

## CHAPTER 8

### BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Countless people regard the Bible as a sacred book. For some, however, it became little more than a dust collector on a shelf. It is said of Emmet Fox that he changed this for many people. Herman Wolhorn (1977:54) comments that although 'in time the many healings and the down-to-earth yet highly spiritual instruction of Emmet Fox will be forgotten', a 'lasting tribute to his work, a golden key to those yet unborn', will be 'his unveiling of the Bible'. He was known for his ability to awaken his listeners to the immense and practical value of the Bible in their lives. Wilhorn himself regards the Bible as the grand diagram of man's destiny. Then again, Fox is not the only one to have been inspired by this book. Any religious script of this magnitude is part of a shared social and cultural viewpoint (the lower half of Wilber's four-quadrant model), for it creates the fundamental and foundational value system of a religious group within any specific culture or society. In this chapter Fox's method of biblical exegesis will be the focus and exemplar of such a common shared experience.

Among academic scholars, interpretation of the Bible is of cardinal importance, for it is believed that a wrong method of biblical interpretation may lead to a false notion of the message of the Bible. Fox's method, or lack of it, will be discussed, and compared with New Thought teachings in general.

#### 8.1 BIBLICAL EXEGESIS IN THE NEW THOUGHT TRADITION

As scholarly debates over the correct method of biblical interpretation continue, the question is raised whether biblical exegesis has vanished from the New Thought tradition. New Thoughter and academic Dell deChant believes that New Thought has forgotten its unique historical tradition of exegesis, which is the allegorical method, and that readers are more familiar with the term 'metaphysical', as New Thought's name for biblical interpretation. But this term can be

philosophically and theologically ambiguous. deChant (1994:2) maintains that the basis of New Thought's metaphysics is a 'philosophical/theological system known as Idealism – the system that recognizes the primacy of Mind' and that its method of biblical interpretation is 'Idealistic allegorical exegesis'.

In tracing the origins of the term 'metaphysics' as applied to metaphysical religious groups, Anderson considers Mary Baker Eddy the starting point, followed by Emma Curtis Hopkins. Both New Thought women established metaphysical colleges and their metaphysics propose that which is above and away from the physical, the Divine Mind. Anderson (2000:108–109) also refers to Charles Fillmore (co-founder of Unity School of Christianity) and Ernest Holmes (founder of Religious Science) as New Thinkers who use the term 'metaphysics' to suggest 'clear understanding of the realm of ideas and their legitimate expression' and 'intelligent forces latent in the human mind'. Anderson (2000:112, 121) also comes to the conclusion that there is 'little or no justification' for the belief that 'New Thought has any prevalent metaphysics' and that since the passing of Thomas Troward in 1916 (the most outstanding figure in the development of New Thought in England) there had been 'no one who might reasonably be considered a metaphysician in the philosophical sense'. Paul Laughlin, an academic, has also joined in the debate. Like Anderson and deChant, he does not believe that Idealism is the philosophical foundation of New Thought. (His specific views on the topic were discussed in chapter 3.3.)

To return to the allegorical method of biblical interpretation of New Thought, deChant maintains that its historical roots go back as far as Philo and Origen. Allegorical interpretation of Scripture became a tool that revealed a higher meaning behind the literal reading of Scripture. Origen distinguished three levels of understanding Scripture: the historical or literal, the moral or ethical, and the mystical or allegorical. Ken Wilber (1995:397) remarks that both Origen and Philo conceived the allegorical method as a solution 'that would henceforth be used whenever mythology needed to be both negated and preserved'. 'The brilliance of this scheme is that "the myth" can be made to say whatever it is necessary to make it say, quite regardless of how its originators actually meant it'. Charles Throckmorton (2000:52), a New Thought minister, confirms this: 'Historically, allegorical methods applied to biblical exegesis lack consistency, and the allegories often reflect the theological biases of the exegete.' Not only has this method of

interpretation been referred to as ‘fanciful, assuming that the allegorist can make any passage mean whatever she or he wants it to mean (eisegesis), leading to moral relativism’, but in many schools of thought it has been regarded as an erroneous method of interpretation. Ignoring what stands in the text and focusing on what one can read into it, this method of interpretation has led to the utmost subjectivity, and therefore is completely unacceptable to many scholars.

Fox’s hermeneutics do not seem to be articulated in academic and philosophical terms, but in symbolic interpretation that bears a close resemblance to existentialist Rudolf Bultman’s (1880–1976) thinking. The existential reading is heir to the great Neoplatonic tradition in Christianity, extending from Plotinus over Eriugena, Schelling and others, to Emerson into New Thought.

## **8.2 EMMET FOX’S METHOD OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

Dell deChant (1998a:64) suggests that basic exegesis should ask general questions about the text’s ‘(a) historical period; (b) material environment; (c) genre; (d) primary language; (e) relationship with other texts; (f) edition; (g) author(s) and editor(s); (h) public function (religious, political, ideological, etc)’. Fox believes that the Bible must be unveiled, as it is written in symbol and allegory. But in terms of the above list, it is clear that Fox certainly did not do exegesis.

If Fox did not do exegesis (as suggested above), and did not have a theology, then what made him such a popular teacher and so widely read? deChant’s (2002) impression is that ‘Fox’s thought represents a popular theology – a theology for a popular culture’. He states that Fox is pretty much mainstream New Thought. He regards his biblical work as traditional New Thought metaphysical: ‘a blend of allegorical (symbolic interpretation) and popular psychology’. Although Fox was not particularly deep in his exegetical attempt, according to some, he was a genius at making interpretations relevant to his readers. Hence, according to deChant (2002), Fox has a ‘popular theology and popular allegorical interpretation’.

According to Emmet Fox the object of the Bible is to teach psychology and metaphysics (or spiritual truth) in order to know how to live correctly. Allegories and parables are used because they allow everyone to receive the teaching at their own point of development. He maintains that

‘if the Bible is to be of any use, these parables must be interpreted spiritually’ (Fox 1994:32). This spiritual interpretation is the fundamental thought in Fox’s method of interpretation. He recognises the Bible as the most precious possession of the human race for it contains the key to life, which includes health, freedom and prosperity. It meets all on their own level and brings them to their understanding of God. In his words, ‘it has a solution for every problem’ (Fox 1984:81). His zeal for the Bible as spiritual truth is confirmed in his statement that it gives ‘direct teaching about God, as clear and precise as any book on philosophy that ever was written’. He acknowledges the historical narrative and biographical nature of the Bible, believing that it contains unmatched collections of essays and treatises on the nature of God, the nature of man, the powers of the soul, and the meaning of life. Fox is convinced that it is ‘in its prayers and treatments that the Bible is transcendent’ for it goes ‘right down to the depths of the human soul, meeting every need that can arise, and providing for every possible temperament and any conceivable contingency – in fact they [prayers and treatments] cater to all sorts and conditions of men’ (Fox 1979a:69–70).

