

## CHAPTER 3

### NEW THOUGHT HISTORY

William James (1987:88–89) described New Thought as the American people's 'only decidedly original contribution to the systematic philosophy of life'. This movement, which is a blend of religion and philosophy, was founded in the United States in the late nineteenth century. After The Bill of Rights in 1791 guaranteed freedom of religion in the USA, New Thought, in a response to this spirit of religious freedom and tolerance, 'arose in rebellion against faiths of fear and preaching rooted in concepts of sin and damnation' (Venter 1996:14). Emmet Fox (1944:29) remarks that 'it was, in part, a reaction to the terrible Calvinism which had gripped New England for so long'. The title of Braden's book, *Spirits in rebellion*, indicates that the spokespeople of this movement 'were and are actually in rebellion, even though they regard themselves as the true proponents of original Christianity' (Larson 1987:ix).

This study, however, is not about New Thought in general; it is neither a detailed discussion of its theology, nor an evaluation of any of its belief systems. After an overview of its historical roots, I will discuss the continuing debate among contemporary New Thought scholars on some of the challenges of New Thought as a movement. This will provide the backdrop for determining the role of Emmet Fox within the larger scope of New Thought theology and philosophy and whether Fox had any theology or not.

It seems essential to start with a definition (3.1), followed by a short overview of its history, roots and the acknowledgment of its forerunners and founders (3.2), as well as New Thought's theology, philosophy and subsequent challenges (3.3).

#### 3.1 WHAT IS NEW THOUGHT?

'If you aren't quite sure whether it is a philosophy, a religion, or a movement – join the crowd', writes Kathy Gottberg (1996:8). She is not the only one who finds it difficult to define New Thought, with its unusual dimensions and tolerance. Larson (1987:ix) states that 'New Thought is a basic attempt to reinterpret the conventional dogmas of historic

religion', whereas Braden (1963:9) indicates that New Thought is a term 'loosely used to cover a wide range of philosophical, theological, psychological and practical approaches to God, to the world, to life and its problems, that had its development within the last hundred years, chiefly in America, though under one name or another it has extended itself over much of the Western world'.<sup>1</sup> He describes New Thought as

neither church, cult, nor sect. It stands for Universal Brotherhood, teaches that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins, including the healing of the sick; that health, happiness and success are the birthright of every child of God. There is no future punishment. The individual rewards and punishes himself as he conforms to or opposes the Eternal Law of Life. New Thought believes that the great need is not so much a theoretical Christianity as an applied one; that living the Christ life does not so much imply uniformity of creed or form, as being activated by the same inward Spirit, demonstrated by loving helpfulness to one's fellows ... It holds that all religions and all peoples are at different stages of growth. Every man has a right to live his own life in accordance with the highest dictates of his own conscience, for where truth is there must be freedom ... It is not a name of any fixed system of thought, philosophy, or religion, for when moulded into a system, it ceases to be 'New' Thought. But the following can be said of it: It practices in the twentieth century what Jesus taught in the first (Braden 1963:12).

In discussing the origins of New Thought and labelling them complex, Ferenc M Szasz states in his article 'New Thought and The American West' (1984:83) that some of the proponents of this movement argued that 'they were simply restating the spiritual message of Jesus, a message which had been lost since the fourth century'. Fox (1944:29) echoes these statements: 'What we call New Thought is, of course, only the primitive New Testament teaching restated in modern form. It is essentially a Back-to-Jesus movement.' Braden (1963:12) asserts that 'New Thought is the Christ Thought made new by being applied and proved in everyday affairs. New Thought is positive, constructive, a philosophy of optimism, the recognition, realization and manifestation of God in Man.' Elmer Gifford (Braden 1963:13) comments that 'as Mind advances, the old forms die, because they no longer serve or satisfy men's needs ... New Thought can never therefore be a finished product and if it remains truly New Thought, it will never be completed enough to creedalize it'.

One of the most outstanding examples of a New Thinker, according to New Thought thinkers, was Jesus. 'His thinking, believing and example were "new" thought in his day, opposing the "old" ways of the priesthood and its practices in those days' (Venter 1996:17).

Jesus' proclamation in Matthew 9:17, 'Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine in fresh skins and both are preserved', was already teaching the process of paradigm shift.

Sarah J Farmer (Anderson 1993:1), one of the early New Thought leaders, refers to this shift to newness by defining the movement: 'It is simply putting ourselves in new relation to the world about us by changing our thought concerning it ... We are not creatures of circumstance; we are creators ...' Charles Fillmore (1981:140) defined New Thought as 'a mental system that holds man as being one with God (good) through the power of constructive thinking'. Alan Anderson (1993:1) sees New Thought as 'a movement of philosophical-religious thought and action originating in the nineteenth-century United States and emphasizing the attainment of health, wealth, and happiness through the control of one's conscious and non-conscious beliefs, attitudes, and expectations by means of deliberately practising the presence of a wholly benevolent deity'.

