

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 TOPIC, APPROACH AND RELEVANCY

The religious significance of Emmet Fox (1886–1951), a pioneer in the New Thought movement and one of its most popular writers ever, is the focus of this study. Emmet Fox<sup>1</sup> was born in Ireland, of Irish parents, although he had been conceived in the United States,<sup>2</sup> on 30 July 1886. He received his education in England, but after becoming an American citizen (1941), he lived out his career in the United States, about which he was passionate. On 13 August 1951 he died in his beloved Paris. As one of the metaphysical movement's greatest leaders, he also addressed the largest crowds in this movement's history.

The primary aim of this research paper is to understand Fox's religious thought. I would like to determine the current influence of a teaching such as that which Fox presented and whether it is worthy of our attention. A question I have asked myself is why one would choose a person such as Emmet Fox, who seemingly wrote and preached in such simple language that even a child can understand it? At times the written material may become boring in its simplicity and its repetition of similar facts. It has been said that if one has read one of Fox's books, one has read them all.

The above question will be answered through interpreting Fox with reference to and in the context of the theoretical framework developed by Ken Wilber, specifically in three of his books: *Sex, ecology, spirituality: the spirit of evolution* (1995), *Up from Eden* (1996) and *A theory of everything* (2001). This contemporary theorist believes that humanity is living in a fractured worldview that separates and divides everything – a worldview that is in need of healing. He acknowledges that 'at the very base of men and women's consciousness, then, lies the Ultimate Wholeness [but that] it is not in the vast majority consciously realized' (Wilber 1996:14). It is this fear and resistance of the wholeness that keeps humanity imprisoned in ignorance, judgement and being pathological.

Ken Wilber, one of the most widely read (author of over a dozen books) and influential American philosophers and thinkers of our time, has been called a true philosopher-mystic. Writing with great conceptual clarity and a wealth of information, the work of this remarkable scholar is regarded as the catalyst that humanity needs for a shift in consciousness into a new millennium. This project will therefore critically evaluate Fox's religious thinking in terms of Ken Wilber's theory to determine whether there is an inner affinity between New Thought<sup>3</sup> and Wilber's reflections. It seems that Emmet Fox, a precursor of Ken Wilber, is in line with the model of religious thinking of the present.

In the final analysis the aim of this study is to understand the relevance of Emmet Fox in the South African context.

Fox's religious and educational upbringing was of a rather traditional and formal nature. As a young boy he discovered his healing abilities and was drawn to the metaphysical teachings of that time. On leaving the Catholic Church, he began to study movements such as Practical Metaphysics, New Psychology and Divine Science. It was important to Fox to have the freedom to approach God in ways known to him.

In sketching a complete biographical overview of his life and work (see chapter 2), one will gain insight into the nature and quality of his teachings. This shy and rather greyish character, who then turned into a positive and spiritually focused young man, came to influence so many lives. His simple, qualitative, well-balanced and practical approach to life, combined with his appreciation of beauty all around him, as well as his enthusiasm for life and belief in God as first cause, forms the backbone of his metaphysical teaching.

One should take into account, when one analyses Fox's methods, that he was first a preacher and not an academic. Therefore this work will not involve detailed academic and theological discussions, but will emphasise his ability to bring ancient symbols and truths right into the field of every person's understanding today. From a detailed description and analysis of his teachings, together with his allegorical and metaphysical ways of interpreting scripture, one comes to understand his intent and purpose for such a structure or method. His advice has always been from his own personal experiences and inspirational insights. His guidelines were simple, practical and easy to apply. When students inquired about the next step in their spiritual growth, Fox reminded them to use

what they had rather than enrol in yet another intellectual activity. The 'mere accretion of knowledge', he states, 'is true in the study of mathematics, or of physics, or chemistry', but 'it is not true in metaphysics'. Metaphysics is both a science and an art and one learns by doing. 'Spiritual growth comes from putting into practice the knowledge we already possess' (Fox 1984:36).

