

Miracles, Mysteries and Moralities. From Puritanism to New Age – a Study in History of Religion of Helen Shucman and *A Course in Miracles*. A Summary.

Introduction

This thesis is focused on *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)*, a book that was said to be *channelled* by Helen Shucman (1909-1981) during 1965-1972. Shucman received what she described as an inner dictation, which she wrote down in shorthand. Both Shucman and William “Bill” Thetford (1923-1988) who was copy-typing the text, were professors of medical psychology at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York during the time these events took place.

ACIM came to comprise of around 1, 200 pages subdivided into three parts; Textbook, Workbook and Manual for Teachers. The Course is described as a program of self-tuition, where the 365 lessons provided in the Workbook are aimed to change a person’s mind and perception. *ACIM* aspire to be “*a course in miracles*” in a literal sense. Miracles are described as something natural and timeless. They occur when perception is changed to be aligned with the truth of God, although the need of miracles is temporary. When a person fully communicates with God, says *ACIM*, there is no longer a need for miracles.

ACIM states that true reality is synonymous with God, which in turn is synonymous with love. When a person acts with love, God is cherished, but when a person acts differently; with aggression, hatred, pride or guilt, the ego is promoted. The ego is the false Self of humans which, according to *ACIM*, keeps us away from God. The ego also causes friction in all relationships between us. The solution suggested by the Course lies within a choice of mind; if a person chooses love instead of fear the result will be peace and harmony.

During the 1960-s and early 1970-s a cultural shift occurred. There was a rebellion towards traditional values and ditto behaviour in society. Especially young people protested against colonialism, imperialism, division of class, race and gender and all sorts of standardization of society. Pioneers from the hippie movement proclaimed *peace, love and understanding*. Freedom was a keyword. The conceived restrictions of formal religion were exchanged to freer forms of spirituality. Later on many of the spiritualities emerging during that time have been labelled New Age, but at that point of social and religious upheaval this was hardly an inclusive label, rather a definite, apocalyptic expectation of the results of the changing times, of a new age to come.

At first there was a centering around *planetary consciousness*, an environmentally-friendly way of living with an extended loyalty towards all people of the world, rather than a nation or a separate society. Communities built around these initial ideals were also established, as Findhorn and Auroville. Later, New Age has come to be associated with the cultivating of the Self as well as with *prosperity consciousness*. This is a way of thinking that can be said to have been introduced by New Thought, and thereafter entered New Age. The underlying mode of thinking is that when a person is aligned with God – or the Universe – energy will start to flow freely. This means all good things will come into life, including not only health and a sense of spiritual connection but also money and desired material things.

A Course in Miracles was scribed during the above-mentioned times of social upheaval and transformation. This study places the course in the context of New Age but also carefully examines the historical *roots and routes* of New Age. Christian Science, a theology formulated by Mary Baker Eddy, is of special interest as the kinship with the theology of *ACIM* is close.

The First Part, Chapter One

A main theme of this work is the examination of the persons and events behind *A Course in Miracles*. My thesis is that *ACIM* can be linked to its context; historically, religiously and personally, although its presentation seems to claim independence. Shucman states in the introduction of the book that she was an atheist psychologist working in an academic setting, meaning she was therefore unlikely to experience anything spiritual. I show that not only was there an extensive religious influence during both Shucman's and Thetford's upbringings, including interactions with Christian Science, but I also discuss Shucman's experiences from a standpoint of Psychology of Religion. I will assert that the proclamation of Shucman as some sort of religious *tabula rasa* may not only be wrong, but also uncalled for, as it rather is her previous religious background that in a sense determined her for mystical experiences.

This work is also based on the assumption that there are important mentalities, half conscious and half semi-conscious, displaying themselves as ideas, conceptions and attitudes, or *moeurs* to follow Alexis de Touqueville. These have been associated with the American society, shared by its people from colonial times, and continually reproduced as core values within the culture. The values can be traced back to the Puritans, and have constituted a cultural mainstream based in the Protestant faith. Still, mentalities, I argue, are necessary to include in the formulation of alternative religious manifestations, if they are to be accepted by a wider audience. The inclusion of mentalities is probably, at least partly, not conscious, but even if a new theology proclaims to introduce an updated alternative, it still needs to address the habitual values. The mapping of mentalities in this work is applied from Puritanism to New Age, including their permeation of *A Course in Miracles*, by an examination of *moeurs*.

