

Religious Science and New Thought

By Dave Hunt

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Religious leaders began to realize that if they could join in a partnership with science they could sell their particular religion to a wider audience. We saw how successfully this scam was pulled off by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. When he couldn't sell his brand of yoga in the Western world as "The Spiritual Regeneration Movement," he called it "The Science of Creative Intelligence" and it became a success.

Maharishi was not the first to use this scheme. Long before his day, Mary Baker Eddy had founded the cult of Christian Science. Convinced that multitudes would be attracted to "Christianity" if it were scientific, she turned Jesus into a "scientist" who knew the "mental laws" that allegedly govern this universe. Unfortunately, what Eddy taught was not biblical Christianity based upon the true gospel of Jesus Christ, but an esoteric interpretation of the Bible which only she could explain. In spite of the Bible's declaration that no "Scripture is of private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), Eddy insisted that *her interpretation alone* was the truth, as expressed in her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Mrs. Eddy held that key and had now unlocked a new understanding that all must follow—an audacious and absurd claim.

The absolute authority and infallibility claimed by "Mother Eddy" is now wielded by the "Mother Church," where all except the most minor decisions are made for the branch churches and must be accepted without question. To this day, every Christian Science church around the world must take its Sunday lessons from the Mother Church in Boston, lessons which are based upon the infallible interpretation of Scripture known only to, and revealed only by, Mary Baker Eddy.

Here we have one of the first marks of a cult: that the followers must accept without question whatever the cult leader as the infallible authority decrees. A former Christian Scientist of the third generation explains some of its teachings:

Mary Baker Eddy declares that there is no sin and no hell, and that death is an illusion. No one needs to be concerned about salvation because everyone will live eternally....

Jesus was just a man, the perfect example for us to follow. He didn't die for our sins. Instead, he demonstrated the unreality of matter, that all is mind, and that we too can overcome the false beliefs of mortal mind....

We were warned not to read the Bible without Key to the Scriptures.... We were always encouraged to repeat the affirmations, "Christian Science is the complete and final revelation" and "Christian Science is a perfect science...."¹¹

New Thought—Forerunner of the New Age Movement

Christian Science is part of the New Thought movement that developed during the last half of the nineteenth century. Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866), whose "studies in mesmerism [early hypnotism], spiritism and kindred phenomena... laid the basis for a new structure in the world of thought¹²... was regarded as the founder of the [New Thought] movement."¹³ New Thought's basic teaching is (like that of Hinduism) that everything is in the mind. We create our own world of good or evil, of health or sickness, of prosperity or want by our thoughts. The practice of hypnosis, which Quimby pioneered in America, seemed to dem-

onstrate this. Mary Baker Eddy was one of the early patients he “healed” and her new interpretation of the Bible was actually based upon Quimby’s teachings—a fact which she refused to admit.

New Thought was the forerunner of today’s New Age, which has popularized the same delusion under new labels. New Thought was forced out of mainstream Christianity and became the basis for a number of cults, which include (in addition to Christian Science) Unity School of Christianity and The Church of Religious Science (Science of Mind). Like Unity founders Myrtle and Charles Fillmore, Ernest Holmes patterned his Science of Mind on the same attractive delusion: “Man, by thinking, can bring into his experience whatsoever he desires....”¹⁴ In a proud prophecy that has come to pass, Holmes declared, “We have launched a Movement which, in the next 100 years, will be the great new religious impulsion of modern times... [destined] to envelope the world....”¹⁵

Among today’s well-known advocates of Science of Mind are actor Robert Stack and singer Della Reese. This “spiritual philosophy for the New Age” offers a “specific method by which anyone... may relate consciously to the Creative life Force [“God”] of the universe... for the purpose of achieving whatever constructive objective is desired.... Health, abundance, security; love, peace, and happiness are... within the immediate grasp of all who apply... principles... which the Science of Mind explains.”¹⁶ Having reduced God to a Universal Principle that can be utilized according to scientific laws, the creature has become the Creator!

Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller

Norman Vincent Peale, a 33-degree Mason, and his chief disciple, Robert Schuller, kept New Thought alive within mainstream Christianity—so that its tenets are even widely embraced among evangelicals today. Schuller calls Peale “the man who has impacted and influenced my thinking and my theology and my life more than any other living person....”¹⁷ Peale borrowed from Fillmore the phrase “Positive Thinking” (that made Peale famous)¹⁸ and credited Holmes with making him into a positive thinker.¹⁹

Charles S. Braden’s definitive work on New Thought identifies Norman Vincent Peale as the one man “through whose ministry essentially New Thought ideas and techniques have been made known most widely in America.”²⁰ Peale continually spoke of the universe as “mental,” of God as “energy;” and of “prayer” as the scientific technique for releasing God-energy according to definite “laws.” The following statements reveal Peale’s basic Science of Mind teaching:

The world you live in is mental and not physical. Change your thought and you change everything.²¹

Your unconscious mind [has a] power that turns wishes into realities when the wishes are strong enough.²²

Who is God? Some theological being...? God is energy. As you breathe God in, as you visualize His energy, you will be reenergized!²³

Prayer power is a manifestation of energy. Just as there exist scientific techniques for the release of atomic energy, so are there scientific procedures for the release of spiritual energy through the mechanism of prayer.... New and fresh spiritual techniques are being constantly discovered... experiment with prayer power.²⁴

Prayer... is a procedure by which spiritual power flows from God... releases forces and energies... and brings many other astounding results. As in any skill or science one must learn step by step the formula for opening the circuit and receiving

this power.

Any method through which you can stimulate the power of God to flow into your mind is legitimate... [any] scientific use of prayer....²⁵

Notes:

11. Personal interview with Carolyn Poole.
12. Horatio W. Dresser, ed., *The Quimby Manuscripts* (Citadel, 1980), p. 9.
13. Charles S. Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion: The Rise and Development of New Thought* (SMU Press, 1966), p. 20.
14. Ernest Holmes, *The Science of Mind* (textbook), p. 30.
15. James Reid, *Ernest Holmes: The First Religious Scientist* (Science of Mind Publications, Los Angeles), p. 14.
16. From the brochure "What Is the Science of Mind?"
17. "The Plus Factor," published excerpts from a Peale talk on Schuller's "Hour of Power," copyrighted 1985 by Robert Shuller, p. 3.
18. Braden, *Spirits*, p. 390.
19. Reid, *Ernst Holmes*, p. 14.
20. Braden, *Spirits*, p. 186.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
22. Norman Vincent Peale, *Positive Imaging* (Fawcett Crest, 1982), p. 77.
23. Norman Vincent Peale, *Plus: The Magazine of Positive Thinking*, Vol. 37, no. 4 (Part II), May 1986, p. 23.
24. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (Fawcett Crest, 1983), pp. 52-53.
25. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, New Condensed Edition (Center for Positive Thinking, 1987), p. 17.