In an attempt to understand his teaching of the power of the mind, Fox reminds us of Pythagoras, who said 'man know thyself' (Fox 1994:29). He points out that truth has been inspired by the Divine Mind and thought is the creative force in the world. This, he says, is stated over and over again, in different stories, through different symbols, in various ages and traditions, because it is the basis of all spiritual growth. To know and understand one's own nature is to have the power to control it. And he believes that the Bible shows one how to do this. He always reminded his readers that God is 'All' and 'Good' and therefore there is nothing to fear.

In the early 1930s Fox was ready to move from a more fundamental religious background into the now-known New Thought movement. 'New Thought or Christian metaphysics', as he calls it, has 'helped to wear down the old theology in its various forms' (Fox 1994:29). This movement, which stands for the principles of the love of God and the power of prayer, to Fox is the basis of New Thought. It suited his enquiring mind and allowed him to express and worship God in his own ways, which to him is the 'direct seeking of God in the individual soul' (Fox 1939:17). It was against this background that he began his teaching of what he really knew and really believed. He summarised it in a single phrase: 'As you believe, so shall it be done unto you.' This to him is the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament. He believed that 'all you have of your religion is what you practice', for as a 'mere theory, it is dead' (Fox 1941b:12). He always reminded teachers of truth, to teach only what they really know and believe.

In a volume called *Who's who in New Thought* (published in 1977 by Tom Beebe) Emmet Fox was listed as one of the historical figures that are featured. Other names included Horatio W Dresser, Ernest Holmes, Emma Curtis Hopkins, Ralph Waldo Trine, Emanuel Swedenborg and many more (Larson 1985:287). Besides having been one of the most popular New Thought writers (Anderson 1985:247), Fox was also considered to have been the 'most famous minister' of Divine Science, which was the earliest New Thought

denomination to have emerged (Anderson and Whitehouse 1995:24). Larson (1987:179), through reading Fox's material, is amazed at his power. And although he considers that there was nothing even remotely original in Fox's thought, he believes that Fox's appeal must have lain in his simplicity and forthrightness. It is this easy and casual way of writing about spiritual matters that made him such a popular writer. Fox did not write to prove anything, but rather to state things in a simple way in order to make his readers and listeners aware of their own potential.

One is aware that Fox was not an academic and that he seldom, if ever, engaged in academic discourses with other theologians of his time. While he differs from traditional Christianity on some interpretations of the Bible, this nevertheless leaves an emptiness within the sphere of theological discussions. He hardly ever refers to any other researched or academic work and neither does he place his teaching within any historical or religious framework. His books do not feature a bibliography or index of any nature, either. Although his metaphysical interpretations of the Bible were not considered particularly deep, they still seemed relevant to his readers.

However, it is undeniable that he did influence his readers and listeners to greater spiritual heights and transformations in their personal lives and his work continues to inspire his present-day readers. His strength as a preacher and writer seems to lie in his non-conformist nature. He did not follow any other person or teaching; nor was he interested in producing an academic achievement. His teaching is not about comparing, proving or validating an existing system or school of thought, but only about sharing what made sense to him. He wrote and preached for the person in his congregation who was not interested in theologies, theories or philosophies, but was struggling with challenges in his or her relationships or business or with ill health. Fox provided these people with soul food and he did this within their religious framework. His advice was challenging, yes, for this is when one shifts energy and the miracles are demonstrated. However, the tools and guidelines were always directed at the level of the person's spiritual understanding where it could be of value to him or her. He has stated that although someone else's interpretation may be helpful or stimulating, one should nevertheless keep one's focus on God as the inspiring factor, for it is this consciousness that will lead one to obtain a direct illumination on the teachings. I'm convinced that it is just this unsophisticated, uncomplicated, simple and

straightforward approach that is the foundation of his success. It was his passion and enthusiasm for life that became tangible through the written and spoken word.

It is clear from this study that his insights and explanations on topics such as God, Jesus, prayer, healing, the mind, thought, death, reincarnation, the Bible and its symbolism are still relevant today. Although one comes across some 'contradictions' regarding his thoughts, one has to consider whether these were included deliberately, or whether he really did contradict himself. (This will be examined in the appropriate chapters.) Despite these concerns, he is still a contributing player in the field of challenging people to look anew at existing truths. When he encouraged students to believe Jesus when he said 'greater works shall ye do', he stated that: 'We believe we can do it, not as a limited personality, but we believe we can do it in virtue of our oneness with God. Not I but the Father in me, he doeth the work' (Fox 1939:18). From a statement such as this the reader immediately shifts from a limited personal consciousness of 'I cannot' to a greater understanding of oneness with God in which 'I can'. These subtle reminders, but dynamic paradigm shifters, are relevant throughout his work.

