

New Thought—Part 5

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Critique

Biblical Distortion

New Thought groups will often quote Jesus, and just as often distort Him. For example, when Jesus said, “Ask and you will receive,” they reinterpret this to mean that we are to demand or command God (Cosmic Law) to bring our divine heritage into manifestation. Ask (demand) of the One Mind (which is your real nature, thus a requesting among equals) and you shall receive abundance. Here, New Thought ignores the meaning of biblical words and their context. The asking was to be done “in My [Jesus’] name” (John 16:25), which involves a recognition of all Jesus is, including His sovereignty and possible choice not to grant our wishes. “This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us” (1 John 5:14).

New Thought also ignores the Greek definition of the word “ask.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* points out that the common word for “to ask” (as in prayer: John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-26, etc.) is *aiteo*. It is distinguished from *erotao*, which suggests that “the petitioner is on a footing of equality or familiarity with the person whom he requests”; for example, a king requesting another king in some matter. By contrast, the meaning of *aiteo* “more frequently suggests the attitude of a suppliant, the petition of one who is lesser in position than he to whom the petition is made; e.g., in the case of men asking something from God, Matthew 7:7.”¹ Jesus never used *aiteo* when making requests to the Father, which indicates His deity. But when speaking of people requesting things of the Father, He used the word *aiteo*, indicating their creaturehood. In addition, biblically, Satan is the only one who makes demands of God (Job 1:11; Matt. 4:3,6; Lk. 22:31).

The biblical distortion by New Thought ministers and practitioners is often extreme. For example, “settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while with him on the way” (Matt. 5:25) means “insisting upon seeing that there is good behind all things.”² “Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies meaning that his existence is based on lies.”³ And John 8:52 is used to prove there is no sin or duality!⁴ Yet this verse in context refers to being set free by the truth of Jesus’ teaching—just two verses later Jesus speaks of being set free from sin—something that New Thought claims that Jesus has just denied as being an illusion. John 1:5, which teaches that Jesus Christ is the Creator, is quoted to show that God is indifferent to evil!⁵ We are told that “in Hebrew, the word Abraham means ‘Father of Height’ or a heightened, exalted, prosperous state of consciousness.”⁶ To the contrary, Abraham means

“father of a multitude.”⁷ Abram, the original name of Abraham, means “Father of Height” or exalted father; but it has nothing to do with personal consciousness.

In theory, there can be as many interpretations of Scripture as there are New Thought believers, since each person is “the greatest authority as to its [the Bible’s] true metaphysical meaning.”⁸

Centering on God?

Centering one’s mind upon certain attributes of Deity is a central premise of New Thought. This teaching stresses the awareness of “God” as He or It is “defined” or interpreted in New Thought. Knowledge of God’s attributes is said to contribute to a correct perception of the world about us. Without such knowledge, we will misperceive the world, to our own detriment and downfall. For example:

If God is absolute good and *omniscient* everything is supposedly Good, for God does not “know of” sin and evil so they cannot exist.

If God is absolute good and *omnipotent*. Good is supposedly all powerful, i.e., any contrary condition of “not good” is infinitely weak by comparison, an illusion without power.

If God is all power and *omnipresent*, man is supposedly in God as God; creation is God in self-expression. The universe is God’s “body.” Man can be free from his misperceptions that evil, disease, death, pain, sorrow, etc. (whatever is “not good”) has any binding reality.

But apart from accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible, and the Bible as authoritative in an absolute sense, how does any New Thought believer *know* that these are God’s attributes? According to New Thought, God has, in truth, *no* distinct attributes (or opinions) apart from those subjectively decided upon by the “enlightened” consciousness. Of what value is this? Each person is God, dictating his or her own theology. We are free to invent God as we wish, just as we are free to label whatever we personally do not like as “unreal,” or whatever troubles us as “undivine.” But this does not give us a way to determine the divine attributes objectively and authoritatively. So should we determine it on the basis of the pronouncements of New Thought leaders historically? That won’t help either because they don’t agree. The point is this. If there is no logical basis in New Thought for assurance as to God’s attributes, then there can be no logical basis for the New Thought *interpretation of those* attributes. And without divine authority for this interpretation, New Thought crumbles into the competing subjective opinions of all its members. How can anyone “center on God” when no one knows for sure who or what God is?