For Anderson and Whitehouse<sup>2</sup> (1995:4) the principles of New Thought are expressed concisely in Romans 12:2, 'Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. New Thinkers seek nothing less than total life transformation, empowerment through changing their thoughts and keeping them changed.' Dell deChant<sup>3</sup> (1991b:16) sees New Thought – like Christianity – as 'a diverse religious movement, because both Christian and non-Christian groups can be found under this broad heading'. In their series of lessons, the Unity-Progressive Council (deChant 1991b:16) states that all New Thought groups affirm, at least, that 'Ultimate Reality is Good; Humanity is divine; Mind is primary and causative; The freedom of individuals in matters of religious belief'. Gordon Melton<sup>4</sup> (1995:6–7) recalls the growth of the New Thought movement from an obscure cult status to a 'prominent indigenous American denominational family' that has 'established itself with a significant constituency in the United States'.

## **3.2 HISTORY, ROOTS, FORERUNNERS AND FOUNDERS**

### **3.2.1 History, roots and forerunners**

Although the origins of New Thought are complex, there is nothing 'new' about New Thought. It embraces a wide range of thought and sources, including the gospels, the

writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Berkeleian idealism, spiritualism, the theory of evolution and Hinduism (James 1987:91). Although Alan Anderson (1993:1) acknowledges Eastern influences within New Thought, and even explores the possible connection between these two as they 'might fit into a larger pattern of thinking, which might lead to an universal theology or philosophy', it is really Paul Laughlin<sup>5</sup> who is passionate about Oriental thought as the foundation of this movement. In one of his articles (Laughlin 1997:113) he shows that New Thought is compatible with Eastern philosophy and that the precursors of New Thought were comfortable with Oriental roots.

Before the present name of 'New Thought' became accepted, the movement was known by other names such as Mind Cure, Mental Science and The Metaphysical Movement. Some individuals, such as Dorothy Elder (1992:9), still use the terms Metaphysical and New Thought interchangeably. Steven Sadleir (1992:152), in his discussion of Religious Science (founded by Ernest Holmes and one of the major New Thought movements) classifies it under the heading of Metaphysical Teachings. Although New Thought's approach to biblical exegesis is known as the metaphysical interpretation, Dell deChant (1994:2) believes that it should correctly be called 'allegorical', and more specifically 'idealistic allegorical exegesis'.

Other philosophical and religious thinkers who are acknowledged by New Thought as precursors of the movement include Plato (428–348 BCE), Augustine (354–430 CE), Origen (185–254 CE), John Scotus Erigena (810–877), Anselm (1033–1109), medieval scholasticists, Descartes (1596–1650), Spinoza (1632–1677), Gottfried Leibniz (1648–1716), Hegel (1770–1831), and mystics (deChant 1991b:19).

Events such as the Civil War (1861–1865) brought about radical changes to the whole of America. Post-war America witnessed the eruption of secularisation and modernisation. It was a period influenced by industrialisation, urbanisation and the development of a mass society. Other influences included the emergence of a middle class, an increase in literacy, the expansion of education, the move westwards, an increase in European immigration and the advent of female empowerment movements. Besides the impact of the Idealists and Rationalists, European influences, in the persons of Mesmer, Swedenborg and Emerson, had quite an effect on the precursors of New Thought.

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) will be remembered for his use of hypnosis in the process of healing (then known as mesmerism), and his effect on Quimby, the first great exponent of New Thought in America. The Swedish seer Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), with his Doctrine of Correspondences, which reminds one of Platonic Idealism, had a great impact on the Transcendentalist movement, as well as on Quimby and Evans. For some scholars, Hegel's (1770–1831) Idealism is considered to have emerged as New Thought today.

Characteristics of Transcendentalism that directly influenced New Thought were first of all a belief in humanity's spiritual nature – 'the supreme dignity of the individual man' (Braden 1963:31); second, support of the enfranchisement of women and equal rights; and lastly the reading and study of translations of Eastern scriptures. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), the leader of the Transcendentalists, was claimed by some New Thought leaders to be the Father of New Thought. According to Frederick Bailes (in Braden 1963:35–37), Emerson was healed of tuberculosis by 'what we turn TO rather than by what we turn FROM'. Focusing on the 'oneness with the Over-Soul' rather than on the illness is to live the whole secret of Emerson's philosophy. Robert Winterhalter<sup>6</sup> in his article 'Ralph Waldo Emerson: Morning Star of New Thought' (1996:72, 85) recognises Emerson's indirect groundbreaking work 'for the dawning of higher understanding', as well as respecting him as 'the Morning Star of New Thought, heralding the New Dawn'.

In Braden's (1963:49) book *Spirits in rebellion*, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866) is labelled the founder of New Thought. His experiences and practices of mental healing were 'the real beginning of the New Thought Movement'. Anderson and Whitehouse also trace the origins of New Thought back to this clockmaker, faith healer and inventor who was deeply influenced by Mesmer and Swedenborg. He describes disease as 'something made by belief or forced upon us by our parents or public opinion ... Now if you can face the error and argue it down then you can cure the sick. Disease is false reasoning' (Braden 1963:59). He speaks with confidence as he had a 'mental' healing himself.

Although deChant gives Quimby the credit for laying the foundation for New Thought, he does not acknowledge him as its founder, but gives this honour to Emma Curtis Hopkins, the teacher of teachers. In a paper titled 'Quimby as founder of New Thought', Anderson (1997a:5, 20) addresses the question of the relative importance of Quimby and Hopkins in

founding the New Thought movement, and ultimately feels that Quimby deserves the title of founder of this movement.

