- ³² Ibid., pp. 40, 96.