The source material around *ACIM* is not independent, and in consequence not objective. All Shucman's personal material – as original handwritten notes, letters, diaries etcetera - is currently held under copyright by Foundation of A Course in Miracles and Kenneth Wapnick. Wapnick became a good friend of Shucman and was working alongside her during the final revision of the course. For many years, students of *ACIM* were led to believe that no major changes of the text were conducted. However, this notion was completely altered in the year 2000, when an earlier text, the so-called *Urtext*, was released on the internet. Another crisis of confidence occurred when Wapnick and his co-boarders applied for a summons to be issued against users of *ACIM*-material. All of these events are examined in this study, but at this moment I just want to conclude that the *ACIM*-related sources, even contemporary writers such as D. Patrick Miller and Carol M. Howe, are partly dependent on material that is only available through Wapnick. However, by carefully studying and comparing these sources, I have been able to assemble what I consider to be a more composed view of the subject.

My starting points are manifold. To examine the many layers of history and religion, I try to show that even though American history has become impregnated by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant domination through its institutions, there are multitudes of other (religious) narratives that challenge this. Still, I argue, as above mentioned, that certain mentalities are displayed in core values which have their basis in colonial society. From those days these *moeurs* have been reproduced over times, and constitute something with a uniting ring, a marker of what is thought of as “American”. On the other end there is religious pluralism, alternatives of religious directions or currents. I follow Catherine L. Albanese (1999) in her application of concepts; *manyness of religion* which refers to the pluralism, not only the many different religions but also their counterparts and divisions, as well as *oneness of religion*. The latter refers to the Protestant dominion and its unifying ambition.

Other concepts used in this work inspired by Albanese are *boundaries*, religion as composed by *creeds*, *codes*, *cultuses* and *communities*, as well as *ordinary* and *extraordinary religion*. Mary Farrell Bednarowski (1989) has discussed new religions by examining their *theological imagination*. She has found that they seem to have a tendency towards *dyadic thinking*. Especially noticeable is the use of *oldness* and *newness*, where innovative models of the universe presented by new religions are legitimised by a search backwards in time. Bednarowski also discusses another polarity of great concern; *individualism* and *community*. She draws back on Robert Bellah *et al.* who are another inspiration for this study, with *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985/1996).

From Anthony Giddens (1997) I discuss the concept of *disembedding*, which is the understanding of representations that are not stuck in specific context, but can be moving, changing places within or between cultures. Johan Fornäs (1995) has even further made visible the complexity of cultural movement. He argues that every cultural phenomenon includes *roots* and *routes*. There exist no such things as rigidity and simplicity within culture. Instead we have to acknowledge the many dimensions, their multitude, differentiation and interaction.

Another angle of approach towards the understanding of Shucman, comes from Psychology of Religion. I use Attribution Theory with its observation of *situational influences* and *dispositional influences*. The former includes *contextual factors* and *event character factors*, the latter looks at *personal*, *background*, *cognitive/linguistic* and *attitudinal factors*. I also apply Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s theory as presented in *Birth of the Living God. A Psychoanalytic Study* (1979) on Shucmans early experiences during childhood. My final approach in this particular field is inspired by Antoon Geels (2001) whose study of mysticism has led to several valuable conclusions. Here I find, by using the given criteria, that Shucman can be said to have been *predisposed* for her mystical auditory.

The First Part, Chapter Two

In the second chapter I strive to make a résumé of earlier scholarly approaches to the New Age-studies. I make brief summaries of the following scholars: Catherine L. Albanese, James R. Lewis, J. Gordon Melton, Paul Heelas, Michael York, Olav Hammer, Lena Löwendahl, Liselotte Frisk, Henrik Bogdan, Magnus Gudmundsson, Robert C. Fuller, Susan Love Brown, Robert Forman, Richard Kyle and Steven J. Sutcliffe. Earlier in chapter one I comment on Wouter J. Hanegraaff as well and I return to him, Hammer, Frisk and Melton in a discussion on globalization.

One main issue discussed here is how New Age is to be defined. The early definition, brought forth by Michael York and Lena Löwendahl for instance, that New Age can be seen as a New Religious Movement seems to have lost most of its bearing. The organization and structure of NRM's are missing, a person cannot be a member of New Age, and there is no defined leadership, no founder, and no coherent identity. Other scholars like Albanese or Olav Hammer want to discuss New Age as a religion. By applying the above mentioned terminology from Albanese – *creed, code, cultus, community* - it is possible to do that. Yet the question is raised whether this is eligible, or if so, is it a religion or an *alternative* religion? Some scholars point out that New Age's increasing popularity works as a prohibitive factor for being alternative, it cannot be labelled *fringe* anymore, as its beliefs are widely spread and accepted by many, hence the use of terms like *mainstream* or *popular*. Steven J. Sutcliffe objects to the NRM-, the religion-, as well as the networking-definitions. He concludes that New Age today is "*a popular, functional, everyday spirituality*" and that what we see is "*a diffuse collectivity of questioning individuals*" (Sutcliffe,2003;223).