Fox (1944:28) believes that 'no one person can be said to have "originated" it [for] like all significant movements it came into the race mind through several different channels at about the same time'. He refers to Emerson and regards him as the prophet of the movement. Quimby is mentioned as the healer of Portland, Maine, who taught several students who went out afterwards and spread the teaching in different ways. Lastly he mentions the New England Transcendentalist Movement, which was really part of the same current of thought, and again includes the name of Emerson, as well as Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Theodore Parker and others.

In the person of Warren Felt Evans (1817–1889) we find 'the first real philosopher of New Thought' who 'was advancing Eastern ideas' (Laughlin 1998:75). Anderson and Whitehouse (1995:21) regard him as 'the first person to write books for what would become New Thought'.<sup>7</sup> Braden (1963:89) calls Evans the pioneer writer of New Thought. And Charles Fillmore (Anderson and Whitehouse 1995:22) considers Evans's works 'the most complete of all metaphysical compilations'. This Methodist minister, psychotherapist and healer, who was cured by Quimby and became one of his devoted students, was recognised in particular for his contribution to the philosophical and theological development of New Thought and was considered the most influential literary figure in its early period. But in the New Thinkers' endeavour to develop a popular and practical religion, they abandoned any attempt to develop an academic profile – in other words, they forgot all about Evans.

Evans states the influence, directly or indirectly, of the other religions of the world on the leaders of this movement when he identifies the essential teaching and ideas of Christianity with Oriental thought, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism (apart from Platonism, Hermetic Philosophy and the Kabala). Teahan (1979:64) concludes the list of those who have influenced Evans with names and movements such as Swedenborg, Philosophical Idealism, Mysticism, Modern Science and what he termed 'Esoteric Christianity'. Other significant leaders and individuals include Julius and Annetta Dresser, Ursula Gestefeld,

Annie Rix Miltz, Elizabeth Towne, Horatio Dresser, Thomas Troward, Emmet Fox (whose religious thought and contributions will be discussed in detail), Joel Goldsmith and Ralph Waldo Trine.

### 3.2.2 Founders/leaders of organisational movements

Quimby and Evans, as well as many other founders of movements, were not interested in forming an organised movement. But their students, usually healed by them, started to teach and preach their methods, and through their devotion and eagerness to spread this teaching, formal organisations started to develop.

This short overview of the leaders of organisational New Thought movements includes Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), who was first to organise a healing ministry. The Christian Science church was founded and formally established in 1879 by Eddy. Out of the incident of Eddy's healing 'grew one of America's major religious denominations, which is represented around the world' (Sadleir 1992:74). In Gage Chapel's<sup>8</sup> article 'Christian Science and America's tradition of Philosophical Idealism' (1996:39), he writes about the considerable public controversy that Christian Science evoked. But despite sustained attacks by the established churches, the medical profession and popular writers, Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science continued to prosper, and became a major indigenous religious denomination. Although many were attracted to her and her teachings, her rigid rule, her claims to divinity and her reputation for greed and self-glorification became intolerable to some of her followers and the students who left her joined forces in the general New Thought movement. Even before 1900 Christian Science and New Thought had split into two streams.

Emma Curtis Hopkins (1853–1925)<sup>9</sup> was one of the students who left Eddy in 1885. She is hailed as the 'teacher of teachers', 'the mother of New Thought', 'the great influence', a 'prophetess of her age', a 'genuine mystic', the 'founder of New Thought', the 'forgotten founder', the 'ultimate new thought mystic' and the 'grand lady of new thought'. For Melton

(1995:5, 33; 1996:13) Hopkins 'was the founder of the first feminist religious movement independent of Protestantism in American history'; he believes that 'every major New Thought organization in existence today traces its roots directly to Hopkins's teaching work'; and that 'though there were many who influenced the development of New Thought ... Hopkins stands above them all as the founder of the movement'; she was 'the fountain from which the New Thought movement flowed'. On the other hand, Anderson (1997a:5) accredits Hopkins with being 'a spiritual giant' and 'the New Thought movement as it actually developed stands in large measure on her shoulders', but he still believes that 'she stands on the shoulders of Quimby'.

Through her universal and inclusive teachings, including the major religions of the world as well as Eastern thought, Hopkins attracted those students who were no longer satisfied with orthodox religions. Although she did not claim that any thought was original to her, she knew that her idea of God was a basic ingredient of all religions and philosophies (Anderson 1981:57). For her 'the truth is that Good is God and God is omnipresent and omnipotent, thus the Good is omnipresent. If the Good is omnipresent, the evil is nowhere present and there is no apartness', and this formed the basis of her healing therapy (Hopkins [sa]:39).

Hopkins was the first to educate ministers and to have them ordained. She was known as the first woman to ordain women and referred to God as 'motherhood', because she believed in the Oneness of God and saw no distinction of sex in God. Her organisational strategies were carried on by her students and gave rise to the great movements of New Thought: Divine Science (Cramer and Brooks), Unity (the Fillmores) and Religious Science (Holmes). Someone once wrote that 'she is undoubtedly the most successful teacher in the world' and that 'never before on this planet were such words of burning truth so eloquently spoken through woman' (Larson 1987:144–145).

In the persons of Melinda Cramer (died 1907) and Nona L Brooks (1861–1945), the third-largest New Thought group, the Divine Science movement, took form (in 1898). After these two women had a 'divine' healing, they began to study this method and later became teachers and healers in their own right. Brooks and her two sisters laid the foundation for the institutional establishment of Divine Science, while Cramer was responsible for the organisational input. The omnipresence of God is the basic principle of Divine Science.

