



STATEMENT DC720

A Course in Miracles: “Christian” – Glossed Hinduism For The Masses¹

What is it about *A Course in Miracles*? In the past century a glut of spiritistic “Bibles” have been published to help usher in the anticipated “New Age” of occult enlightenment, but none have rivaled the popularity and influence achieved by the *Course*. It has sold 1.25 million sets and has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Hebrew, and many other languages.² 1900 study groups now exist in the United States and Europe.³

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’s million-copy bestseller, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (Harper-Collins, 1992), is heavily based on the *Course* (see accompanying article). Her promotions of the *Course* on TV are also numerous. Popular TV host Oprah Winfrey was so enthralled with this book that she bought a thousand copies for her friends and others, many of noted influence.⁴

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 Crystal Cathedral. Jampolsky’s bestselling books, *There Is a Rainbow Behind Every Cloud*, *Goodbye 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.

The *Course* has influenced the Christian church as well. “Evangelical” Christians, such as author Virginia Mollenkott in *Speech, Silence, Action*, attest to its alleged benefits in their lives.⁶ Some mainline churches use it as part of their educational programs, since numerous Catholic and Protestant clergy have given it glowing endorsements. In fact, the *Course* specifically commends itself toward acceptance within the Christian church. Distinctively Christian terminology is used throughout.

So back to our opening question, What is it that makes *A Course in Miracles* so successful? All in all, the *Course* is a masterpiece of spiritual strategy. It claims to be a revelation from Jesus Christ Himself, and it is intelligently organized and simply written. It appeals to personal pride and can become almost addicting emotionally. It is carefully designed for radically restructuring a person’s perception against Christian faith and toward New Age occultism.

We might say the text was designed not only for spiritually searching individuals of a secular or psychic persuasion, but especially for nominal Christians in the church who have recognized the bankruptcy of theological liberalism and desire more spiritual “reality” in their lives. In essence, the *Course* simultaneously indoctrinates its students in Eastern metaphysics and human potential psychicism, while it specifically insulates them against biblical revelation and true Christianity. In achieving this end, its manipulation of psychological and emotional states is impressive, it offers carefully thought-out spiritual exercises, one for every day of the year.

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BACKGROUND

A Course in Miracles was channeled (spiritistically delivered) through an atheistic psychologist named Helen Schucman. Dr. Schucman, who had an early background in New Thought metaphysics and the occult,⁷ would not permit public knowledge of her role as the medium and eight-year channel for the *Course* until after her death. She died in 1981.

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.” From this experience ensued a form of inner dictation. Although it was not a form of automatic writing, the otherworldly nature of the phenomenon made her “very uncomfortable.”⁸

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*.⁹ 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 mentally but very clearly. It’s a kind of inner dictation you might say.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹

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 very uncomfortable with the “Christian” tone of the messages.

Her coscribe on the project was Dr. William Thetford, an agnostic teacher and research assistant to the famed psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers. 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 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. Thetford’s prestigious standing in the medical community and his wide influence gave him many opportunities to publicize the *Course*.

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 the Christian faith. Furthermore, the “voice,” as is generally the case in spiritism, was merciless and unrelenting. This was clearly a force controlling Schucman, not a personally desired writing project to reinvent Christianity.

TEACHINGS

A Course in Miracles teaches people that for physical and spiritual health, they must accept “proper” attitudes toward themselves, life in general, and the world. What are these “proper” attitudes? In essence, they constitute (1) the rejection of biblical understandings about such issues as sin, guilt, and atonement, and (2) the acceptance of New Age occult teachings, such as pantheism (All is God, God is All) and psychic development. Specifically, the *Course* offers a form of “Westernized” Hinduism with the distinct goal of changing its readers’ perceptions into conformity with the nondualistic (*advaita*) school of Vedanta Hinduism. This school maintains that the world is ultimately a dream or illusion and that all men and women are in reality divine — manifestations of the godhead. Another chief goal of the *Course* is to encourage the student to accept psychic (spiritistic) guidance.

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Volume 1 is the “text” itself, which presents spiritual (metaphysical) and theological teachings, including heretical treatments of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross as a vicarious atonement, the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of salvation.

Volume 2 is a “Workbook for Students,” which offers 365 spiritual lessons and exercises to help the participant personally and experientially assimilate this new worldview and cultivate an openness to psychic and spiritual guidance. Volume 2 has two specific goals: (1) learning New Age Hinduism and (2) unlearning biblical Christianity.