In chapter two there is also a discussion about New Age and globalization. *ACIM* could well be seen as an object of this globalization, as there are study groups around the world and translations of the text that also cross the Euro-American borders.

The Second Part, Chapter Three- Six

In this part of the study I begin with examining the presentation of Helen Shucman as an atheistic academic. I try to sort out the misunderstanding of terminology, which occurred when the American professional title of "Professor" was transferred into a Swedish setting. In Sweden this means "Full Professor", whereas this was not the case with Shucman's position. Nevertheless, she had completed her doctoral degree and the mix-up is of minor importance as it probably is a confusion of language, rather than an intentional attempt of deception.

I then argue against the notion that Shucman could be considered to be an atheist. During childhood she was described in part to be a lonely child. Her only brother was fourteen years older, and her company consisted first and foremost of Miss Richardson, her governess. Miss Richardson was a Catholic, and Shucman was quite intrigued by its symbols of faith. She wanted a rosary herself, but was told that those were only for Catholics. When Miss Richardson went to church, Shucman had to wait in the foyer but she was exposed to the candles, flowers, music and not the least a beautiful statue of a lady, the Virgin Mary. Later when she was frightened by stories of hell, she decided to lean on her father who was Jewish. Under a shorter period of time she tried to apply that faith, mainly by using the prayer "*Lord God of Israel*". As the prayer did not prevent a surgical removal of her appendix, she gave up on Judaism.

When Shucman was twelve years old the family went to Lourdes. Shucman asked for a miracle, she asked for a meteor. She prayed, opened her eyes, and the sky was full of shooting stars. After initial awe and gratitude she started to rationalize the event, and the conversion she promised in return was put off. Instead she started on a new religious project with the Baptist housekeeper. They read the Bible every night, and Shucman started to realize: If she really was to experience God, she ought to get baptized. She did, but still the deep connection with God that she longed for, escaped her. Finally, she gave up on Baptism too.

Her mother was a spiritual seeker, trying out Theosophy, and Unity (New Thought) but also in between that, Christian Science. With the commentators of Shucman's life and accomplishments, there seem to be a mutual interest displayed in diminishing the influence on Shucman by her mother. This influence must, I mean, be taken into serious consideration, especially as the end product *ACIM* turns out to be very close in theology to Christian Science.

As a grown up, Shucman married a man who owned a bookstore, specialized not only in Americana but also books of metaphysics. Shucman herself went into an intensive Catholic phase. This religious phase seems to have ended with an operation, which didn't go according to plan. Shucman expressed at this point that she was giving up on God, and that if he wanted something to do with her, he had to come forward himself. I conclude that this is not a statement made by an atheist, rather by an agnostic.

I also discuss Thetford's religious background, and establish the fact that his family was Christian Scientists during his childhood. Even if they left the church abruptly after his sister's death, this religion must still have had an impact on him. In a recently published biography about Thetford, Carol M. Howe does her best to acknowledge his signification for *ACIM*. However, it is remarkable that she has completely left out this early religious influence since there are, as I show in part three, several considerable similarities between the teachings of Christian Science and *ACIM*.

When Shucman and Thetford were working together they, spite of some problems, still became good friends. Thetford encouraged Shucman to meditate, which led to a series of spiritually inclined visions. They also visited *the Association for Research and Enlightenment*, a centre based on Edgar Cayce's works, and made friends with his son, Hugh Lynn Cayce. In the preface of *ACIM*, Shucman states that she heard the channelling voice for the first time an October evening in 1965. After examinations of the visions and Shucman's private notes that statement turns out to be false, she had heard the voice before, and it was in fact, as she said, growing increasingly familiar. I conclude that as well as presenting Shucman as an atheist, or a religious amateur, this twisting of the truth concerning the voice might have had a specific reason. The aim seems to have been to promote some kind of spiritual innocence, in order to enhance the credibility of the message. This subject may still be a bit delicate. Although early publications by Kenneth Wapnick and Robert Skutch tell a story of previous knowledge, Howe more recently pushed the timeline quite a bit in saying that Shucman's and Thetford's spiritual interest came after the dictation had begun.