God is everywhere and for this reason human beings must be divine and partake of his nature. The term 'science' is used frequently in New Thought, and Divine Science stresses the close relationship between science and the Christ religion. It is Divine Science because it is based on the omnipresence of God and proves by the law of expression that, innately, a person can be only what God really is.

The Unity School of Christianity, which is regarded as the largest and most successful of the New Thought groups, came into being (1889) after both of its founders, Myrtle (1845–1931) and Charles (1854–1948) Fillmore, experienced healings. Unity's statements can be summarised briefly as 'Ultimate Reality is God/Good; Humanity is divine; Mind is primary and causative; Freedom of individuals (in matters of faith and expression); Christianity (the acceptance of spiritually interpreted Christian doctrine as normative)' (deChant 1991b:30–31).

Ernest Holmes (1887–1960) began his movement, Religious Science (1927), after his studies with Hopkins. His classic textbook, *The science of mind* (1926), is considered one of the 'most thorough and comprehensive texts on spiritual healing ever produced' (deChant 1992[Class5]:7). Holmes (1938:31) does not claim any special revelations for his movement, but he does admit that 'the intelligent law of creative force may consciously be directed and definitely used', as the 'greatest discovery of all time'. From 1954 Religious Science has been represented by two groups, namely the United Church of Religious Science and Religious Science International.

### **3.3 THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND SUBSEQUENT CHALLENGES FOR NEW THOUGHT**

In an ongoing debate, the contemporary scholars of New Thought continue to do battle regarding the philosophy and theology of this movement. Traditionally, the two main emphases of the different thought and practice in New Thought seem to be practical healing and an ideology or theology (Idealism) that explains the sources of healing power. In his paper 'New horizons in New Thought: doing theology in a new thought situation', deChant (1995:150–151) argues for the value of theology in New Thought. He is convinced that it is a necessary step in New Thought's development 'as a mature form of human religiosity'. It is not enough for New Thought to merely have a practical theology, as it does

not include the entire theological system. Therefore it only 'leads to contradictions, and contradictions lead to weakness in a religion' – a total schism. He is positive that New Thought can change the world as it was meant to do, but in order to fulfil this mission it has to embrace a full theological system.

A formal theology 'is the discipline through which a religion rationally reflects on itself and responsibly addresses its needs and questions. Its method is rational and systematic self-reflection. Its motive is the drive for survival and the quest for maturity in a religion through continuity with its past and continent self-modification in terms of the present and the future'. But theology, God talk, is not just another academic discipline, it is also 'a cultural event occurring whenever religion speaks about itself' (deChant 1995:132). Dell deChant (1998b:205) defines 'religion' as 'the voice of faith, but theology gives the voice range, accessibility, and coherence'. He believes that New Thought has the voice, but that it lacks the range, the accessibility and the coherence.<sup>10</sup>

In this role of both academic discipline and an ongoing cultural event, deChant (1995:133–137) recognises theology as 'a process rather than a finished product'. For him it is always in conversation. And it is this dialectic dimension of theology that New Thought currently lacks. New Thought's theology is considered practical and fundamental. It is talking about God, but it does so without a great deal of reflection and with very little dialectical sophistication. The lack of cultural sophistication is in the areas of higher education, the media and politics/government. This to deChant is fundamentally a doctrinal dilemma. Fox (1944:28–29), on the other hand, believed back in the 1940s that New Thought had always been a practical movement and 'has stood for healing, and in this respect gradually separated itself from those who were primarily concerned with philosophical speculation'.

Although Anderson (1996:107) appreciates William James's remarks about the uniqueness of Early New Thought, he would like to add the philosophical distinctiveness of New Thought that he feels James failed to realise. This distinctiveness is not merely of its metaphysics, but of the blending of metaphysics and its method. He believes that 'the foundations for New Thought's metaphysical-methodological uniqueness were laid by Quimby and Evans'.

Recognising New Thought's uniqueness because of its blend of theory and practice, Anderson (1996:111–113) suggests that 'New Thought has become a practical success and a theoretical failure' and that 'the prevalent forms of New Thought metaphysics are antiquated'. The metaphysical alternative that was adopted by New Thought was Idealism, 'which maintains that everything is spiritual or mental'. Anderson (1998:23) states in his article 'Pluralistic Idealism: only mind, many minds' that 'the central philosophical foundation for the New Thought movement as well as for any other metaphysical religion is idealism'. He does mention, however, that there is more than one type of Idealism. deChant (1998b:195–196) reminds his readers of the success of New Thought in bringing its 'new gospel of its new faith to a young but developing American culture'. It was 'America's middle class' that 'found something of value in this new faith which proclaimed that God was wholly good, evil was only error, ultimate reality was Mind, and one's life and one's world were predicated on one's thoughts. This was religious idealism packaged for popular consumption, a gospel of infinite possibilities capable of mass production.' He feels that it was New Thought's idealistic faith (pragmatic science) that gave the movement its appeal.

In an earlier writing, deChant (1991a:71) defines Idealism as 'a philosophic position, expressed in various ways, to various ends, with varying degrees of complexity, that holds the highest reality and the foundation of existence itself is mental. Mind, consciousness, ideas, and thoughts are the basis of reality and the causal force(s) behind material objects, events and conditions.' He declares that Idealism is the 'key ideological premise if not the very foundation of New Thought'.