Can Fox's method of interpretation and his easy way of explaining religious truths benefit readers of a multireligious and multicultural country like South Africa? In a previous study<sup>4</sup> I investigated the possibilities of New Thought contributing to changing lives and providing answers and positive solutions to problems, as well as determining the conditions for its relevance in building bridges across a multidimensional land, allowing people from different backgrounds, languages, cultures, religions and political beliefs to work towards a win-win situation where everyone can benefit and be happy (Venter 1996:2). I came to the conclusion that New Thought in general supports the 'optimistic scheme of life' (James 1987:91) and offers an alternative religious experience to those religious people who have been disappointed by present organised religions (Venter 1996:137–138). New Thought, and Fox in particular, focuses on 'whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve', or 'be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind'.

This study then proceeds from personal experience and subjective conviction that the religious thinking of Emmet Fox, familiar in its form, though challenging in its application, does provide a kind of a passageway between the older American spirituality and the more recent spirituality embodied within New Thought. Fox's work provides a religious paradigm

that proves to be extremely relevant in bridging the different cultures, languages and religious beliefs in a country such as South Africa,<sup>5</sup> and in particular in playing a significant role in assisting a continuously changing spiritually minded population.<sup>6</sup> According to many, humanity is on the brink of the next evolutionary step in its existence. As Teilhard de Chardin (1959:213) once stated, 'In every epoch man has thought himself at a "turning-point of history".' The Boer general Jan Christian Smuts (1987:vi), who was twice prime minister of South Africa, said in the 1920s that

the old concepts and formulas are no longer adequate to express our modern outlook. The old bottles will no longer hold the new wine. The spiritual temple of the future, while it will be built largely of the old well-proved materials, will require new and ampler foundations in the light of the immense extension of our intellectual horizons.

The old must therefore make way for the new, and this is true of one's thoughts too.

When Fox came onto the religious scene, he provided, through his method of allegorical and symbolical interpretations of the Bible, a new bag in which his readers and listeners might receive the truth. He brilliantly wove the traditional and the new ways of thinking into a mind-shifting and liberated experience that allowed many, according to their testimonies, to move into greater insights and wisdom. If this method includes the ingredients that make one a true teacher, then Fox was indeed one. This gift was of vital importance to a humanity who needed a shift in consciousness at that time. As stated above, according to many analysts, humanity once again finds itself in a time of spiritual change, and Fox's method provides us with a model of teaching that is most significant and applicable in these times.

At the beginning of this chapter Ken Wilber was introduced to the reader. In order to compile a summarised version of his theoretical framework of integral hermeneutics, three of his books were consulted. First, *Sex, ecology, spirituality: the spirit of evolution* explains the evolutionary thought of the great chain of being – that perfectly unbroken or uninterrupted fashion from matter to life to mind to soul to spirit – the processes of involution and evolution. Second, *Up from Eden: a transpersonal view of human evolution*: this first attempt, based on actual anthropological evidence, to reunite humanity with the rest of the Kosmos, weaves together the insights from disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, religion, sociology and mythology. It tells of humanity's

evolutionary journey over some six million years. Finally, in *A theory of everything: an integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality* Wilber presents a theory and model that integrates the realms of body, mind, soul and spirit. Applying these theories to real-life problems in the fields referred to in the title of his book, he offers a vision of wholeness rather than the slice-and-dice alternatives.

The following chapters will provide one with the necessary opportunity to experience and apply this model. The study will include an in-depth and critical look at Fox's religious thought and in particular his scriptural interpretation, and will also compare it with other work. In placing his method alongside other models, such as Wilber's theoretical framework, one will be able to determine the significance and relevancy of this man and his teaching.