He further reveals the significance of the Bible by accepting that the characters demonstrate certain states of mind that could and do happen to people today. Every incident signifies something that can happen to us. Every name in the Bible has a meaning, for it represents an idea of a person and that person’s life. The geography of the Bible is significant too, as it represents certain states of consciousness. Numbers are used to convey definite ideas and principles. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet are particularly significant and have a symbolic meaning that runs through Scripture. To Fox, the Bible, although a story about people who lived thousands of years ago, is nevertheless a story for everyone today, ‘because the Bible is the Book of Every man’. He adds: ‘If I had my way, I would have all Bibles published with this phrase printed in large letters on the outside cover: THIS MEANS ME’ (Fox 1993:77). But Fox never loses sight of the fundamental thread of the inner and spiritual meaning of the Bible. He maintains that the Bible uses outer concrete things to express inner, subjective or abstract ideas as its method of imparting its teaching. Those who reject it as absolute nonsense, because it cannot be true, and those who accept it at face value, true or not, whether it makes sense or not, are all missing the point, according to Fox – he believes that the Bible is an allegory.

Fox reminds his readers that the Bible is not primarily intended to teach history, or biography, or natural science, although it contains a great collection of literary masterpieces, both in prose and poetry. It is intended to teach psychology and metaphysics. It deals primarily with states of mind and the laws of mental activity. Each of the principal characters in the Bible represents a state of mind, and the events that happen to them illustrate the consequences of entertaining such states of mind. It is in understanding this spiritual key to the Bible that a person's consciousness changes for the better, and Fox remarks that this raising of consciousness makes the higher revelation possible to us. New Thought Charles Fillmore ([sa]:73–74) agrees with this line of thought. 'Above all, the Bible explains the spiritual character of man and the laws governing his relation to God. These are symbolically set down as states of consciousness, illustrated by parables and allegories.' Thomas Troward (1917:208) adds that 'we learn that the interpretation of it is not to be found in learned commentaries, but in ourselves'.

Even though Fox emphasises the importance of symbols, parables and allegories within the Bible, he does not believe that the Bible is a book of predictions. As he often posits, the Bible, an ancient and Oriental book, compiled for a population living in different conditions and with different needs, is a great vortex through which wonderful spiritual power flows into the soul of the individual who reads it with understanding. It contains a wealth of pure history, but deals primarily with spiritual things that cannot be fully stated in limited language. There are three basic meanings to every passage in the Bible, Fox maintains. The first is the historical fact or bare statement; the secondary meaning lies imprisoned within the statement; and the third meaning brings about the change in the soul when the spiritual significance is really obtained and understood. It is in the secondary meaning, the inner meaning, that Fox finds the diagrams for living and where symbology transcends language. 'There is nothing in the world more thrilling than the Bible, particularly our Bible in English', says Fox (1979d:15). He states that: 'There is no literature in the world which comes within a thousand miles of it for literary power, for graphic presentation, for dramatic expression, for knowledge of human nature, and for human psychology, as it is the fashion at the moment, to call it.' He regards the Authorized Version, the King James Version, as the best; however, he does mention that there are mistakes in it.

For greater understanding of the Bible, Emmet Fox lists eleven keywords that in his opinion will not only open up the Bible, but will open up one's life as well.

*Fear:* It is said in Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 1:7 that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. According to Fox, fear is entirely evil and 'we have nothing to fear but fear'. Fox interprets fear of God as reverence for God. And reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom.

*Wrath:* For many students of metaphysics, the wrath of God poses a problem as they learn of a loving God. Fox's explanation is that the word 'wrath' in the Bible really means great activity. This activity is the confused stage prior to the moment of order. He uses the example of total disorder as in spring cleaning, or the 'getting worse' stage before the actual healing. To him, this so-called chaos or crisis is the wrath of God.

*I Am That I Am:* As one of the principal terms for God in the Bible, it 'means unconditioned Being ... the great Creative Power that is unlimited. It is an attempt – and a very successful one – to express, as far as language can, the infinity of God' (Fox 1984:60).

*Salvation:* To Fox this word means perfect health, harmony and freedom.

*Wicked:* Occurring more than three hundred times in the Bible, the word 'wicked' means 'bewitched' or 'under a spell'. As Fox has so often stated, the 'Law of Being is perfect harmony, and that truth never changes'. He reminds us that man often uses his free will to think wrongly about these truths and in so doing begins to believe that these false conditions are real. This is what it means to be bewitched or to live under the spell of this illusion. To break this spell of a wrong impression, one has to turn to God and 'know instead that God is all Power, infinite Intelligence, and boundless Love' (Fox 1984:64–65).

*Judgment:* Fox does not see judgment as a great trial at the end of times, but a process that goes on every day. This means deciding on the truth or falsity of any thought. 'To accept evil at its face value is to judge wrongly; To decline to believe in evil, and to affirm the good is righteous judgment'. He explains Jesus' saying 'Judge not that ye be not judged' cogently when he states

that 'to condemn our brother out of hand instead of seeing the Christ within him is to put ourselves in danger, because we are making a reality of those appearances in him, and whatever we make real we must demonstrate in our own lives' (Fox 1984:66).

*Heathens, enemies, strangers:* 'These mean your own negative thoughts', says Fox, and not other human beings. 'Wrong thoughts are heathens because they do not know God. They are strangers to your real self, and, of course, they are the only enemies that you can have. All such enemies are to be destroyed, not by wrestling with them which only gives them power, but by righteous judgment – refusing to believe in them. God is the only Presence and the only Power' (Fox 1984:67).

*Christ:* This word, which is a title, not a proper name, comes from a Greek word meaning 'anointed or consecrated' and it 'corresponds somewhat to the Hebrew term Messiah, and to the oriental word Buddha'. The Greek word 'Jesus', which was translated from the Hebrew 'Joshua' means 'God is salvation'. This is what Fox calls the golden key, in other words, 'the realization of God is our salvation'. He defines The Christ as 'the spiritual Truth about any person, situation, or thing' and 'when you realize the spiritual Truth about any problem you are lifting up the Christ in consciousness, and the healing follows' (Fox 1984:68).

*Repentance:* This means 'to change one's mind concerning something'. So when a person realises the wrong ways of his or her life, and chooses to change it for the better, then he or she has repented. Repentance is very important for any spiritual progress, and for the forgiveness of sin. When John the Baptist said: 'Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand', it meant that 'you should change your thought and know that the Presence of God is where you are' (Fox 1984:69).

*Vengeance:* Fox (1984:71) interprets the word 'vengeance' as 'vindication'. It stands for the vindication of Truth against the challenge or accusation of fear and misunderstanding'. Knowing that the real nature of being is perfect, people still accept mistaken ideas about the truth and then have to live in their bondage. When they turn to God and realise the truth, then the truth and God's goodness are vindicated once more.

*Life*: 'Life' in the Bible refers to those periods of feeling free, useful and joyous, without consciousness of fear or doubt.

### **8.3 ALLEGORICAL AND SYMBOLIC SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS**

Emmet Fox has a wealth of biblical interpretations.<sup>1</sup> He was particularly famous for his symbolic interpretation and understanding of the Bible in such books as *The Sermon on the Mount* and *The Ten Commandments*. It was his down-to-earth, direct, forthright approach to biblical interpretation, his warmth and deep sincerity towards people, as well as his optimism and total belief in the Gospel and its workability, that made his message always 'right now', affirms New Thought author Charles Braden (1963:355) – a religion 'for here and now – and people needed just that'.