In this work I try to sort out the different events occurring both before, during and after *ACIM* was scribed. This includes the editing of the text, the triangular relationship between Shucman, Thetford and Wapnick, the different versions of the text, its form, language and teaching and the distribution process ignited by Judy Skutch (now Judy Skutch Whitson). I have included an extensive discussion concerning the voice, as the text is often introduced as being the words of Jesus. I establish that there is nowhere to be found, a statement from Shucman herself, nor from Thetford, that they said or thought it to be Jesus' voice. Rather this notion may have been introduced by Wapnick, who not only gave up his initial calling to be a Catholic monk to work with *ACIM* instead, but also states that he woke up one night in the Abbey of Gethsemani and knew that it was Jesus who delivered the course. In the study of Wapnick's book *Absence from Felicity* (1991), one thing becomes clear; everytime Wapnick says that Shucman said that Jesus said, it is Wapnick's own addition to Shucman's words. This can be seen throughout and should be noted. This thesis does not take a standpoint as to whom the voice belongs to, or even if there was a voice at all. Instead I point out the

discrepancy between Shucman's and Thetford's own statements and what is now proclaimed by many believers to be a fact.

Shucman was clear about several things; she didn't wish the course to be the basis of a cult, she didn't want to be its leader or spokesperson, and she said the text should be available to all who desired to read it. I have examined how it turned out to be in reality. Except for the many centres and groups that study and teach *ACIM*, there is one organization that stands out: the Foundation for A Course in Miracles, founded by Kenneth and Gloria Wapnick. This foundation gives lectures, produces literature and a newsletter; all activities are dependent on the course and are accessible for a fee. It also holds the copyright of much of the *ACIM*-material, although some parts were lost when FACIM together with the Foundation of Inner Peace and Penguin Books sued the New Christian Church of Full Endeavour for infringing on the copyright. Before the trial there had been an intensification of opposition from FACIM directed towards professional users of *ACIM*. It may have started with the success of Marianne Williamson's *Return to Love* (1992) based on *ACIM*-teachings, but soon there was an escalation in conflict. Cease and desist-letters were sent out, and *ACIM*-centres may have been taken by surprise (as it was opposite to Shucman's proclamation) but they tried to resist by opening up new web pages, closing down others etcetera. When FACIM, FIP and Penguin lost a great deal of the copyright in court, the situation was partly resolved but there are still texts under copyright.

But yet another thing threatened the believers' confidence in FACIMs and FIPs spokespersons, and that was the release of *Urtext*. The story once told around *ACIM*, was that during the editing process not much was changed. Some personal material was taken out, and then there were changes made concerning grammar and punctuation. When *Urtext* was published on internet those statements were severely challenged. I discuss and compare these texts to one another, and find many noteworthy paragraphs which differ. Of special interest is the hostility expressed towards homosexuality, which oddly enough also seems to have been directed towards Thetford's lifestyle. Perhaps this was the result of Shucman's unrequited love for Thetford, but it reveals another issue: Is that too to be understood as Jesus' words or at least as a divine message? Wapnick says no, this was Shucman's private prejudice, but that leaves the believer with an acute dilemma. If parts of the text are divine, but parts are something quite different, stemming from Shucman's own mind – who is to say which is what? These sections, as well as attacks on Freud and Cayce for example, were lifted out during the editing processes. I further argue that considering the time period that *ACIM* was released, in the mid 1970-s, the harsh writings about sexuality in *Urtext*, as something not to be enjoyed, only meant for procreation, would hardly have increased its popularity. Actually, sexuality might still be a problem for the *ACIM*-believer, and I have included a comment on the subject from a current *ACIM*-teacher, David Hoffmeister. He states that when the mind is fully united, bodily needs cease to exist.

The teaching is very clear in its statement that the world has nothing to offer simply because it isn't real; it doesn't exist, and is no more than an illusion. As a consequence of that thought, humans have no real bodily existence. All those bodily healing techniques that are frequently used within New Age, are rejected here as the body is unreal. It cannot be sick, and cannot die. Everything, including the possibility to be healed and saved, lies according to *ACIM*, in the power of mind. Salvation takes place when perception is corrected, and transformed into true knowledge. Then God, instead of the world or pain, is perceived. There is no outer evil force challenging divinity. Instead bad things are, or rather bad thinking occurs, because of

the ego. The ego dwells within the mind, and strives to keep humans away from God and the communication link between God and humans; the Holy Spirit.