## **1.2 METHOD**

For this study I read and analysed all the literature written by Emmet Fox himself in order to gain insight into his religious thinking, and to understand his methods of interpretation. This material offered the most extensive explanation of his work and thinking. With the intention of gaining a more personal and biographical understanding of Fox's life and work, the writings of two of Fox's personal friends were consulted. One is by Harry Gaze (*Emmet Fox: the man and his work*) and the other by Herman Wolhorn (*Emmet Fox's golden keys to successful living and reminiscences*). These were the only comprehensive sources of literature on the life of Fox that I could obtain. From this information facts were gathered about the man; his interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes; his involvement in his church and with other groups and individuals; the people he met and visited on his trips around the world; his thoughts on abstract theories and specific topics; the techniques he used in healing and prayer; and how he lived everyday life and dealt with his challenges. This material constituted a structured outline in which his religious thought was placed and will be discussed in further detail in the various chapters of this study.

The Addington-INTA<sup>7</sup> Archives provided a couple of articles from its collection that were written either by Fox or about him. These articles gave a very early impression of his way

of thinking as they appeared in 1939. Other casual writings were all taken up in later publications of his work.

Contemporary New Thought scholars Anderson, Whitehouse and deChant responded directly to some of my questions about Fox's work. Their replies gave insight into the relevance of a man such as Fox and the application of his methods in a modern religious community. This helped to determine the place that Fox had or still fills within the theological and religious arena of metaphysics.

I wrote to some New Thought individuals in order to determine whether they are aware of any people who are still alive that may have known Fox personally, or may have correspondence or other literature in their possession. However, there was no response to this request. I also contacted Emmet Fox's publisher, Harper & Row, for information about current sales, their best-selling volume, which specific groups were buying books, and so on. Although they agreed to send me this information, I have not yet received it.

### **1.3 SURVEY OF LITERATURE**

To my knowledge no scholar has taken on the life, work and religious thinking of Emmet Fox as an academic project. This study is therefore a first attempt to look critically at the relevancy of Fox's method and teaching model. For the first time, so far as I know, Fox's religious thoughts and ideas will be structured according to subject matter and discussed alongside other references of the same contents. This method, I believe, provides one with a greater insight into his thinking, understanding and interpretation of Scripture and other relevant subjects. It also offers one an opportunity to analyse and apply his model more freely and critically within a multi-religious arena.

Harry Gaze and Herman Wolhorn (above) wrote popular and precise works on his life and teaching. They both knew Fox personally and shared his opinion and understanding of life and scriptural interpretation. Because of this close relationship between them, one does get a very personal and even unusual insight into the everyday life of Emmet Fox. This is evident throughout their books and is the authors' intention, as may be seen from the discussion of their books below. Neither Gaze nor Wolhorn attempted any critical analysis

or comparison of Fox's work, and this overwhelming and even loyal appreciation of him and his teaching seems to have left a gap from a more academic and comparative perspective. It is interesting to note that other authors (below) did not compare Fox within any theological or academic framework either. Either Fox is so unique in his practical method that there is nothing or no one to compare him to, or he was not considered worthy of being discussed theologically. As stated above, his work is not of an academic or scientific nature; neither was this his intention. It is the aim of this work to provide a more conclusive study on his thoughts.

*Emmet Fox: the man and his work* (first published in 1952) was written by Harry Gaze, who felt he was qualified to write about the man and his work, as he had known him from a young age. Gaze was a teacher and lecturer in Practical Metaphysics, New Thought and Divine Science, and began his lecture work as early as 1898. The young Fox's desire and thirst for knowledge led him to Gaze's lectures. Gaze also enjoyed the acquaintanceship of many of the lecturers, writers and teachers who inspired Fox's spiritual quest. Gaze's work took him all over the world and the young Fox was clearly fascinated by this, and it doubtless contributed to his own desire to become a lecturer. Harry Gaze (1968:8) remembers how Emmet admired his teachers and how he loved them for the truth they were teaching and living, 'but he did not consider them infallible. He belonged to no church, was bound by no creed and was subject to no human guidance save his own inner light'. Their friendship deepened over the years and Gaze witnessed the beautiful process in which Fox built himself up in health, strength and wisdom in order to prepare himself for his valuable service to humankind. He wrote the story of Fox's life 'in order to let those who have been so richly blessed by his books, sermons and lectures gain a more intimate acquaintance with the man himself, as well as to supplement the knowledge of his most essential teachings' (Gaze 1968:7).