Further, if it is human beings who define reality, then people, places, things, events and situations can be divine or not (good or evil) merely depending on how one personally feels. Thus, good or bad emotions, subjective conjecture, prejudices or even evil acts can receive a “divine” blessing, if that’s how one feels about it. This has unsavory implications, to say the least.

There are many logical problems to all of this. For example, some New Thought teachers ascribe God as “Matter-Spirit.” If matter is God manifesting, as in Process New Thought, how can the “not fully enlightened” (most of us) deny God, who is fully enlightened, His expressions in matter: suffering, decay, lack, evil, disease and death? If these expressions are God (Good), why even try to deny them, let alone try to escape them? Why not *embrace them*, if everything is “God-in-action” or “God becoming”? On the other hand, if New Thought ministers misperceive God—if they misperceive “Good” (God) as “Bad”—how can anyone considered them divinely

enlightened? And where and how did this misperception of divine reality ever originate? If they are not fully enlightened, where does their assurance about what God is come from?

Further, is the misperception from the mind or from God? If from the mind, then what of the premise that “it is through the mind that we can claim our prosperous heritage of lavish abundance”?⁹ If from God, who has any hope at all? If the misperception stems from God—our true nature—where is one’s trust possibly to be founded? And why do we need to remind ourselves we are God? If we were God, one would think that no reminder would be necessary. If the mind so forcefully misperceives fundamental earthly reality, how can it possibly be trusted to perceive spiritual heavenly reality accurately?

New Thought Religion, Reality and Rationality

The experience of every man, woman, son and daughter is an experience of life *inconsistent* with the premises of New Thought. Every New Thought believer realizes his mind is finite, not infinite; that he is limited, not unlimited; that he is morally imperfect, not perfect. This is the testimony of human knowledge, history, common sense and individual experience. As people we are fallen and our minds are subject to all kinds of frailties. If New Thought believers can unleash divine perfection with the mind, why doesn’t it work?

There are all kinds of problems with New Thought here. For instance, on the basis of clinical evidence a New Thought father will admit his daughter was raped, but he will also deny rape as an illusion, as an unnecessary misperception. How does this help his daughter? Reality can be denied only until one is forced to accept it. No New Thought believer would deny that someone who fell into a pit of cobras would die a painful death, no matter how illusory they thought the cobra venom to be. Yet until he fell into that pit of cobras, a New Thought believer might deny any necessary reality to pain, illness or death. It is reasonable to ask why the New Thought believer would be the last person in the world to jump into a pit of cobras. Is it because divine perfection would be difficult to find in a pit of angry cobras? But if New Thought is true, why should it matter?

It matters because evil *is* real. The folly of New Thought religions is the extent of their denial of reality.

We wonder how the New Thought practitioner really feels during those uncomfortable moments when faced so frequently with what his beliefs say to deny. What about the enthusiastic parishioner who dies of heart disease despite an exemplary mental outlook? What about the friend who was shot and robbed in spite of all the mental affirmations before, during or after the crime; or the financial struggles of divorced Mrs. Jones?

When such failures are encountered they are characteristically interpreted in New Thought as “karmic necessity,” lack of faith or false perception. Dr. Joseph Murphy tells us, “The world is not harsh, but it may seem to be because we fail to affirm or claim the presence of God.”¹⁰ Again, perhaps the real failure here is in not accepting reality. The simple truth is that when New Thoughts believers are confronted by reality, it is they who must admit that New Thought, rather than Christianity, is the deceptive philosophy. Is it wise to become experts at avoiding reality? Would the consequences of such a life be “all Good”? Isn’t even a fool wise in his own eyes?

A further problem is that “accepting” evil sabotages itself because giving *any* power to evil only perpetuates its reality. Thus New Thought places itself in a self-defeating position; like a parasite, it slowly kills the host (the Only Good) upon whose survival it depends. This makes New Thought a terminal illness philosophically.