As a result of *ACIM*'s popularity, there has been quite a large distribution of interpretative texts. Writers such as Gerald J. Jampolsky, Marianne Williamson, Gary R. Renard, Gabrielle Bernstein and Kenneth Wapnick have produced books that explain and often simplify *ACIM*-teachings, but also give the writers opportunity to describe their own experiences. The consented proclamation is that by using *ACIM*-based thinking or methods, crises are solved or at least understood. I also discuss some Swedish books on the subject, written by Tomas Frankell, Curt Jonsson and Ewa Forkélius. The latter has written what I call a rip-off, every word seems to be taken from *ACIM* and/or Marianne Williamson, but nothing is said about these sources as Forkélius claim to have channelled her book by automatic writing.

In the final chapter in part two, I examine Shucman's life in order to apply two different approaches from the field of Psychology of Religion. By using Attribution Theory I determine a number of factors that could have led Shucman to make religious attributions. Among these factors is her setting, significant others, her religious socialisation, her tendency to be active and that she had access to a language which supported religious thinking and acting. There seems to be a definite relationship between Shucman's previous experiences and her later visions and auditories. One particular thing to be taken into account is her fondness of Shakespeare, her knowledge of the King James Bible and her professional insights in psychology, as all of these unquestionably strongly influenced the language of *ACIM*.

By applying Rizzuto's Psychodynamic Theory I point out the emotional aspects in the development of the so-called *God image* or *the God representation*. Shucman often felt lonely; she longed for her parents, she longed for Miss Richardson and she even wrote a story about (her alter ego) Elizabeth Jane, a six year old girl who longed to communicate with God. Rizzuto states that at times of crisis, God can be taken out of an inner space where childhood memories and the primary objects are stored. Added to those, are the needs of the present moment, which lead do an up-to-date representation of God. This seems to reflect the created representation of God in *ACIM* well. There the image of God is one of love, and the merging of a person's mind into God's mind, resolves any feelings of separation or fear. Shucman's controlling issues and relational problems also found their way into the text, I hold, described as manifestations of the ego.

I also use a study by Antoon Geels concerning mystical experiences. One common determiner by those who experience visions, are feelings of stress prior to the event. That was surely the case with Shucman; she went through complicated surgery, there were a multitude of crises at work, and she had a strained relationship with Thetford and other people at her workplace. Visionary experiences, says Geels, can be spontaneous or induced, and structured or not structured. I have found that quite opposite to the *ACIM*-narrative (which says that suddenly, one night, out of the blue, Shucman heard a voice) that both her visions and her auditory came after she started to meditate. Shucman first saw a series of pictures, almost like movies, and later when she experienced the voice, it was clear and could be stopped at any time. Her mystical experiences therefore turns out to be induced and structured. In addition there is also Shucmans extensive religious background. All factors taken into account, Shucman displays what Geels calls a *predisposition* for mystical experiences.

The second part is completed with a comprehensive application of the theories and concepts from the first part. I state, among several other conclusions that *ACIM* with its incorporated

psychology, is well suited for the contemporary scene, where individuals are supposed to take their own responsibility for spiritual achievement. Still, if individualism is clearly addressed, the need for community hasn't been eluded as the many study groups and organizations around *ACIM* prove.

The Third Part, Chapter Seven - Eleven

The aim of the third part is to build an understanding for which components and traditions that constitute the historical and religious background in America, shaping a locality for New Age.

I start in colonial times where the Puritans displayed tension between sought after individualism and the welfare of the community. The individual was encouraged to have a personal experience of God, but still, if that experience led to a challenging of the consented faith of the community, it was dismissed. The utopian touch of the Puritan thought, the wish to transform the land to a model society, has become embedded in the American values of willingness to work hard, be fair, do good, simplify, draw a strict line between good and evil, be fast and virtuous, and strive for freedom. Another influence came from the Society of Friends who added openness, tolerance and through the years became forerunners of peace.

Later the ideals of Enlightenment came to merge with the Puritan thought. Political equality, religious freedom and an even more poignant individualism were emphasized notions. All of these reinforced values have resulted in what Albanese identified as a Protestant code. This, I conclude, is an important part of the American *moeurs*, and I argue further that these are the habitual values or concepts that need to be included, or at least addressed, by any new religious system that is to be accepted by many, even if that inclusion not necessarily must be conscious. In this chapter I also present the Catholic Church, as a viable example of a religious alternative turning mainstream. In addition to this I discuss immigration and the ideal of pluralism in America.