Herman Wolhorn decided to write a biography of Emmet Fox because of the insistent demand from his followers for a more intimate view of the man than his books could provide. Having known and worked very closely with Fox, Wolhorn is also qualified to reveal the warm, private and personal side of Fox to his readers and followers. His book, *Emmet Fox's golden keys to successful living and reminiscences* (published in 1977), is divided into two parts. Part 1 is a summary of Fox's teaching and includes topics such as 'The great golden key', 'Change your mind', 'The power of love', 'An angel on your

shoulder', 'The word of power', 'Your success story', 'Psychology', 'Wealth', 'The Moron Club', 'Reincarnation and life after death' and 'The stars in their courses'. Wolhorn annotated these teachings with his own personal observations and experiences in his association with Fox.

Part 2 is an intimate view of Fox as known and experienced by Herman and his wife, Blanche. They spent many years travelling with Fox all around the world and they experienced a side of him that was not too commonly known by others. They regarded these times as a great blessing in their lives and it was a joy to have been part of it. Fox entertained them with his knowledge of the towns and countries they were visiting, of music, theatre, art, museums, restaurants and the finest cuisine, and they always stayed in the best hotels. Many stories and experiences are shared in chapter 2. The information in this book is grouped in such a way that it conveys 'a comprehensive portrait of Fox in his constant search for Truth and in the ongoing work of his Healing Ministry' (Wolhorn 1977:vii).

Dorothy Clark Hubbard, a student of metaphysics for a number of years, first attended Emmet's services before becoming a close friend. In an article, 'Dr Emmet Fox as I knew him: some personal reminiscences' (1971), she shares her experiences. On their occasional free Saturdays she used to drive him around and they enjoyed the scenery and fine cuisine. She treasured his friendship and was especially touched by his generosity. Ervin Seale, pastor of the Church of the Truth, New York City, and a well-known author himself, wrote a tribute to Fox on the day of his 'departure'. In an article titled 'Dr Emmet Fox – August 13, 1951, Paris, France', he describes Fox as 'distinctive, individual, and pre-eminent; he was, to use a poet's simile, like a great tree which has gone down, leaving an empty space against the sky. No description fits him so well. None, I think, would give him more satisfaction than "good and skillful teacher"' (Seale 1951:17).

General publications on the history of New Thought, for example by Braden (1987, *Spirits In rebellion: the rise and development of New Thought*) and Larson (1985, 1987, *New Thought religion: a philosophy for health, happiness and prosperity*), do include separate headings on Emmet Fox. In discussing some of the first outstanding leaders in the organised New Thought movement, Braden (1987:164, 317, 352–355) refers to Emmet Fox as the person with the widest book circulation and the one who drew the largest crowd

ever in the history of this movement. Referring to his popularity, Braden states: 'He was in no way sensational either in his language, in his ideas, or in his illustrations.' When Fox was compared to people such as Aimee Semple McPherson, Billy Sunday, and even Billy Graham, 'his services were models of quiet, thoughtful, prayerful worship'. Braden stresses the simplicity of the man and his teachings, the warmth that drew people close to him, his forthrightness, his deep sincerity and comments that he was always hopeful, optimistic and confident. 'His message was for "right now"' (Braden 1987:355).

Fox also influenced the New Thought movement in that most of his books were bought and read by ministers of other denominations, and these are still best-sellers in large denominational bookstores. Glenn Clark, a Presbyterian, who also had close associations with the leaders of the New Thought movement at that time, once mentioned that should he have to pick a football team, he would include Emmet Fox for power.