#### **8.3.1 The Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount<sup>2</sup> in the New Testament Book of Matthew is 'an almost perfect codification of the Jesus Christ religion', according to Fox (1938:16). It is considered one of the greatest pieces of writing in existence and forms the heart of Christian teaching. Norman Vincent Peale<sup>3</sup> (1956:7) remarks: 'Of all the millions of words produced, of all the ideas ever expressed', the words of the Sermon on the Mount 'are supreme in style and truth' and have exercised 'more creative influence for good than anything ever written or spoken'. Swami Prabhavananda<sup>4</sup> (1964:9,13) regards the Sermon on the Mount as 'the essence of Christ's gospel' and 'a practical programme of daily living and conduct'. Along with other scholars, Swami Prabhavananda and New Thought follower Dorothy Elder insist that the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes in particular were intended for Jesus' disciples only, as their hearts were prepared to receive them, and not for multitudes.

Fox's belief in the essential truth regarding the nature of man finds a counterpart in Indian teachings in the knowledge that 'man's real nature is divine' (Prahavananda 1964:9); that a person 'is essentially spiritual and eternal' and that the only real goal of human life is to unfold and manifest that divinity (Fox 1938:4). A fundamental idea in Fox's teaching is that 'the Truth turns out to be nothing less than the amazing but undeniable fact that the whole outer world is amenable to man's thought and that he has dominion over it when he knows it'. In other words, the whole of one's life experience is only the outer expression of one's inner thought. He also maintains that 'we have free will, but our free will lies in our choice of thought' (Fox 1938:13–14).

Fox's focus on the inner teachings of Jesus and the Bible corresponds generally with the mystical approach to Scripture. Both approaches emphasise the importance of interpreting and understanding these truths with the heart and not the intellect; 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'. It was in the attempt to reduce the mystical content of teachings so that they justified prevailing opinions that the keys to Scriptures were lost. It is the truth or spiritual key that unlocks the mystery of the Bible and Fox regards the Sermon on the Mount as a golden key to successful living. Norman Vincent Peale considers the style and organisation of the Sermon on the Mount a work of genius. It deals with the profoundest of all truth in the simplest manner. He shares Fox's sentiments that: 'It does not depend for scholarly reputation upon complicated reasoning, heavy sentence structure, and an air of intellectual sophistication' (Peale 1956:9). Fox insists that Jesus taught no theology whatsoever and that his teachings were entirely spiritual or metaphysical. He believes that historical Christianity, which was concerned with theological and doctrinal questions, had no part in the Gospel teaching. It is these simple and profound truths, taught in the spiritual gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, that lead serious students to liberation, purification of their hearts, and the truth of God fully revealed within them.

The Beatitudes, or blessed statements, form the prelude to the Sermon on the Mount and they constitute one of the best-known sections in the Bible. Fox refers to the Beatitudes as a prose poem in eight verses that summarises the whole of Christian teaching. 'It is a spiritual, more than a literary synopsis', he observes, and it summarises the spirit of the teaching rather than the letter. This format 'is highly characteristic of the Old Oriental mode of approach to a religious

and philosophical teaching, and it naturally recalls the Eight-fold Path of Buddhism, the Ten Commandments of Moses, and other such compact groupings of ideas' (Fox 1938:19). This statement reveals that Fox had a very wide framework of reference. Mystic Manly P Hall, whose teaching is in accordance with Fox and New Thought in general, finds doctrinal parallels to the Beatitudes in the religions of the East and in the ethical codes of the philosophical systems of the Greeks and Egyptians.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)*

This Beatitude has been interpreted in various ways from indicating spiritual poverty to the importance of being humble and renouncing the vainglorious and petty ambitions of this world, and letting go of all pride in one's intellect. Fox understands 'the poor in spirit' as having emptied yourself of all desire to exercise personal self-will, 'to have renounced all preconceived opinions in the whole-hearted search for God. It means to be willing to set aside your present habits of thought, your present views and prejudices, your present way of life if necessary; to jettison, in fact, anything and everything that can stand in the way of your finding God' (Fox 1938:22). In other words, there should be nothing (poor) but God (Kingdom of Heaven). This is the fundamental truth or spiritual key that a person is essentially spiritual and eternal.

*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4)*

It has often been said that people do not learn by spiritual unfolding, but by painful experience. Fox considers such trouble and suffering extremely useful, as eventually it can become a blessing in disguise for through mourning one will be comforted. It is this feeling of spiritual deprivation within a person that Elder links to a mystic's experience of the 'dark night of the soul' – a period of seeming separation from the Source.

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5)*

The word 'meek' does not have any of the modern English meanings, such as submissive, servile, low and unpretentious, but should be interpreted for its technical use in the text, says Fox (1938:30–31), who interprets it as 'a combination of open-mindedness, faith in God, and the realization that the Will of God for us is always something joyous and interesting and vital'. Its true significance is a mental attitude, one of obedience or willingness to listen and follow the inner guidance, and this 'is the Key to Dominion, or success in demonstration'. 'Earth', continues Fox (1938:29), means manifestation, and 'manifestation or expression is the result of a cause'. Thus 'all causation is mental'. If earth means the whole of one's outer experience, then 'to inherit the earth' means to have dominion over that outer experience.

*Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)*

In this Beatitude the word 'righteousness' must be used in a special and definite sense. 'Righteousness' does not merely mean correct conduct, 'but right thinking on all subjects, in every department of life' (Fox 1938:33). Other scholars agree that the fourth Beatitude highlights the great law of the universe – 'that what you think in your mind you will produce in your experience. As within, so without' (Fox 1938:33). It is about the desire to realise God fully, to concentrate mindfully upon him, and ultimately to find one's own divinity in the silence.

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7)*

As a summary of the law of life, Fox insists that this Beatitude should be applied to the realm of thought – one should be merciful in one's thoughts. It also endorses the law of cause and effect, or the law of karma, even the golden rule. 'Because in deed and in truth we are all one, component parts of the living garment of God', affirms Fox (1938:38), and therefore merciful in our mental judgements of others, we will have the same merciful benefits in our own lives. 'To be merciful is one of the conditions necessary before we can receive the truth of God', and for that reason thoughts of envy, jealousy and even hatred towards another should be erased by an opposite wave of thought – 'If we want to find God, we have to become God-like in mercy' (Prabhavananda 1964:24–25).

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8)*

Fox points out that this is not seeing God in the ordinary physical sense of the word, but apprehending Truth as it really is. Scriptures of the world have proclaimed the truth that God exists and that the purpose of one's life is to know him. Fox (1938:41) suggests that people must recognise God as the only real Cause, Presence and Power, 'not merely in a theoretical or formal way, but practically, and specifically, and whole-heartedly, in all their thoughts, and words, and actions'; and 'in every nook and corner of their lives and mentalities'. Such devotion to God creates the pure in heart. Another method that results in this purity is to learn that purity and divinity are basically one's nature. The word 'heart', says Fox (1938:42), stands for 'that part of man's mentality which modern psychology knows under the name of the 'subconscious mind': 'as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'. Not only should one know this, it must also be registered within the subconscious (in the heart), and then the outer reality can really change, and one can be a divine creature (and see God), as Fox would teach.

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9)*

This is a practical lesson in the art of prayer. Fox (1938:43) regards prayer as 'the only thing that changes one's character'. It is such a radical change that he reminds his students that Jesus refers to it as being 'born again'. To bring about this new reaction, a person must have a sense of serenity, peace. Swami Prabhavananda (1964:28) echoes Fox's sentiments: 'We cannot bring peace until we have realized our oneness with God and with all beings.'

*Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matthew 5:10–12)*

Here Fox differs from other scholars in his interpretation. The classical interpretation is that those saints and teachers who were persecuted for their religious beliefs would be blessed for their courageous efforts. Fox (1938:49) affirms that one can envy them for the moral and spiritual heights that they attained, but 'there is no virtue in martyrdom'. 'Nothing can come into our

experience unless it finds something in us with which it is attuned; and so, to have trouble and difficulty is only a sign that our own mentality needs clearing up; for what you see at any time is nothing but your own concept.' According to his understanding the source of any persecution 'is none other than our own selves'. It is this tussle with one's lower self that persecutes one, but Fox considers this an extremely fortunate or blessed condition, 'for it is in such moments that we are really advancing' (Fox 1938:47–48).

Fox's unshakable belief in the power of thought, that what you think in your mind you will produce in your experience, is the golden key, or golden thread that runs throughout the Beatitudes. He has pointed out repeatedly that the vital bearing of the principles covered in the Beatitudes lies in their application to the realm of thought. He clearly interprets each of these statements from a personal and inner perspective and always applies it to the individual and his or her divine consciousness at any given time. This belief in the power of thought is not only evident in Fox's interpretation, but is the foundational concept in the Dhammapada, the Buddhist Book of Proverbs. In its opening line the Dhammapada states: 'All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts' (Müller 1988:3).

Fox's reading of the Beatitudes apparently brings him close to the Dhammapada. It also shows that he does not read the Bible from a narrow Christian point of view, for his interpretation reveals the possibility of a more universal truth. Although he suggests a literal interpretation for those for whom this works, he indicates that as a person evolves, so his or her interpretation of the truth opens into a greater universalism. From the many comparisons with other texts and religious philosophies, it seems that the Beatitudes portray a general way of life and do not belong exclusively to the Christian tradition. Christianity is just one doctrine among many; however, Fox regards Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount as a life-altering experience. That we have free will and that our free will lies in our choice, says Fox, is demonstrated by Jesus Christ. He summed up this truth, taught it thoroughly, surmounted every sort of limitation to which humankind is subject, and through his resurrection from death he 'performed a work of unique and incalculable value to the race, and is therefore justly entitled the Saviour of the world' (Fox 1938:15).

### 8.3.2 The Ten Commandments

Emmet Fox regards this section as one of the most important parts of the Bible, for it sums up the whole Bible teaching as it instructs one about the laws of life. In applying these laws, he says, we have dominion over everything. The account appears in the book of Exodus, which means ‘to exit’, and is therefore appropriate as a means of getting out of trouble. New Thought exponent Dr Ervin Seale (1976:14) reaffirms that the Ten Commandments give us the assurance that ‘there is always something that can be done about every problem, and that no man is ever without hope or without resources’.

Fox’s interpretation begins with the story of Moses, the receiver of the Ten Commandments. Moses, who was drifting in a basket on the river, was found by the pharaoh’s daughter, who then gave the baby to his own mother to be nursed. Metaphysically, remarks Fox, we all become the pharaoh’s daughter when we discover the truth – the spiritual idea – and like all babies, this discovery needs to be nursed by our daily prayers and meditations.

The meanings of names in the Bible are always tools for interpreting the stories. This, and other examples where a deeper meaning is indicated, points towards an esoteric background.<sup>5</sup> Moses means ‘drawn out of the water’, and water represents the ‘human mind or personality – our emotional nature’, while Egypt stands for ‘limitation and a lack of faith in God’. In order to know ourselves, we have to find God. Moses did this by going into the wilderness, where he married one of the priest’s daughters. These seven daughters represent the seven main aspects of God: Life, Truth, Love, Intelligence, Soul, Spirit and Principle. Marriage has always been the symbol of union between God and man. Once Moses was whole again, he could return and lead his people out of bondage, meaning that once we are reunited with God, our troubled and limited thoughts can be freed (Fox 1979d:28–31).

Ervin Seale also realises that the Ten Commandments can be read on several levels, depending on the level of consciousness and understanding of the individual. There are those who only

know and live by outer laws and regulations, whereas others, who have discovered the power within them, accept the spiritual responsibility for their actions. They will see the Ten Commandments not as restraints on their conduct, but as prescriptions for their thinking. 'This is the spiritual understanding of the Ten Commandments; it is also a scientific understanding, because it can be applied in daily life' (Seale 1976:19).

*First Commandment.* I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me

Fox refers to this commandment as 'I Am That I Am', for it explains the nature of God, which is not human, but pure Spirit, Infinite Creative Life, Infinite Mind, Infinite Intelligence. This pure, unconditioned Being cannot be defined within the limited human language. Fox notes that 'I Am' is one's true being. It is our real nature, which is the Presence of God in us. So, if one says 'I am this or that, or I cannot do this', one is limiting this Divine Presence, and therefore is entertaining other gods. But limited and negative thoughts will bring about a limitation in our demonstrations. One should remember the nature of one's being and confess that all the time, rather than focusing on those thoughts that will divert us from our goal. When the 'I Am That I Am' (God) spoke to Moses from the burning bush, it was the Presence of God (I Am) within Moses that addressed the personality of Moses (Fox 1979d:53–64).

*Second Commandment.* Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me ...

Whenever we give power to anything but God, we are making that thing into a graven image, a pocket god that we take out at will and that becomes the focus of our attention. This graven image can even be a favourite disease that we affectionately refer to as 'my rheumatism', comments Fox. This wrong thinking will bring about its own punishment, as the law will always carry it out – producing after its kind. God is not a jealous God; however, it is explained in this limited language so that we understand that when we give power to anything other than God, we lose it altogether. Ervin Seale (1976:65) expresses this idea as: 'Therefore, when any human

mind sets up a concept, a theory or an opinion about causation being outside itself, it is guilty of worshipping a false god'.

The thought of 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation' has frightened many people. People often refer to this text when they want to explain a hereditary disease. The truth is that 'no children are ever punished for the sins of their fathers or anyone else. We are never punished by or for anything except our own mistakes in the present or the past, perhaps the distant past'. We do not inherit any disease from our family, but a certain type of ailment may run in certain families and, like attracting like, someone in such a family may develop a similar condition. The ancestors are ourselves of yesterday, and the children and grandchildren are ourselves today and tomorrow. So whatever we do and think today will become our experience in the future (Fox 1979d:67–77).

*Third Commandment.* Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain

It does not matter what name we give God, for 'the real name of God for you is your idea of God' and you cannot have that in vain. Our idea of God determines the outcome of our whole life, declares Fox. It always works out for us in accordance with our belief. A limited idea of God will definitely bring about a limited demonstration and therefore we cannot afford, so to speak, to take the name in vain. Fox refers to this commandment as 'Thoughts are things', knowing that whatever we entertain in our minds about the nature of God will be what we experience and demonstrate in our daily lives (Fox 1979d:46–52).

Seale (1976:82), in line with Fox's thinking, expresses this as 'man is a result of what is in his mind. Mind is always measuring, defining, thinking and choosing what it shall experience.' He interprets taking the name of God in vain as having a limited thought, for '[w]hen a person falls down in his mind before difficult conditions or situations [such a person is taking the Name in vain] he is misusing the marvellous powers of being and awareness, and thus limiting his progress in life'.

*Fourth Commandment.* Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ...