Bringing into focus the whole debate over Idealism as the foundation of New Thought (as supported by Anderson and deChant), Laughlin (1997:113) wonders why J Stillson Judah<sup>11</sup> 'didn't notice that fact in his thorough and excellent chapter on the movement, but rather identified New Thought with pantheism and monism, neither of which is necessarily idealistic'. He stretches his curiosity by wondering 'if idealism is the essential philosophical basis of New Thought, it is even more curious that the wide-ranging "Declaration of Principles" of the International New Thought Alliance<sup>12</sup> does not even mention, much less endorse, idealism' (Laughlin 1997:120–121)! Both Smith and Laughlin realise that New Thought's single philosophical tradition, Idealism, sadly and ironically 'fails to provide a theoretical basis for the kind of mental healing that has been a staple of the movement

from the outset'. He and Smith agree that 'idealism simply does not and, cannot provide an adequate conceptual framework for the very practice that defined the New Thought movement from the days of Quimby, Hopkins, and the other founders of the tradition, namely, mental healing' (Laughlin 1999:142).

Laughlin (1999:144–145) shares Wilber's<sup>13</sup> appreciation of Idealism when it integrated spirit and evolution in such a convincing way 'by recognizing that evolution is simply Spirit-in-Action, or "God in the making"'. The one crippling inadequacy that Wilber feels brought Idealism tumbling down is that 'it possessed no yoga – that is, no tried and tested (spiritual) practice for reliably reproducing the transpersonal and superconscious insights that formed the very core of the great Idealist vision'. Wilber believes that Idealism and Whitehead's philosophy are 'grounded in rationality rather than in spirituality' for both of them lack 'yoga, [or any] spiritual discipline or practice to provide the data for his [Whitehead's] clever musings, which remain, therefore, ingenious, but idle speculations of pure reason'. Whitehouse (1999:157) recognises that the Idealism that was prevalent in the nineteenth century had fallen out of favour. However, it remains widely popular in New Thought circles.

Anderson (1996:113–115) considers that New Thought's task is to become more fully metaphysical and his suggestion for such a reinvigoration is what he terms Process Philosophy (or Process Theology, or even Process Thought, depending on the context). The purpose of this thought is to 'understand as fully as possible the nature of process, which is "the creative advance into novelty"'. 'The production of the novel, the newly satisfying, is the thrust of all creation' and 'we must be new moment by moment'. He is convinced that 'New Thought never need fear extinction if it remains new, needed, and best', and that Process Thought 'most adequately understands the nature of the creative advance'.

In an article titled 'Towards a sustainable metaphysic of faith', Arthur Preston Smith<sup>14</sup> (1999:104–105) explains and outlines Whitehead's philosophy as an alternative to Idealism, and explains why New Thought should consider including Whitehead's model in its teachings. Whitehead's Process Model, an ontology of experience, could benefit New Thought, should the latter reinterpret God as 'Experience', rather than 'Mind' or 'Consciousness'. Whitehead's metaphysic is useful to Smith as it addresses the concepts

of mind-body interaction and causation. This metaphysic is both sustainable and optimistic, whereas the idealist model may be optimistic, but not sustainable. This philosophy, which is highly complex, has at its heart the ontological doctrine of pan-psychism (according to William James), or pan-experientialism (according to David Griffin) According to pan-experientialism the universe is viewed as alive. It consists of experiences of experiencing entities. Everything consists of entities that have some subjectivity and self-determination.

The other two key concepts in Whitehead's philosophy are 'prehension' and 'actual occasion'. Smith's (1999:107–108) understanding of Whitehead's 'actual occasion' is that it is a moment or an instant in experience that includes the development and completion of a definite feeling. 'Prehension' is to feel or to be affected by something. He states that in each actual occasion is the unification of various prehensions into a final complex feeling or satisfaction (in the sense of a feeling of some level of value). An occasion first exists as a subject, during which it prehends prior occasions (physical) and prior possibilities (conceptual). Then it unifies them into a single feeling of satisfaction. This subject then becomes an object for subsequent occasions and in that sense lives forever. Or, expressed in another way, the subject (occasion) through feeling becomes the object for another occasion. This subject's nature moves forward in time, and it continues to exist forever as an object for subsequent occasions, which is phrased by Whitehead as 'objective immortality'.

Whitehouse (1999:157–158) observes that the constructive post-modern philosophers (Whitehead, Hartshorne and Griffen) 'have totally discredited both dualism and materialism, and shown that some traditional forms of idealism have serious philosophical flaws as well'. Therefore she advocates a 'mediation, a synergy of old dualistic beliefs and old pantheistic/idealistic beliefs that overcomes the philosophical errors in each while preserving what is of value in both', as pointed out by Stephen Covey's<sup>15</sup> interdependency.

This process of mediating came into prominence in 1828 when Karl Christian Friedrich Krause combined the best of traditional theism and pantheism into a new creation, termed 'panentheism'. It can be defined as the 'notion that all is in God and God is in all; in other words, that the universe is God's body', or 'that God and we

are a one made up of many' (Anderson 1997b:83). Anderson (1997b:84) considers panentheism 'a logical and powerful central position for New Thought to take in assuming its leadership role for spirituality in the twenty-first century. Indeed, it is the only position that even attempts to synergize both theistic and pantheistic approaches, to create a metaphysical middleway'.