In chapter eight I review the early metaphysical traditions with a focus on Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism and Transcendentalism. Swedenborgianism promoted a picture of a coherent, united universe, where the spiritual world was connected with the material ditto. I also show that Emanuel Swedenborg himself discussed love as a way of spiritual development, love as a way to God. Quite contrary to certain Christian thinkers of his time, he did not see sexuality as opposed to divinity. As Mesmerism failed to scientifically prove the existence of a magnetic fluid, the centre of attention on an affluent power moved to a more psychological view. The power of a fluid over the years became the power of mind. These traditions strove to re-establish the harmony between the spiritual and the human, hence an interest in keeping the unseen channels connecting those open. The Transcendentalists also brought Eastern thought to the minds of Americans, even if it was idealized versions of Eastern philosophy and religion. It may not be a too far-reaching conclusion, to see the roots of New Age in these displays of thinking.

In the ninth chapter I examine spiritualism and the phenomena called channelling. Spiritualism built heavily on Swedenborg, but added aspects which from that time onwards continue to make a mark on alternative religions or spiritualities. The first of those marks is a more scientifically oriented language, the other is permission for women to take on spiritual

leadership. Spiritualism, I argue further, currently has something of a rising in popularity as it receives quite a significant space in the media. With movies such as *Ghost* and *The Sixth Sense*, and TV-series such as *Ghost Whisperer*, *Medium*, *Psychic Detectives* and many more, the audience may have become more and more familiar with the notion of speaking with the dead.

Channeling is discussed from several standpoints. Historically I start with *OAHSP*, H. P. Blavatsky and Edgar Cayce. I look at the early thinking around such phenomena by Freud and Jung. I examine whether channels can be diagnosed with psychological or mental disorders, like *Grandiose Delusions*, *Depersonalization*, *Dissociation* or *Dissociative Identity Disorder*. Some sort of Depersonalization may occur, especially for trance-channels, but there are also risks for Dissociation and some channels may as well be narcissist. Still, studies show that channels do not seem to hallucinate and cannot generally be assumed to have a DID.

I also include a section on the teachings of channelling. The most prominent theme is that of spiritual development, which is thought to occur over time. Entities from previous high cultures as Atlantis or Egypt, are said to communicate in helping humans to wake up to this spiritual reality. Humans have a Higher Self, and/or an inner essence which is connected with God. Bad things that happen are experiences meant for the moulding of the soul, but the overall prospect for the future is optimistic. Free will and the power of love are frequently used concepts. I conclude, that in a cultural climate which is therapy-centred as well as individualistic, channelling with its spiritual guided therapy based on optimism, free will, love and the added mystery of ancient people giving directions, surely will find its followers. *ACIM* shows in this sense, a close proximity to channelled messages in general.

In chapter ten, I present an extensive examination of Christian Science and its founder Mary Baker Eddy. Earlier, I have established that there exist a connection between Christian Science and *ACIM*, as Shucman and Thetford both shared a knowledge and experience of Christian Science, a fact that rarely is acknowledged. The first thing which is obvious, is the similar construction in text, where *ACIM* answers “What is”-questions in “Workbook”, *Science and Health* does the same in “Recapitulation”. Both books also have a dictionary; in *ACIM* this is called “Clarification of Terms”, in *Science and Health* it is “Glossary”.

In addition to that, there are more profound similarities in the teachings. Both have a strict monistic worldview; the material world is an illusion, and therefore the body, as well as sickness and death are illusions too. The only reality is the spiritual world; everything else is but a dream. God is eternal, all-knowing and synonymous with love. Heaven and hell are not places; they are simply products of the mind. Fear is negative, and while Christian Science states that fear is a mistake created by *mortal man*, *ACIM* says the same, but imputes that to the ego. The concept mortal man of Christian Science and the ego of *ACIM* seem to be identical, because every mistake humans make, as believing in sin, sickness, and death are dependent on these.

Other things that are strikingly in common between the teachings are that both stress inner change as a remedy for outer change. This means that working for social change for example, is not a priority, or may even be dismissed, as change is only possible within the mind. Another similarity concerns prayer. Both teachings state that prayer should not be considered as a call for help. Nothing is per definition wrong they say, all is well, and therefore no help could be needed. Prayer is only a means of communication with God.