This commandment instructs us to seek the presence of God everywhere and every day – not just on the Sabbath. God did not make the world in six days and then rested on the seventh. Fox states that the seven days of creation are allegorical. However, to have a full demonstration, we need to ‘let go’ of the effort. In other words, we need time to allow the demonstration to come to fruition. Fox’s motto is ‘Do the work, and then allow it to happen’. This is the meaning of keeping the Sabbath – it is understanding that God is present everywhere and every moment is sacred and holy (Fox 1979d:126–142).

*Fifth Commandment* Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee

Respecting our parents is only one aspect of this commandment. The metaphysics describes polarity, which is the motive power of the universe. Fox maintains that ‘father’ represents the knowing nature, whereas ‘mother’ means the feeling nature. It is only when our knowledge is accompanied by a strong feeling that the demonstration comes about. Thought has no power unless it is charged with feeling. We will only demonstrate in life, or have success in prayer, if we strongly entertain a specific truth.

*Sixth Commandment* Thou shalt not kill

Knowing that no one can kill from the outside, whether it is our business, our reputation or our peace of mind, is to be freed from being the victim of experiences. Fox (1979d:89) calls this commandment ‘expressing what you are’. When we express our true divine natures, nothing can touch us or affect us from the outside. However, we are always trying to kill our true nature, for we are so easily affected by the outside world. The good news is that we cannot kill or destroy what is divine.

Seale (1976:133) states that: ‘To kill means to remove from consciousness’. In other words, ‘If a mind becomes angry, it kills reason and good sense. If a mind becomes fearful, it kills courage and confidence. When a mind is jealous and vengeful, it is strangling hope and destroying faith. When a mind turns to bitterness, it has pulled down the shades on vision and is blindly bent on its own destruction.’ He reminds his readers: ‘There is nothing and no one in the sensible world

who can hurt you without your permission. Therefore, there is nothing in the created world to fear' (Seale 1976:137).

It is interesting to note the Eastern<sup>6</sup> sentiments on this commandment, because, for some, 'Thou shalt not kill', involves a vegetarian diet. Supreme Master Ching Hai (1999:56) is adamant that this commandment covers all aspects of life – human and animal. She links the killing of anything or anyone to the law of karma. When you kill 'in order to satisfy your desire for meat, you incur a karmic debt, and this debt must eventually be repaid'. Fox does not touch on this subject, for he insists that the Bible, and in this case, the Ten Commandments, must be interpreted from an inner, metaphysical and spiritual level. Is his limited approach to a topic of this nature (one that is important to the Eastern mind) a weakness or even a lack of exegesis and theology, or is he so focused and convinced about his belief structure that this so-called narrow-minded methodology becomes his practical and very efficient tool of teaching?

*Seventh Commandment.* Thou shalt not commit adultery

A synonym for idolatry was the word 'adultery' and they were used interchangeably. The worship of false gods was described as adultery. The fundamental idea behind this commandment is to have one God, insists Fox.

*Eighth Commandment.* Thou shalt not steal

Fox (1979d:42–45) terms this commandment 'by right of consciousness'. He explains that there is one great fundamental law, the law of being: 'whatever comes to you, whatever happens to you, whatever surrounds you, will be in accordance with your consciousness, and nothing else; that whatever is in your consciousness must happen, no matter who tries to stop it; and whatever is not in your consciousness cannot happen'. In other words, one cannot steal! Stealing is trying to get something for which we do not have the consciousness. And if we don't have it, we cannot steal it. When we do have the consciousness, then no one can steal anything from us either – they can only transfer some items from our home to another, but what is ours by consciousness can never be lost.

*Ninth Commandment.* Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour

To Fox, this means that we cannot permanently bear false witness, for our true witness is the full expression of God in us. We are divine beings, spiritual and perfect. And when we are true to ourselves, we cannot be false to someone else, for we always express what we are. We cannot be one thing and express another. When we bear true witness to our neighbour of what we really are, we also change that person, for when one goes through the generation of the soul, everyone benefits from it to some extent.

*Tenth Commandment.* Thou shalt not covet ... anything that is thy neighbour's

'Coveting affects the soul of man', Fox states, for it means that we do not understand the law of being, which is that 'whatever you are getting or lacking is the outpicturing and expression of your consciousness'. To want something from another is to deny our own contact with God, because God's supply is infinite. This commandment links strongly with the sixth (*Thou shalt not commit adultery*) as well as with first (*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*). 'Coveting and adultery are really bound together because coveting is disloyalty to God and so, in the Old Testament sense, is adultery; and when the Bible says not to commit adultery, it means not to worship some other God.' 'If you think you can only get what your neighbour has by taking it from him, you are worshipping a false God' (Fox 1979d:123–125).

In conclusion to the commandments, Fox (1979d:146) considers them a summary of the thought that every problem has a solution, for there is always a solution, and 'always the solution is to turn from the outer to the inner'.

### **8.3.3 The Lord's Prayer**

The Lord's Prayer (discussed in Fox's *Power through constructive thinking* and *The Sermon on the Mount*), probably the best-known and most often quoted words attributed to Jesus, is the common denominator of all the Christian churches, comments Fox. This is another of his well-known biblical interpretation. To truly understand this prayer, one should realise that it is a carefully constructed organic whole, a compact formula for the development of the soul. The

person who uses it will certainly experience a real change of soul. This is what is meant by 'being born again'. This carefully designed prayer works on a superficial level for the more simple-minded, and for the more materially minded, but also provides more advanced spiritual levels of insight and understanding. It has come down through the ages uncorrupted and unspoiled. Although this prayer is generally supposed to have been revealed by Jesus for the use of his disciples and followers, Manly P Hall believes that the Lord's Prayer may have been derived from older Jewish prayers, and that what it contains is consistent with the Rabbinical tradition.<sup>7</sup> Hall (1951:142) informs his readers that the Lord's Prayer will have richer meaning for us if we interpret it mystically and not literally, for 'after all, it is the spirit and not the letter which brings the Comforter' (the Holy Spirit).

The Lord's Prayer comprises seven clauses, a structure that is characteristic of the Oriental tradition and that symbolises individual completeness and the perfection of the individual soul. In its completeness it contains everything necessary for the nourishment of the soul, and to Fox this is of fundamental importance.

*Our Father:* The salutation 'fixes clearly and distinctly the nature and character of God. It sums up the Truth of Being. It tells all that man needs to know about God, and about himself, and about his neighbor' (Fox 1979a:15–16). It clearly states the relationship between God and man as that of father and child. If God, the father, is Divine Spirit, then the child, the offspring, is essentially Divine Spirit too. The word 'our' states the truth of fellowship of man that 'all men are indeed brethren, the children of one Father' and no race is superior to another (Fox 1979a:18).

*Which art in heaven:* These words describe the nature of God, and the nature means that God is in heaven. The word 'heaven' stands for God or Cause. In other words, God is first Cause, the Absolute. Humankind living on earth represents the manifestation, and therefore man must manifest 'or express God' at all times and under all conditions. Fox understands that God and man have their own role in the scheme of things, but 'although they are One, they are not one-and-the-same.' That is why it is stated that God is in heaven (Fox 1979a:19–20). 'Heaven [in a New Thought interpretation] alludes to one's state of mind, and earth is the manifestation of that state. As in mind, so in manifestation' (Anderson and Whitehouse 1995:78). Mystically, 'heaven

is experienced as a condition of union with the divine nature', and 'The Father in heaven is the divine power residing in the divine state', according to Hall (1951:143).