Anderson (1997b:88–89) created his own formula (although it is the result of the thinking of some great minds) for panENtheism: past + divinely given possibilities + free choice = new creation. He feels that this claim is what metaphysics are all about. And as process thought and personalism meet in panentheism, this forms 'a middle way where we can all come together and move forward together under the guidance of the God whose name is love'. Whitehouse supports this, advocating that the old static Substance New Thought should be updated to this Process New Thought. When the substructure of New Thought's practices has been worked on, then truly it will remain 'the religion of healthy-mindedness' (William James) as it affirms the freedom of belief of each person and its boundaries are permeable.

Smith (1999:120–123) believes that Process Philosophy, particularly that of Whitehead's model, is unique and New Thought can benefit from it. First it offers a better theory of mind-matter interaction through pan-experientialism than through the theories of dualism, materialism or even idealism. In pan-experientialism the whole is not reduced to one of its parts, but 'it seeks to incorporate both wholes into a larger one' or one can say it takes on 'the role of aspects or attributes of something that is both mental and physical'. As the theories of causation and creativity are important for the theory of mind-body interaction, one must begin to think 'in terms of processes and events, ie, the way things come to be'. Whitehead's uniqueness then lies 'in explaining the influence of causes as part of the effect's creation, or coming to be'.

Laughlin (2000:138) thinks that 'the belief that idealism is the philosophical foundation of New Thought is a false assumption' and he offers his 'Oriental-style neutral monism as an equally valid and in many ways better alternative to idealism'. He remarks that the early New Thinkers were 'attracted to the religions and philosophies of the East primarily because of the monistic view of Ultimate Reality they found there'. Although the Western

world would term it 'pantheism', it is nevertheless more accurately phrased as a specific type of 'monism' (Laughlin 1997:116–117). This Ultimate Reality, Universal Absolute and Supreme Power, Presence, or Principle of Eastern Thought resonates well with 'New Thought's foundational theology, which posited a single God abiding within the universe and people, all of which were treated more like expressions of an immanent divinity than as a heavenly deity's creations'. As Laughlin (1997:117) has stated: 'It is not surprising, then, that the earliest founders of the New Thought movement, like their Eastern counterparts, found themselves preferring both neutral and impersonal appellations for "God" – such as "Power", "Principle", "Presence", and "Wisdom" – to the much more personal references being commonly used in mainstream Christianity (eg "Father", "Lord", "King").'

Of course the term 'monism' can be used in different ways. Laughlin (1997:121–123) identifies the two most obvious understandings. The first refers to idealistic monism, 'which holds that the one constituent of reality is Mind or Spirit', and the second to materialistic monism, 'which says that it is Matter'. It is then clear to the student how New Thought has found its identification with idealistic monism. On the other hand, Laughlin reminds us that there are more types of monism. He introduces one other viable option, namely neutral monism. Apparently William James first coined the term 'to connote the idea that the fundamental reality is neither Matter nor Mind, but some neutral element or "stuff" so basic that no definite characteristics can be attributed to it'.

Laughlin (1997:123–124) observes that the Declaration of Principles of the International New Thought Alliance describes God as 'Divine Perfection', as well as 'Universal Wisdom, Love, Life, Truth, Power, Peace, Beauty and Joy'.<sup>16</sup> These expressions are beliefs about and experiences of God and do not state that God is these things. So Laughlin points out the obvious 'relevance of neutral monism to New Thought' and, like its Oriental counterparts, 'New Thought has a basic theology that focuses on God as the single immanent Source and Basis of all reality'.

He stresses the challenge of Eastern thought to New Thought when he writes that 'the Eastern traditions may well press New Thought beyond familiar and comfortable conceptual boundaries and into new territories hitherto unknown, unexplored, and perhaps even unimagined'. He states: 'To most Westerners, the prospect of viewing God, not only as a non-personal Something, but indeed as a formless Nothing, might seem at worst an

utterly and hopelessly abstract and nonsensical view, and at best a negative, cold, puzzling, and totally unsatisfying way to comprehend Divinity'. For him the 'philosophical language and concepts associated with neutral monism in Eastern religions are derived from and rooted in the sublime unitive bliss of the most profound and moving of mystical experiences', as well as the 'deep appreciation for silence as the purest language of the spirit'<sup>17</sup> (Laughlin 1997:124–125). From this study Laughlin (1997:126) suggests that

... a recognition of the implicit metaphysics of New Thought as monism, coupled with a realization that that monism may be interpreted as either Western idealistic monism or Eastern neutral monism, may just give both of the historic dynamics of New Thought – rationalism and mysticism – their due. It would also leave room in the movement for those students of Truth who find personal language about God appropriate and for those far more comfortable with non-personal imagery.