Volume 3 is a “Manual for Teachers” of the *Course*. It offers them a sense of “divine destiny” for their spiritual “mission,” *Course* teachers are referred to as “teachers of God.”

In addition to the set of three volumes described above, another manual, *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice*, is suggested by *Course* promoters for integrating its concepts with modern psychotherapy. This is for the professional therapist who wishes to use *Course* teachings in his or her counseling practice.¹²

The *Course’s* encouragement toward psychic guidance is obvious. Writing in *New Realities*, Brian Van der Horst observes “Above all, the *Course* instructs students in the discovery of their own inner guidance, the revelation of a spiritual voice that counsels one in all situations. The Voice or God or Holy Spirit, as it is called, that gives everything from direction for making decisions on business, career, and life purpose, to advice to the lovelorn.”¹³

THEOLOGICAL CONTENT

Eastern philosophy, particularly Hinduism, plays an important role in the *Course*. Robert Skutch, publisher of the *Course*, writes:

What they now had in their possession was a spiritual document that was very closely related to the teachings of the non-dualistic Vedanta of the Hindu religion, and that the profundity of the Vedanta certainly paralleled the obvious profundity of the *Course*. He [Thetford] realized the basic spiritual teachings of both had many striking similarities to each other, and that the main difference between them was that the *Course* was stating the perennial philosophy of eternal truths in Christian terminology with a psychological application that seemed expressly aimed at a contemporary audience.¹⁴

In *Course* usage, words undergo drastic changes of purpose. Often, the new meanings are the opposite of their biblical usage. For example, “atonement” no longer refers to Jesus Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross for sin. In biblical teaching, the Atonement is based on the fact that man’s sinfulness separates him from God. Before man can be reconciled to God, there must be a divine judgment of sin. Christ sacrificed His own life on the cross — He was judged in our place — to accomplish this reconciliation. This is what Christians mean by the word “atonement,” or the atoning sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16, 18).

In the *Course*, the word “atonement” involves the exact opposite: one is not, and never has been, separate from God. An atoning sacrifice in the biblical sense is therefore meaningless. For the *Course*, the term “atonement” now refers to *correcting* the belief that people are separate from God, which is presumed to be a false belief. Hence, because “the Atonement” is not yet completed (i.e., some people still think they are separate from God), *Course* students are told they have an important role to play “in the Atonement.”¹⁵ Their job is to help reconcile men and women to the spiritual truth that they are God and therefore cannot be separate from Him.

According to the Bible, God freely pardons, or forgives, a believer’s sins on the basis of Jesus Christ’s atonement. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:8-10). Denying the reality of sin, the *Course*

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rejects this central biblical teaching, just as it rejects the biblical concept of the Atonement. For the *Course*, “forgiveness” merely involves the realization that there never were any sins to pardon. Likewise, “sinners” do not exist, because sin is an illusion.

As a result of this distorted theology, the *Course’s* approach to “salvation” lies in understanding that no one requires salvation in the biblical sense because all men and women are already divine. “Salvation” is merely accepting one’s “true” identity as one essence with God. Therefore, we need nothing *from* God because each person’s true nature *is* God.¹⁶

Sin, guilt, death, judgment, propitiatory atonement, and other biblical doctrines are viewed as “attack” philosophies by the *Course*; that is, they are concepts that supposedly stand in the way of spiritual “progress” and severely damage the realization of our “true” divine nature. People must become free of these false, enslaving, and evil ideas if they desire true spiritual freedom. Otherwise, they choose to “remain in hell” and to “kill” the God of love.¹⁷

In this worldview, orthodox Christian beliefs (biblical teachings given by the one true God) are held to be “evil,” “insane,” and “anti-Christ.” Such *Course* teachings prove that the Jesus of the New Testament could not be its source. This means that the apparent¹⁸ entity who dictated the *Course* to Helen Schucman lied when he claimed to be Jesus Christ. The most logical possibility for the true author of the *Course* is therefore a demon, a spiritual underling of Satan, the one Jesus called a liar and “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

THE OCCULT NATURE OF THE COURSE

The spiritistic nature of the *Course* should now be obvious. Several themes that it has in common with spiritistic revelations are: (1) spirit dictation to an uninterested or hesitant party; (2) forcing production of the revelations; (3) unbiblical content; and (4) encouraging psychic guidance. The wholesale denial of God’s Word and God’s Son is also typical of spiritistic revelations in general.¹⁹

Again, these spiritistic themes identify the author of the *Course* as a demonic spirit. When the *Course*, as a supernatural revelation, actively promotes another Jesus, a different spirit, and a false gospel, the Scripture declares that its origin must be demonic (2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15). Significantly, even *Course* editor and promoter, psychologist Kenneth Wapnick, commented that “if the Bible were considered literally true, then the *Course* would have to be viewed as demonically inspired.”²⁰ This is why the Bible warns, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world....Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:1-3).