*Hallowed be thy name:* To know the name of God is to know the nature of God (above). In this prayer the name of God is 'hallowed'. In Old English 'hallowed' has the same meaning as 'holy', 'whole', 'wholesome', and 'heal', or 'healed' (Fox 1979a:21). If the nature of God is holy and whole, then a person, as an offspring of God, must also be holy and whole in nature for 'an effect must be similar in its nature to its cause'. His nature being altogether good, God cannot bring forth sickness, accidents or even death. Mysticism, as expressed by Manly P Hall (1951:144), states that 'we can only honor which we have known inwardly'. In other words 'the true name can be spoken only by those who have experienced the substance of Divinity'.

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven:* Humankind, being the manifestation of God, or an individualised consciousness of the Good, has to express the Divine Nature, which is from Heaven, here on earth where we are living our reality. 'Thy kingdom come' is to make manifest more and more of God's ideas upon this plane. It is to allow the All Goodness to express itself on all levels. 'Thy will be done' is to keep to the purity of nature as much as possible. For if one can let the will of the Divine manifest, one will stay in perfect harmony with its nature. And this perfection, this harmony, joy and freedom, must become evident on earth.

*Give us this day our daily bread:* If God is our Father, and we are his children, then God becomes the source of all our supply, Fox reassures us. 'Bread' symbolises all that one requires for a healthy, happy, free and harmonious life. To receive substance from the All Good every day is to be injected with the Divine. This means a life lived in purity. The source of all our supply is the one unchangeable Spirit, and not one's employer or investments. To realise the Presence of God, declares Fox, is to have daily bread. This means we link direct to the source and are nurtured in all ways through the source. Bread is food of the soul. This nourishment from Spirit must take place daily, as we are living in the here and now. To store food is to believe in privation, or a fear that there may not be enough, but if God is our source, we will never lack anything.

*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us:* Fox (1979a:31) regards this clause as the turning point of the prayer. He states that ‘the forgiveness of sins is the central problem of life. Sin is a sense of separation from God, and it is the major tragedy of human experience.’ When we are separated from our Source, we become disconnected from others. In other words, we then deny the first two words of the prayer ‘Our Father’, which indicated our oneness with the Source and with one another.<sup>8</sup> There is no progress in life without this connection. Jesus knew the beliefs of people in independent and separate existence and therefore he made very sure that there is no continuation without healing this sin. To be whole and complete one must ‘extend forgiveness to everyone to whom we possibly owe forgiveness, namely to anyone whom we think can have injured us in any way’ (Fox 1979a:33). Without this, the prayer becomes a vain repetition of words. Fox makes us aware that we cannot say ‘forgive me my trespasses and I will try to forgive others’ or ‘I will see if it can be done’. Jesus ‘obliges us to declare that we have actually forgiven, and forgiven all, and he makes our claim to our own forgiveness to depend upon that’. He raises the question of who is there who has grace enough to say his or her prayers at all who does not long for the forgiveness or cancellation of his or her own mistakes and faults? Who would be so insane as to endeavour to seek the Kingdom of God without desiring to be relieved of his or her own sense of guilt? No one, answers Fox. And so we see that we are trapped in the inescapable position that we cannot demand our own release before we have released another. This explanation reminds us of the Dhammapada, which states that the evildoer mourns and suffers in this world as well as the next, and therefore hatred can only be ended by love.

Patricia Diane Cota-Robles (1989:227), whose teaching resonates with that of New Thought, said: ‘It is not, “I will Forgive you IF or WHEN”, but rather, “I will Forgive you because I must, if I ever hope to Live fully and Happily again”.’ Asked why one should forgive others, she replied: ‘We Forgive because the price we pay for not Forgiving is too great.’ Fox (1979a:34–35) shares these sentiments. He reminds his readers that ‘we have got to forgive’, as hurt, injury and disappointment sink into our subconscious, and there they cause ‘inflamed and festering wounds, and there is only one remedy – they have to be plucked out and thrown away. And the one and only way to do that is by forgiveness.’ ‘There is no escape from this, and so forgiveness

there must be, no matter how deeply we may have been injured, or how terribly we have suffered. It must be done.'

When asked why our prayers are not always answered, Fox urged us to check for any unforgiven people or issues in our lives. If one still holds a grudge against anyone or anything, then the manifestation will be blocked from flowing freely into our existence. Fox's direct way of expression leaves no stone unturned. He affirms that: 'Setting others free means setting yourself free, because resentment is really a form of attachment.' He explains: 'It is a cosmic truth that it takes two to make a prisoner; the prisoner – and a gaoler.' So when you bear a 'resentment against anyone, you are bound to that person by a cosmic link, a real, though mental chain. You are tied by a cosmic tie to the thing that you hate.' Fox then asks whether we want to be in prison with the very person or thing that we feel has injured us? If our answer is 'no', then we have to cut the link and set ourselves and the so-called enemy free. Hall (1951:149), in keeping with this line of thought, remarks: 'We can never have peace in our own hearts while we resent the actions of those around us. In revenging ourselves upon them, we destroy our own security.' Fox is aware that many people have tried to forgive, because they understand the reasoning behind this act, but they have been so deeply injured that they find the act of forgiveness impossible. His advice is to begin with the essential willingness to forgive and he reminds them that this does not mean that we have to compel ourselves to like the enemy.

Fox (1979a:38–39) provides his readers with a simple method of forgiving as a practical application of his experience. It starts with quiet time by oneself. You can repeat a prayer or treatment that appeals to you, or maybe read an inspirational text. When you are ready, you say 'I fully and freely forgive X (mentioning the name of the offender); I loose him and let him go. I completely forgive the whole business in question. As far as I am concerned, it is finished forever. I cast the burden of resentment upon the Christ within me. He is free now, and I am free too. I wish him well in every phase of his life. That incident is finished. The Christ Truth has set us both free. I thank God.' If the memory of the incident should come up again, then just bless the person and dismiss the thought. Keep on doing this until you find yourself 'cleared of all resentment and condemnation, and the effect upon your happiness, your bodily health, and your general life will be nothing less than revolutionary'.

*Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil:* This clause has caused difficulty because many believers feel that God cannot lead anyone into temptation and that it is not part of his nature. For this reason, there have been many attempts to change the words, as many could not identify with them. Fox feels that this prayer, even in the English language, gives us a perfect sense of the true inner meaning. He reminds us that this prayer ‘covers the whole of the spiritual life’ and is a ‘complete manual for the development of the soul’. Those evolving along the spiritual path do become more sensitive in all ways, and therefore become ‘susceptible to forms of temptation that simply do not beset those at an earlier stage’ of their spiritual development. These temptations include spiritual pride, self-glorification and even material gain. Knowing that these temptations are real on our journey, Fox believes that Jesus included these words so that we can pray ‘that we may not have to meet anything that is too much for us at the present level of our understanding’ (Fox 1979a:40–42).

*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever:* This clause, although an excellent affirmation, does not really form part of the prayer. It states the ‘truth of the Omnipresence and the Allness of God’. The ‘kingdom’ refers to ‘all creation, on every plane, for that is the Presence of God – God as manifestation or expression’. The ‘power’ suggests the Power of God. This is to acknowledge it as the very power or force working through us. When we realise the Omnipresence of God, every sorrow will be turned into joy, age into youth and dullness into light and life. And this is the ‘glory’ of God (Fox 1979a:42–43).