From 1910 interest in Eastern religious thought waned noticeably. Apparently Dresser 'rejected Indian religious and philosophical notions' and both Jackson<sup>18</sup> (1996:171) and Laughlin (1998:77) consider this the moment in New Thought's history that interest in Eastern thought stopped. It is unfortunate, comments Laughlin (1997:120), that 'Dresser's devaluation and dismissal of what he took to be Hinduism deprived New Thought of a most fertile and promising metaphysical framework, within which the movement might have produced substantial theoretical activity and at least one sound theological model'. He reckons that Anderson,<sup>19</sup> whom he regards as 'not only the premier philosopher of New Thought today, but the world's foremost authority on Horatio Dresser', shares the same 'negative views of Hinduism' as his predecessor (Laughlin 1998:79). He is therefore even more convinced that the Oriental philosophical systems so appreciated by New Thought's founders can still 'present valuable resources for the clarification and articulation of New Thought principles, not the least of which are a philosophical method and metaphysical model virtually unknown in the Western philosophical tradition. Eastern religions and philosophies thus hold tremendous promise and potential for the restoration of the New Thought movement's philosophical and theological dimension' (Laughlin 1997:115).<sup>20</sup>

Laughlin (2000:145–146) proposes a philosophical and theological foundation for discussions within the New Thought community. At first he reminds New Thinkers to 'recapture the broad scope that Warren Felt Evans exhibited throughout his career'. This includes the importance of giving attention to metaphysics in the philosophical sense, as well as some serious reading of the great philosophers.<sup>21</sup> As a second point he feels that

one should 'give a fair hearing to Oriental religions on their own terms' and he reminds one that the early founders of the movement 'knew instinctively that Eastern monism had something special and unique to offer New Thought'. Third, he believes that 'it is time to narrow whatever attention we continue to give to idealism to those thinkers who must impressed Evans and no doubt others of his contemporary New Thought pioneers'. He singles out Hegel as 'the greatest of the so-called Absolute Idealists'.

Although Masao Abe (one of the premier Zen philosophers of the late twentieth century, and quoted by Laughlin 2000:147) finds Hegel's 'understanding of Nothingness inadequate and wanting', he 'clearly recognizes the value of Hegel's Absolute Idealism as a philosophical bridge between West and East'. Laughlin too feels that this recognition of Hegel's work can 'lead our movement to its own mystical roots as well'. And as Ken Wilber (as quoted by Laughlin 2000:147–148) summarises:

Hegel's Idealism winds up being a dead-end in this regard, because of its lack of a yoga or spiritual discipline to underpin it. But Hegel's thought is nevertheless quite useful in setting up the kind of dialogue with Eastern thought that Masao Abe values. Hegel might in fact open the way to philosophical traditions that know intimately the spiritual practices and techniques that are so woefully lacking and desperately needed in New Thought circles.

And, lastly, advising an openness to current philosophical movements, findings and trends, he suggests that New Thought entertains 'the possibility that a newly-defined philosophy of materialism could have something important to say to the movement'. With the coming of new physics, quantum physics and even cognitive sciences, matter is now defined as energy, and 'materialism isn't what it used to be'. Laughlin (2000:148) regards philosophy of mind (previously known as philosophy of language), as the present 'cutting-edge' philosophy, with its central issue 'the relationship between the mind and the body'.

Laughlin (1999:146) seems to send everyone who may be interested in the mind's healing powers to the East. He considers the Eastern healing powers so effective, because 'they are grounded in philosophies that, unlike those of the West, are inherently spiritual, and that therefore view the body-mind relationship in a spiritual context'. He reminds his readers that the East understands 'spirit to be a deeper aspect than mind; and they see mind and body both as expressions of that deeper, non-dual spirit, which provides the

crucial and unifying connection that has made Eastern healing arts so demonstrably effective for so many people for so many centuries’.

If it is true, according to Laughlin (2000:144, 149), that ‘New Thought can no longer afford to restrict their philosophical purview to idealism alone’, and that the restriction of a religious movement to one philosophy is to ‘reify, stagnate, and ultimately kill it’, then maybe it is time that the Andersons and Laughlins sit together and re-create a suitable, workable and mind-shifting ‘new’ ‘thought’ for the New Thought movement. As Laughlin (2000:150) has stated, ‘We have gone a long way toward putting the thought back into New Thought. It is now time to pay attention to the new.’

Noting Laughlin’s (1997:128) suggestion that the Oriental roots in New Thought’s fundamental philosophical foundation should be acknowledged, he concludes: ‘New Thought might once again find itself poised, at the beginning of a new century, to build an evermore urgently needed bridge of understanding and ecumenism between the religions and worldviews and peoples of a profoundly multicultural and pluralistic world – one that is still hungering and thirsting for New Thought about Ancient Truth.’

## NOTES

- 1 The books by Braden and Larson, as general introductions to New Thought, present a wealth of material. However, today Dell deChant (1995:2) considers Braden's text long out of date and 'somewhat out of focus'. Gordon Melton (1995:36) found Larson's attempt to upgrade Braden inadequate. I did not refer to Horatio Dresser (1919), who wrote the first, and for a very long period of time the only, written history of New Thought.
  
- 2 C Alan Anderson is professor emeritus of philosophy and religion at Curry College, in Milton, Massachusetts. After earning degrees in political science, law and education, he received a PhD degree in philosophy from Boston University, with his doctoral dissertation, 'Horatio W Dresser and the philosophy of New Thought'. He is the co-founder of the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion, and a member of its board.  
  
Deborah G Whitehouse, PhD, is a member of the faculty at Curry College in Massachusetts. She serves on the board of directors of the International New Thought Alliance and is the editor of *New Thought* magazine.
  
- 3 Dell deChant is the editor of *JSSMR (Journal of the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion)*. He is an instructor and director of undergraduate studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida.
  