Everything with God is perfection and wholeness. Separation, fragmentation and sin are not of God, and as follows, these are only illusions, say both Christian Science and *ACIM*. Both teachings talk about miracles as teaching devices for humans. However, *ACIM* claims that miracles too are dreams, but they show the real world instead of the world the ego believes in. For Christian Science miracles reveal the world of God and are natural, of God. There is one thing that differs slightly in the two teachings, and that is their views on healing. While *ACIM* leaves the healing work to the individual, as it is only possible through their own healing of mind, Christian Science has an organized practise where the practitioner also contributes, and sits with the patient in prayer, inner meditation and concentration.

In the last chapter of the third part I discuss New Thought and New Age. New Thought and its early spokespersons create what I call a sort of crossroads in metaphysical religion. Phineas Parkhurst Quimby was inspired by both Swedenborg and Mesmerism. He, in turn, became an influence on Mary Baker Eddy. Warren Felt Evans was healed by Quimby. Evans wrote several books where he combined the thought of Swedenborg, Emerson as well as Quimby, and maybe mostly important for the future of New Thought; Evans elaborated the idea of positive thinking into a formulated theory of affirmations.

As Eddy became quite difficult to work with, her religion suffered many drop-outs. Among those where Emma Curtis Hopkins, who started an education from which many of the New Thought denominations of today have sprung. New Thought's affinity with Christian Science shows in its monistic teachings. When people fully understand that there are no differences between the divine and the human worlds, healing takes place. The power of mind is limitless, according to New Thought, and by conscious, positive thinking humans can align themselves to the perfection of God (or the Universe). This leads to a life of abundance, as the positive flow of energy not only promotes bodily healing, but also a material affluence, according to New Thought.

New Thought, I argue, has picked up many of the important American values and articulated those into conscious conceptions of faith. But New Thought is more than a demarcated religion. I say, inspired by Gail Hurley and Albanese that New Thought has crossed the line of being a theology, it has permeated the mainstream culture and expresses values and beliefs hold by many outside its denominations.

The delimitation between New Thought and New Age has over time become vaguer and crossed over by many; the foremost name mentioned might be Louise L. Hay. Still, the idea of prosperity consciousness has its roots in New Thought, something worth remembering as New Age sometimes is harshly bashed for its commercial sides, although many of the books produced and lectures held on this subject within the New Age arena, rightfully belong to New Thought spokespersons.

I then discuss some main themes within New Age. Firstly, I examine its more recent roots not only in New Thought, but also in Human Potential Movement, the transpersonal psychology, Eastern philosophical and religious thought and practise and Holistic Health. Secondly, I review some of the general beliefs of faith or notions held by New Age (though not by all), as Holism, Planetary Consciousness, the Gaia hypothesis, Prosperity Consciousness, Self Improvement or Self Culture, Universal Religion, Personal Experience, Freedom, Peace, Love, Universal Energy, God and Christ. I take a close look at Marilyn Ferguson and her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy. Personal and Social transformation in Our Time*(1980). Ferguson relates the New Age ideals of openness and limitless activity - which at

that time were considered to be soon forthcoming ways of thinking and behaving – to the American character. These qualities, already well suited for Americans with their belief in themselves, says Ferguson, will if set in use make way for a new kind of society.

I also examine the articulated opposition against New Age from both Christians (mostly evangelical Protestants) and the sceptics. I then scrutinize three of the scholars who discuss New Age; Bednarowski, Albanese and Heelas and apply earlier discussions onto their thinking. I close the chapter by comparing *A Course in Miracles* to the New Age context. I look at the combined arena where *ACIM* was established, that of New Thought and New Age. I hold that the interpretative, simplified and personal texts written about the course have facilitated the admission to New Age. I conclude that when *ACIM* uses older thought which are presented with a Christian terminology, combined with new psychological themes, which were of highest actuality on the time of the release, the course well displays the necessary dyadic thinking of *oldness* and *newness*. I further discuss the idea of Jesus as the voice behind the teaching, and suppose that it is the tolerance and acceptance within New Age that may have prevented a deeper schism around this notion. Those who believe in Jesus and *ACIM* proclaims their view, and those who believe in *ACIM* but wave aside the idea of Jesus can still happily exist alongside each other. They can do that because the way of New Age is to pick and choose among teachings and activities as you please, and if you do not agree on something, you leave it aside, in the name of acceptance and respect for others that might believe in it.