Fox is aware that in recent years the Lord’s Prayer has been rewritten in the affirmative form. Divine Science believes that ‘through prayer we become more conscious of what we are, of what God knows us to be, His own image and likeness’. The affirmative prayer that Divine Science uses is patterned after the Lord’s Prayer, but is written in the present tense, for it is believed that Jesus spoke it in his native language, Aramaic, which had neither past nor future tense. Saying it in this way one finds no pleading, but rather an affirmation of truth and in a powerful way it emphasises oneness with God. It reads:

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed is Thy name.

Thy kingdom is come; Thy will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Thou givest us this day our daily bread:

Thou forgivest us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Thou leadest us not into temptation but dost deliver us from all evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (James and Cramer 1957:82–83).

Like all great statements, this prayer is simple and profound. Fox, and those who support his thinking, is convinced that if it is taken literally, its deeper significance can be missed. Its meaning is revealed to those who practise spiritual disciplines. In a brief form it gives the principles upon which a holy life must be based.

#### **8.3.4 The Good Shepherd**

Fox considers Psalm 23 a spiritual treatment in the form of a poem. He advises his readers to read this meditation through several times, dwelling on each statement and endeavouring to realise the significance of what one is reading.

##### *Verse 1a The Lord is my Shepherd*

‘Lord’ means God, which is one’s own knowledge of Truth and is the Presence of God within a person. This indwelling Christ is one’s shepherd. Thus as the shepherd looks after his sheep, so the Lord will take care of his people as they seek him through this meditation.

##### *Verse 1b I shall not want*

In fully believing and accepting this statement, a person cannot be afraid of anything; neither will he or she want for any good thing.

##### *Verse 2a He maketh me to lie down in green pastures*

The green pastures symbolise an abundance of good things in life, and they become the possession of a person, as he or she is made to lie down there. It is not a temporary arrangement, but is one's forever.

*Verse 2b He leadeth me beside the still waters*

Water symbolises the soul and to lead a person beside the still waters means that the Presence of God in one makes one's soul peaceful. Once the soul is at rest and at peace, the demonstration is to follow and that person will know that his or her prayers will be answered.

*Verse 3a He restoreth my soul*

Fox (1979a:48) regards this phrase as 'my promise of complete salvation'. At this point, he says, the prayer is answered and peace is filling the soul. For if one thought oneself separated from the Source, then that is what one would experience. 'Restoring my soul' brings one back to the original divine understanding and guarantees freedom in perfect health, happiness and prosperity.

*Verse 3b He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*

'Righteousness' means right thinking, whereas all evil is wrong thinking. The Good Shepherd in a being, the Christ within that person, leads one on the path of right thinking. Because 'the name' of anything in the Bible refers to its nature or character, one knows that the nature of God is 'all-powerful, omnipresent good, boundless love' and that is what one now manifests in life (Fox 1979a:49).

*Verse 4a Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me*

'The shadow of death' refers to a false belief in death as a reality. Knowing that God is life, a person also knows that death is just the seeming loss of the Presence of God. This understanding sets one free from any fear of the false beliefs.

Verse 4b *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*

The rod and the staff represent 'thy law', and that can never change. So, one can go forth in this meditation, knowing that one's word will not return void to one, because that which is forever is the comforter.

Verse 5a *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*

This statement acknowledges that enemies are your own thoughts in the form of fears and doubts, and as you face them, they lose their power over you.

Verse 5b *Thou anointest my head with oil*

'Oil' in the Bible always represents gladness, praise and thanksgiving. Thus to be 'anointed with oil' is a symbol of consecration. To be consecrated as the perfect child of God, a person is filled with praise and thanksgiving for overcoming his or her present difficulties.

Verse 5c *My cup runneth over*

'This is an additional assurance of the thoroughness and fullness of my demonstration' pronounces Fox (1979a:50). When someone allows the Good Shepherd, the Christ within you, to lead you, your life is not merely filled with the good, but it overflows with demonstrations.

Verse 6a *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*

Fox (1979a:50), knowing that 'every good prayer should finish with thanksgiving and a declaration of faith', accepts the 'accomplished fact' and claims it.

Verse 6b *And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*

As a child of God, one will dwell in the Lord's house forever. This means a person will always enjoy the presence and the power of the Lord in his or her life.

As an experimental extension and application of Fox's hermeneutical method, I have attempted to rewrite this psalm according to Fox's method. This is how it reads (my version is written in italics):

The Lord is my shepherd

: *The Presence of God is my protection*

I shall not want

: *There is nothing to fear*

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures

: *Abundance is mine forever*

He leadeth me beside the still waters

: *My soul is peaceful*

He restoreth my soul

: *I am beginning to remember and to understand who I am*

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake

: *I am thinking right thoughts for my nature is all-powerful, omnipresent good and boundless love*

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me

: *In the Presence of God there is no death and no separation from this Source*

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me

: *The unchangeable law, the Presence of God, is always with me*

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies

: *I am facing my own thoughts and fears in the Presence of God*

Thou anointest my head with oil

: *As I remember that I'm a child of God, I am filled with praise and thanksgiving*

My cup runneth over

: *I fully manifest and demonstrate my true nature*

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life

: *I claim my good*

I will dwell in the house of the lord for ever

: *I am always in the Presence of God*

## 8.4 CONCLUSION

Emmet Fox prefers and uses the allegorical method for his biblical exegesis. He is fixed in his opinion 'that all the doctrines and theologies of the churches are human inventions built up by their authors out of their own mentalities, and foisted upon the Bible from the outside' (Fox 1938:3). He also declares: 'There is absolutely no system of theology or doctrine to be found in the Bible; it simply is not there' (Fox 1938:3).

Does an allegorical method of interpretation actually become an aid to someone who uses it, to defend and justify his or her point of departure regarding understanding and interpreting Scripture? A piece of Scripture, which is very old and was written in an unfamiliar language for a different culture and historical period, may perhaps best be dealt with allegorically. If no one has the final say or the ultimate theory of everything, as Wilber postulated, then Fox, who did not concern himself with an intellectual and academic discourse, could be acknowledged for his intuitive (like the Transcendentalists) method of finding the most applicable spiritual interpretation from a text and then living accordingly.

Peterson, another author in the New Thought mould, agrees with Fox's philosophy. He believes that the dilemma faced by Christians and Jews in relating certain biblical accounts to the discoveries of science 'may be resolved when the possibility that some scriptural writing is symbolic or allegorical is taken into account' (Peterson 1986:178). In his opinion a strict literal belief in some particular translation of the Bible, without recognising some form of allegorical interpretation limits the ever-unfolding Truth.

Wilber (2001:132) enters into this debate with his spiral of development model, in which he posits that 'a person at almost any stage of typical development (eg purple, red, blue, orange, green, yellow) can have an altered state of consciousness or a peak experience of any of the higher realms (psychic, subtle, causal, non-dual). The person then interprets these higher

experiences in the terms of the level at which the person presently resides. This calls for cross-level combinatorial analyses; for example, a person at blue can peak experience psychic, subtle, causal, nondual; so can orange, green, and so on. This gives us a grid of over two-dozen very real – and very different – types of spiritual experiences.’ With this observation Wilber recognised the many different possibilities when it comes to interpretations. He also emphasises that such temporary states should become enduring realisations in which a ‘person will have to grow and develop through the spiral and into these higher realms as a permanent realization, and not merely as a temporary or nonordinary state: passing states must become permanent traits’ (Wilber 2001:181). It is important to Fox that people should occasionally paraphrase the most familiar texts of Scripture in their own language, for this will assist them to clarify the teaching according to their understanding and at the level of their consciousness at any given time. Unless such an endeavour becomes permanent, as Wilber has stated, in the sense that it changes one’s life forever, an important aspect can be overlooked.