- 4 J Gordon Melton is the founder and director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in Santa Barbara, California, and a research specialist with the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
  
- 5 Paul A Laughlin is professor and chair of the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio. He has earned a BA in Classics from the University of Cincinnati and MDiv and PhD degrees from Emory University.
  
- 6 Robert Winterhalter is the president of SSMR (Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion). He has written extensively on the Bible and New Thought methods of scriptural exegesis.
  
- 7 Evans's first book was *The mental cure*, published in 1869 (Anderson and Whitehouse 1995:21).

- 8 Gage Chapel, PhD, is associate professor in the Greenspun School of Communication at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and was a member of the board of directors of the SSMR.
- 9 It has been noted that biographical data on Emma Curtis Hopkins is remarkably inconsistent. This includes significant dates such as her birth. I have come across the following dates as given for date of birth:
- Anderson (1981:6): 1853–1925  
 Anderson and Whitehouse (1995:23): 1853–1925  
 deChant (1991a: 69): 1853–1925  
 deChant (1992:1): 1849–1925  
 Larson (1987[1897]: 143): 1855–1925  
 Melton (1995:5): 1849–1925
10. 'It lacks the range, in that it tends to talk only to itself and not to other faiths and other social institutions. It lacks the accessibility, in that it is not fully educated about either itself or the greater culture to which it might speak and with which it might communicate. Finally, New Thought lacks coherence for it does not know its past, its traditions, its normative teachings, or the cultural horizons within which it functions as a religion' (deChant 1998b:205).
11. J Stillson Judah, *The history and philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967.
12. The International New Thought Alliance (INTA) was founded in 1914. It is a loose association of New Thought churches, diverse religious groups and individuals and is considered the most important attempt to assemble all of New Thought under a single umbrella. With its headquarters located in Mesa, Arizona since 1974, and with Rev Blaine Mays as its president, it publishes the quarterly periodical, *New Thought*.
13. Laughlin regards Ken Wilber as '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).
14. Arthur Preston Smith, PhD, did doctoral studies at Claremont University. Other institutions at which he studied include Yale and California State University at Sacramento.
15. Stephen R Covey explains the maturity continuum where we move from dependence to independence and eventually into interdependence. 'Interdependence is the paradigm of we – we can do it; we can cooperate; we can combine our talents and abilities and create something greater together. Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success. As an interdependent person, I have the opportunity to share myself deeply, meaningfully, with

others, and I have access to the vast resources and potential of other human beings' (Covey 1992:49–51).

16. INTA's Declaration of Principles (as given in 2000):

- 1 We affirm God as Mind, Infinite Being, Spirit, Ultimate Reality.
  - 2 We affirm that God, the Good, is supreme, universal, and everlasting.
  - 3 We affirm the unity of God and humanity, in that the divine nature dwells within and expresses through each of us, by means of our acceptance of it, as health, supply, wisdom, love, life, truth, power, beauty, and peace.
  - 4 We affirm the power of prayer and the capacity of each person to have mystical experience with God, and to enjoy the grace of God.
  - 5 We affirm the freedom of all persons as to beliefs, and we honor the diversity of humanity by being open and affirming of all persons, affirming the dignity of human beings as founded on the presence of God within them, and, therefore, the principle of democracy.
  - 6 We affirm that we are all spiritual beings, dwelling in a spiritual universe that is governed by spiritual law; and that in alignment with spiritual law, we can heal, prosper, and harmonize.
  - 7 We affirm that our mental states are carried forward into manifestation and become our experience in daily living.
  - 8 We affirm the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven here and now.
  - 9 We affirm expression of the highest spiritual principles in loving one another unconditionally, promoting the highest good for all, teaching and healing one another, ministering to one another, and living together in peace, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus and other enlightened teachers.
  - 10 We affirm our evolving awareness of the nature of reality and our willingness to refine our beliefs accordingly' (quoted in *New Thought* 85(1)(2001):19).
17. Laughlin's statement that 'New Thought may come to a new appreciation of 'The Silence', seems to be confirmed by the lack of discipline within many New Thought circles when it comes to practising silence. I became aware of the powerful and forceful (at times even very boisterous) way of praying, yes, as well as its success (of course), but seldom experienced the silence (as known, understood and practised within the Eastern thought) within these circles.
18. Carl T Jackson, PhD, is professor of history at the University of Texas at El Paso.

19. Laughlin (1998:84) stated that Anderson's 'erroneous caricature of Hinduism and his consequent allegations of its supposed shortcomings are always in support of his own vigorous presentation of Western panentheistic process philosophy as, in effect, the only real avenue of promise now available for future New Thought metaphysics'. Anderson (1988:161) reacted to this sharp 'criticism' and in one place he remarked that 'any religion or philosophy can learn something from any other religion or philosophy'; that 'obviously, no one could embrace all the conflicting religious approaches that have enriched and cursed humankind over the centuries' (Anderson 1998:155); and 'however, whether one arrives at a position by way of the East or the West makes no difference with regard to the truth of the position' (Anderson 1998:149).
  
20. On a more personal note, it was this Eastern spirituality and yoga philosophy that attracted the writer to and supported an understanding of the New Thought teaching.
  
21. Evans' own understanding of idealism was shaped by the thoughts and writings of Berkeley, Fichte, Hegel and Schelling. His interest in a number of diverse sources includes those of current Western philosophies as well as Hindu monism (Laughlin 2000:146).