New Thought believers are just as often “corrupted” by duality as those they criticize. The essential dichotomy between God and man, which they so consistently attack in Christianity, is abundantly present in their own religious philosophy and personal lifestyles. New Thought believers must constantly refer to man as *realizing* God, *depending* on God, letting *God* run their lives and so on. Even in New Thought, believers are fallen (in consciousness), need salvation (from error) and are “separate” from God in daily life. If New Thought is true, why does it never work when it really matters?

Incredibly, one New Thought writer declares that “right thought and beneficent motives can change and correct the course of any problem looming in our individual lives or in the national and international scene.”¹¹ This writer suggests that even the Jonestown tragedy could have been prevented had all the participants used “positive” mental energy rather than “negative” energy. She does not seem to consider that, for years, Jonestown members had had a positive mental outlook and good motives; they were simply too naive about false teachings and false prophets. They had all the positive thinking and Utopian hopes one could wish for; that’s the very reason they went to Guyana. The problem was that they followed a wolf in sheep’s clothing (cf. Matt. 7:15). Anyone who could accept a “Christian” pastor who would throw the Bible on the floor and spit on it, and who “believed he was ‘guided’ by a supernatural ‘spirit,’”¹² could accept anything.

This is the problem with New Thought. How many people who have truly believed that “no harm can come to me because I do not believe in evil”¹³ currently reside in prison, the hospital or the morgue? New Thought believers are unable to manifest “the Good” when facing prison, depression, a lawsuit, a divorce, a son or daughter’s drug addiction or a thousand other “illusions.” Real solutions to problems are not found, because the real problems are not acknowledged sufficiently to begin with; they are glossed over with thoughts of omnipresent goodness.

Our prison population includes thieves, sociopaths, murderers, rapists, the criminally insane and child molesters. Are not some of them, in fact, pretty evil, or, as New Thought teaches, are they merely portions of God who have just forgotten their divine perfection? A New Thought believer tells us in the following words: “Do you approach them as though they were recalcitrants, difficult, troublesome, evil people? Do you think of them as dangerous criminals, attaching their records to them, such as murderer, burglar, or child molester? The answer is a very strong ‘no’.”¹⁴ In other words, since we are all divine, naturally, “no one is evil.”¹⁵ “Anyone who believes that he is bad is supporting a belief in evil.”¹⁶ Every prisoner can be told, no matter how vicious and unrepentant he is, “You are Good. You are not evil; no one is evil.”¹⁷

While the author is also pointing out that approaching criminals with kindness can be productive, it hardly helps New Thought ethically. When the fallen self is divinized, the fallen nature can run rampant in full. During the period of the judges in ancient Israel, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25 NAS) and the terrible consequences were apparent everywhere. Baptizing sin with divinity only compounds it. In ancient Israel, the result of a bad philosophy was sin and anarchy, not righteousness and peace, just as it will be in America. All the kindness in the world will not change an evil, manipulative person who has no desire to change.

To justify their beliefs, New Thought members often interpret pure coincidence as “proof” of New Thought doctrines. One example is a sailor who accidentally locked himself in a submarine compartment with no way out. Turning to New Thought, he repeated that he was “a divine being... not confined in any way.”¹⁸ After some time a workman passed by and let him out. This incident was hailed as one of many such occasions that proves we are not bound by time, space or form. To the contrary, spending one’s time in affirming illusions wastes precious time

and prevents logical, rational ways of dealing with a potentially life-threatening event.

Supposedly, “The universe agrees with us. Whatever we agree to, the universe obliges us by its ready agreement... but we must be willing to live our assurance night and day.”¹⁹ What of the Kansas farmer standing in the path of an oncoming tornado affirming total New Thought protection for his farm and family? What of the New Thought alcoholic, destitute and confined in treatment, affirming, “There is no lack in my life now. There is only rich abundance because I am the child of my rich Father-Mother-God?”²⁰

Dr. Joseph Murphy tells of one person’s legal difficulties during a five-year lawsuit. When he came to Dr. Murphy, he discovered he had simply not been believing *hard* enough that others had no legal claim over him. Once “he ceased giving his relatives any power to hurt him or deprive him of his good, a power which they never had except in his own thought,” the legal suit was soon dropped.²¹ Obviously, the dismissal had nothing to do with the length and cost of litigation, only with the mental power that the legal universe submitted to.