Larson (1987:178–182) discusses Emmet Fox's role under headings such as Biographical; Success; Message and method; and Eschatology. He also stresses that Fox's books were read by thousands, particularly by ministers from other denominations. It is said that his books do not lose their lustre. As stated above, it was Fox's simplicity and forthrightness that Larson was writing about. He also comments that Fox made use of Swedenborgian methods of exegesis to interpret Scriptures.<sup>8</sup>

Although Anderson and Whitehouse do not provide a separate heading for Fox in their book *New Thought: a practical American spirituality*, they nevertheless refer to him frequently, and quote him. They describe him as one of the most famous ministers of Divine Science and one of the best-known figures in New Thought that gained recognition outside the movement. They state that Alcoholics Anonymous, before developing their own literature, made extensively use of Fox's writings. He was noteworthy for his symbolic and metaphysical interpretations of the Bible in publications such as *The Sermon on the Mount* and *The Ten Commandments*. Fox's famous technique, called 'The golden key', is also referred to. It simply states to 'stop thinking about the problem and instead mentally rehearse everything you know about God' (Anderson and Whitehouse 1995:135). When the influence of New Thought in business is discussed, it is mentioned that Tony Robbins occasionally quoted Fox. The name of Fox is referred to, together with names such as

Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller and Napoleon Hill, as New Thought's influence crept into the culture of the day.

#### **1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

Chapter 2 will focus on the personal life of Emmet Fox; biographical detail will be followed by a look at his professional life as preacher and writer; and through the eyes of his close associates and friends, insight will be gained into his religious thinking, his likes and dislikes, as well as a more intimate picture of Fox himself; followed by a complete look at his publishers and publications.

There is a short description of the general history of New Thought in chapter 3. The theology, philosophy and religious methods of the movement will be discussed and analysed as the backdrop to Fox's influence.

Chapter 4 consists of Ken Wilber's perspective on the spirit of evolution and acts as a theoretical framework in which Emmet Fox's religious thinking can be understood and interpreted.

In chapter 5, Fox's thoughts on creative mind, prayer, meditation and healing will be reviewed and evaluated within Wilber's individual quadrants, which include the upper-right (exterior) and the upper-left (interior).

The concept of God, Jesus and the Christ, and socialising concepts, including church and tithing, are all emphasised in chapter 6. As in chapter 5, these are explored within Ken Wilber's social-cultural quadrants, including the lower-left (interior/cultural) and the lower-right (exterior/social).

Chapter 7 examines Fox's view of the processes of dying, death, immortality, the doctrine of reincarnation and karma, as well as the end times.

Fox's method of biblical exegesis, with The Sermon on the Mount, The Ten Commandments, The Lord's Prayer and The Good Shepherd, sets up the field of exploration in chapter 8. And the study is concluded in chapter 9.

## NOTES

- 1 Only Dorothy Clark Hubbard (1971:41) referred to Emmet's first name, Joseph, after his physician father.
- 2 He always referred to himself as having an American soul because he was conceived in the United States and he was overjoyed the day that he eventually became an American citizen.
- 3 New Thought scholar Paul Alan Laughlin considers Wilber 'the most brilliant and wide-ranging synthetic thinker working in the field of spirituality today, possessing the mind of a genius coupled with the soul of a mystic' (Laughlin 1999:143) and he advises followers of New Thought to ponder Wilber's observations.
- 4 Venter, M 1996. 'New Thought in South Africa: a profile'. MA dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria. It focuses on the historical roots of New Thought in South Africa and its major contributors. The conclusion reached was that New Thought offers an alternative to spiritual and religiously minded people in South Africa, and can potentially play a dynamic role in the cross-cultural bridging that is taking place in a changing South Africa (Venter 1996:ii).
- 5 In a country such as South Africa, where we have more than eleven official languages, a simple written English text can have groundbreaking results.
- 6 South Africa, with its multicultural and multireligious background, offers a challenge to every spiritually minded person. The more its people awaken to a greater spirituality than the fundamental and dogmatic ones they adhered to, the more they search for something that will guide them gently into the next level of their own understanding. With a strong dogmatic Christian influence still visible in this country, Fox's approach to the Bible can provide a bridge for many a student to cross over.
- 7 All collected and stored archival materials are now housed in the Addington-INTA Archives and Research Centre in Meza, Arizona.
- 8 Swedenborg believed that the Bible is the word of God throughout, down to the smallest jot, and declared the Scriptures divine. The Bible possesses a spiritual sense, an internal or mystical meaning, which according to him can only be rightly understood through an inspired interpretation.