Wilber (2001:133) explains this. A cross-level analysis becomes crucial in asking ‘What level is the spiritual experience coming from, and what level is doing the interpreting?’ If someone at level 4 – he uses the word ‘chakra’ – believes that only chakra 1 is real, one arrives at, for example, rational philosophy of materialism (as with Hobbes or Marx). If at this same level (chakra 4) one believes the emotional-sexual dimension is most crucial, one gets a Freud, or if chakra 3 is emphasised, one can get an Adler, and so on. It is also true that level 4 can look above itself and can think about higher and transrational domains without actually transforming to those higher domains. This is when we get various mental philosophies about spirituality, according to Wilber. For example, when chakra 4 aims at chakra 6, one gets rational deism and when chakra 4 aims at level 5, one arrives at rational systems theory, taking Gaia as Spirit, and so on. This thinking is all coming from level 4, as the subject contemplating these thoughts, is still from that level of consciousness. Noticing that most religious beliefs are from the purple, red and blue tiers (second and third chakras), it constitutes around 70 per cent of the world’s population. ‘But’, Wilber (2001:182) states, ‘narrow religious belief is one thing; deep spiritual experiences are another.’ ‘This is why the worldviews from those higher levels can only be seen from those higher levels.’ There is a sharp distinction between being at, say, chakra 3 and

having a temporary experience of a higher level, and being directly at a higher level at that time. One's interpretation of the worldview will change dramatically according to each level.

Wilber also addresses the dilemma of different interpretations that become increasingly challenging, as indicated above. One example is found in the battle of transcendence where Moses had to bring a higher consciousness from the Sambhogakaya realm (level 6) down to pagan worshippers in the Nirmanakaya realm (level 5). In another well-known example, Jesus' insight of causal level 7 (Dharmakaya) that 'I and my father are one' was not appreciated or understood by the lower subtle realm (level 6), where the consciousness was held and believed of 'Our father which art in heaven'.

These examples refocus attention on the importance of one's level of consciousness at any point in time. They also underline the difficulty of judging any one person's method of interpretation or understanding of knowledge. Having said this, it would be difficult to estimate where Fox and his religious thinking would be placed on this ladder of evolution into. Having recognised the value of Fox's universal approach (and esoteric) to biblical interpretation, it seems that he is teaching from a level where he actually resides. In other words, according to Wilber's structure, it does not seem as if he is on a particular level, and having a temporary experience of a higher level, but that he is directly at the higher level.

## NOTES

- 1 Other detailed biblical exegesis includes the following texts: The secret place – Psalm 91; Be still – Psalm 46; Light and salvation – Psalm 27; The everlasting gates – Psalm 24; Daniel in the Lion's den – Book of Daniel; The Garden of Allah – Isaiah 35 (Fox 1979); Your wrestling angel – Genesis 32; The balanced soul – Genesis 35; Turning the tide of trouble – Genesis 6; The called, the chosen, and the

faithful – Genesis 46; The fourth man – Daniel 3; War in Heaven – Revelation 12; Can the stars help you? – Judges 4, 5; How to un-worry – Job; Shipwreck – Acts 27 (Fox 1993).

- 2 Also the title of one of Fox's books, published in 1938.
- 3 A Reformed Church minister, who acknowledged in writing his debt to New Thought as the source of his positive thinking.
- 4 A disciple, teacher and counsellor of Vedanta (the philosophy taught by the Vedas, India's most ancient scriptures) and someone in whose teaching Fox and New Thought find support.
- 5 The following sources can be consulted for information on esotericism: Faivre, A and Needleman J (eds) 1992. *Modern esoteric spirituality*. London: SCM; Faivre, A 1994. *Access to Western esotericism*. New York: State University of New York Press; Faivre, A 2000. *Theosophy, imagination, tradition: studies in Western esotericism*. New York: State University of New York Press; Hanegraaf, W J 1996. *New Age religion And Western culture: esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*. Leiden: Brill.
- 6 To be initiated by The Supreme Master Ching Hai (she was a speaker at the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa), one has to keep the five precepts: 'Refrain from taking the life of sentient beings (the keeping of this precept requires a vegan or lacto-vegetarian diet); Refrain from speaking what is not true; Refrain from taking what is not offered; Refrain from sexual misconduct; Refrain from the use of intoxicants' (Ching Hai 1999:54). This line of thinking, as well as the whole concept of the Ten Commandments strikes a chord with the teaching of Raja Yoga.

To reach the realisation of God, the student needs to ascend the Yogic ladder by practising eight steps: '1) Yama (restraints); 2) Niyama (religious observances); 3) Asana (posture); 4) Pranayama (control of breath); 5) Pratyahara (abstraction or withdrawal of the senses); 6). Dharana (concentration); 7) Dhyana (meditation); 8) Samadhi (the Superconscious State)' (Swami Sivananda 1982:5).

The first restraint, Ahimsa (Yama), is non-injury, and means causing no pain to any creature, in any way, at any time, in thought, word and deed – thus giving up eating meat also falls under Ahimsa, because it involves cruelty.

7. A copy of a Jewish prayer (a reprint from Reverend John Gregorie – London, 1685):

Our Father which art in heaven, be gracious to us, O Lord our God;

Hallowed be thy name, and let the remembrance of thee be glorified in heaven above, and upon earth here below.

Let thy kingdom reign over us, now and forever.

Thy holy men of old said, Remit and forgive unto all men whatsoever they have done against me.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil thing. For thine is the kingdom, and thou shalt reign in glory, for ever and for evermore (Hall 1951:135).

8. The interconnectedness between Creator and creature and the emphasis on their oneness are illustrated in the following prayer, which is a new way of saying the Lord's Prayer. Barbara Marx Hubbard, New Thoughter, futurist, public speaker and social innovator, believes that through a series of deep personal encounters, she experienced the Christ as a living Presence directing her to write down guidelines for the great transition to universal life. When the Christ gives his power to those who are ready to receive it, to be joint heirs with him, she writes, he asks them to pray the following prayer with him:

Our Creator which art in Heaven,

Hallowed be our name,

Our Kingdom is come,

Our Will is done,

On Earth as it is in Heaven.

In marrying me, you take on my name. Your name is the name of God. Your power is the power of God. Your Kingdom is come, your will is done. You and I are one as my Father and I are one. The separation is over. Thank God. Amen (Hubbard 1993:226).

And to those who are attracted to the future, with a belief in things yet unseen, they are invited to say the prayer:

Our Creator who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be your name.

Your Kingdom come,

Your Will be done,

On Earth as it is in Heaven.

I do willingly commit myself to the fulfilment of your design.

Your will and mine are one.

I will go the Whole Way without arrogance.

I will move beyond the limits of the creature/human plane.

I know in my soul that more is to come.

I know I am to be a guide to my brothers and sisters on Earth,

As we move through the passage of transformation.

I promise to prepare myself and all others who desire everlasting life.

I believe that the God-conscious will evolve.

I promise to be a beacon of light for myself and all others who  
choose to evolve from Adam to Christ (Hubbard 1993:141).