New Thought philosophy can filter out all kinds of common sense behavior. For instance, the history of economics has proven the wisdom of saving money. In the world in which we live, it is an unfortunate household that has no savings account. But savings may be *contrary* to New Thought principles, as such action presupposes lack and uncertainty about the future. Therefore, “Never save money! It is vital that the law of circulation, of giving and receiving, is not blocked by the choice to hoard. Your money must be placed into the stream of activity or it will diminish.”²² In other words, if one wants a guaranteed, plentiful supply of money, one should be certain to spend it all! Thrift should be denied; money should be spent as soon as it is received. It should, in particular, be given quickly to New Thought churches, for “not to tithe, not to put God first financially brings the death of your good in many forms.”²³

Morality

New Thought denies the Christian view of morality in many ways. No better example can be found than by quoting “Neville’s” view of an amoral Christ, a logical extension of New Thought monistic philosophy. In spite of the clear biblical testimony to the sinless perfection of Jesus, “Neville” blasphemously declares that “Jesus” waits upon him even when he personally wills what is evil. “He creates all things.... Yes, good, bad, indifferent. He waits on me just as quickly and just as indifferently when the will in me is evil as when it is good.”²⁴

Dr. Roy Graves tells us, with emotion, of the travesty of all the Christian ministries “built upon celestial [divine] rewards and punishments” (heaven and hell), and he offers instead the truth “that *nature* rewards and chastises man” in accordance with the principles of New Thought.²⁵ New Thought cannot tolerate a holy God meting out *just* rewards and punishments; it would apparently rather have an impersonal nature or cosmic law supporting amoral judgments, because “sin and standards of morality are relative.”²⁶

In a similar manner, Dr. Emma Smiley deplores the kind of gratitude in which we feel thankful for what we have that others do not have. Indeed, because of their superior consciousness New Thought believers *deserve* what others don’t have. But New Thought not only makes one feel superior to the less fortunate, it also invalidates their cause altogether. “All is Good and Beautiful. There is no pain, suffering or lack.” If, as one New Thought writer declares, “Love and consciousness are one and the same thing,” it is easy to conclude that loving actions toward the needy are not so important,²⁷ because to live in higher consciousness is by definition to be loving toward others, regardless of our actions. We can simply tell them, “There is one primary cause of your suffering and that is that you have lost sight of your divinity.”²⁸

Notes:

- ¹ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 79.
- ² William A. Warch, *The New Thought Christian* (Anaheim, CA: Christian Living Publishing, 1977), p. 59.
- ³ *New Thought*, Winter 1980, p. 46.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ "Neville," edited by Marge Broome, *Immortal Man* (Lakemont, GA: CSA Press, 1977), p. 15.
- ⁶ *New Thought*, Summer 1980, p. 19.
- ⁷ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 18.
- ⁸ Warch, p. 75.
- ⁹ *New Thought*, Summer 1980, p. 14.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Winter 1980, p. 31.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, Spring 1980, p. 14.
- ¹² *Christianity Today*, December 15, 1978, p. 38.
- ¹³ Warch, p. 61.
- ¹⁴ *New Thought*, Summer 1980, p. 8.
- ¹⁵ Warch, p. 56.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *New Thought*, Summer 1980, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, Spring 1978, p. 9.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, Summer 1980, p. 18.
- ²² Warch, p. 98.
- ²³ *New Thought*, Autumn 1978, p. 44.
- ²⁴ Neville, p. 15.
- ²⁵ *New Thought*, Autumn 1978, p. 44.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, Spring 1978, pp. 18-19.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Summer 1979, p. 55.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.