There are points of division between the course and New Age. One of these is the objection from *ACIM* towards the worth of social work in society, or even social protest against society. This is dismissed, as every change depends on inner change and the correction of mind, and every attempt to change outer reality is useless, according to the course. *ACIM* provides an individual way to spiritual progress, but does not stress the importance of community in the sense that New Age does. However, communities around the course have been established, meaning that the need for affiliation from believers has surmounted the individual pathway prerequisites in text. This though, leads to a united standpoint, where New Age talk about life being a school and the experiences of this life are described as lessons; *ACIM* provides literally just that with its lessons of “Workbook”. Another important divergent between *ACIM* and New Thought as well as New Age, is the course’s radical insistence on the illusion of the world, it has nothing to give because it does not exist in opposition to the New Thought/ New Age-view that the world has everything to offer, it is just a matter of alignment.

The Fourth Part, Chapter Twelve

Chapter twelve contains both an abstract of the thesis, accounts of the results and a freer discussion. In this summary I confine myself to bring up a few of the most important arguments.

One all-embracing theme that has come across as palpable through this study is the theme of change. There have been transfers, transformations, conversions, incorporation of old ideas and new findings, modifications and visions for the future. Altogether these have resulted in new theologies along the road of time, which all have had to tussle with a twofold dilemma; presenting a new and innovative message that stands out as modern and progressive in the current era, and at the same time come across as something safe, recognized, well-known and

rooted in the past. The new theologies taking form also put pressure on those already in place. I have, for instance shown that the Evangelicals take a stand against New Age and especially channelling as something coming from demons or the devil himself. In doing so they forward their believed truth of the gospel as a safe haven of constancy, and make *oldness* into their prime consolidator force, but of course they still have to present something new or else they will stop attracting believers.

There is, I argue, reciprocity between the American culture and the theologies that become vigorous and long-standing within it, where the conceptions of a theology have to be, at least to a greater part, coherent with the values reproduced by the society. Mentalities, which are partly unconscious, but also partly displayed in perceptible values, codes, attitudes and habits, therefore are important in the study of a religious manifestation. A reproduced value of substance in the American context is individualism and its companion self-realization. *ACIM* conveys a rather far-reaching individualism when it states that the individual is not dependent on its past, nor reliant on other people for harmony, peace, love or even salvation. As the mind is the superior power, there are no limits and no hindrances outside for change. Reaching *Unio Mystica* could be the result of an act of grace, but in the case of *ACIM* the course is rather a DIY-way to bliss. Unity with God and the awareness of the material illusion come as a result when the given exercises are done. Well-being as well as salvation then, is all in the hand, or rather the mind, of the individual.

With *ACIM* there is another example of concordance with American concepts, as the course shows a perfect fit with the therapeutic contractualism that Bellah *et al.* discuss. The course offers therapy for the individual. This supposedly leads not only to a personal progress, and feelings of happiness and harmony within as well as in relationships, but also shows, as seen above, a way to establish a communication with God. The *ACIM*-way is thus a combination of psychological therapy and a road to salvation.

Another important mentality in the American culture is freedom. A religious teaching must, I hold, address this value in one way or another. *ACIM* teaches that freedom is found through the overpowering of the ego, but there is a paradox; the course itself is not a project of freedom, rather one of everyday discipline echoing the Puritan heritage that working your way back to God demands hard labour and dedication. Other American values that have come to be more explicit may be those called Protestant codes by Albanese; independence, equality, discipline, efficiency, activity, enterprising, promotion of useable knowledge and commitment to community. These can all be said to be addressed or encouraged by *ACIM*, except for the last one. This one still has developed, as earlier mentioned, which may be attributed to the fact that the underlying mentality concerning community spirit exceeds the advice from the course. There is yet another point of diversion towards an American value: When the course states that the world is an illusion and has nothing to give, *ACIM* follows Christian Science and is completely out of tune with the American appreciation of material success.

ACIM is thus a representation of New Age, built on a heritage of older metaphysical traditions where Christian Science is the most obvious influence. The course is a DIY-way, offering a disciplined practise of mind, supposed to lead to an inner peace of mind as well as a unity with God. *ACIM* was created during the counterculture-years and incorporated new ideas from psychology to its teaching, otherwise expressed with a Christian terminology. The course was formulated in the American context, where the mentalities of the culture have been reproduced and manifested, not only in society in general, but even so in the theologies formed over time. My conclusion is, which I have shown above, that these mentalities,

foremost freedom and individualism also are addressed, consciously or not, in *ACIM*. This, in combination with incorporated subsequent values or *moeurs*, has been a necessity for its persistence. When *ACIM* has spread over the world due to globalization, then there is indeed also a spread of the mentalities and *moeurs* inserted in the teaching.