Because false christs and false prophets *are* in the world, and lying spirits associated with them. Scripture warns that all who proclaim a false gospel are liable to eternal judgment: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8).

That the eventual production of the *Course* was supernaturally arranged behind the scenes by demonic initiative should be obvious to those familiar with the methods of spiritual warfare revealed in Scripture, and in the history of occult revelations. The extent of this occult collaboration, and the power it represents on the part of the spirit world to influence human affairs, is not small. In light of biblical revelation, neither is it unexpected (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19). Similar manipulation of events and people are found in the lives of innumerable psychics, occultists, and mediums.²¹

The *Course* content also promotes occultism and spiritistic guidance, which is another characteristic goal of demonic revelations. As an example of the psychic guidance people have been led to accept through the *Course*, many people have received the author of the *Course* (“Jesus”) as their personal spirit guide — in other words, a demon cleverly impersonating Jesus. In his *Good-Bye to Guilt*, Gerald Jampolsky confesses that “Jesus” became his spirit guide and even possessed him in order to act and speak through him.²²

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Dr. Jampolsky has had such amazing experiences by listening to his inner voice that he now follows its guidance "even when it seems irrational."²³ Even the dead themselves allegedly can be contacted, although the practice is explicitly condemned in Deuteronomy 18:10 – 12. He states that "communication is never broken, even when the body is destroyed, provided that we do not believe that bodies are essential for communication. Isn't that what Jesus taught the world by the resurrection?"²⁴

No, this is not what Jesus taught. What Jesus taught by His resurrection was that "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6); and "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). Jesus would never promote contact with the dead when the Word of God specifically prohibits it. The Bible warns that no one is to become "a medium or a spiritist, or [a person] who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord" (Deut, 18:11 -12).

Notes

- 1 This article is derived from John Ankerberg and John Weldon's *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996). Used by permission.
- 2 Telephone interview, Foundation for Inner Peace, 23 November 1998.
- 3 Telephone interview, Miracle Distribution Center, 23 November 1998.
- 4 Martin Gardner, "Marianne Williamson and 'A Course in Miracles,'" *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall 1992, 21.
- 5 Frances Adeney, "Re-visioning Reality: A Critique of A Course in Miracles," *SCP Newsletter* 7, no.2 (1981): 3.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Gardner, 21.
- 8 Robert Basil, ed., *Not Necessarily the New Age: Critical Essays* (New York: Prometheus. 1988), 23.
- 9 *A Course in Miracles*, vol. 2: *Workbook for Students* (Huntington Station, NY: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1977), 477-78.
- 10 James Bolen, "Interview: William N. Thetford (Part 1)," *New Realities*, July-August 1984, 20.
- 11 Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 2.
- 12 For a critique of modern secular psychology see John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Self-Esteem, Psychology and the Recovery Movement* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995).
- 13 Brian Van Der Horst, "Update on 'A Course in Miracles,'" *New Realities*, August 1979, 50.
- 14 Bolen, 24.
- 15 *A Course in Miracles*, vol. 1, *Text* (Huntington Station, NY: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1977), 7, 10.
- 16 Ibid., chaps. 13, 22-23.
- 17 Ibid., chaps. 5-6; pp. 374-78.
- 18 Although secular skeptics would argue that at best the *Course* is a creation of Schucman's subconscious, the Christian has every biblical reason to suspect that Schucman truly was guided by an otherworldly intelligence (see below).
- 19 John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), appendix.
- 20 Dean C. Halverson, "Seeing Yourself as Sinless," *SCP Journal* 7, no. 1 (1987): 23.
- 21 For example, see accounts printed by the editors of *Psychic* magazine, *Psychics: In-depth interviews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
- 22 Gerald Jampolsky, *Good-Bye to Guilt: Releasing Fear through Forgiveness* (New York: Bantam, 1985), 62-64.
- 23 Ibid., 56.
- 24 Ibid., 136.