

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to understand Emmet Fox's religious thought. The aim was to determine whether his teaching has any relevance for today and its significance within the South African context. Ken Wilber's theory provided the framework against which Fox's thought was critically evaluated and interpreted. To the question whether there is an inner affinity between New Thought and Wilber's reflection, the answer is yes. Fox, a precursor of Wilber, is in line with the model of developing transpersonal religious thinking of the present, as exemplified by Wilber.

Fox's appeal lay in his simplicity and forthrightness, and his strength as a preacher and writer lay in his non-conformist nature. His metaphysical teaching was simple, sincere, well balanced and practical, and he had great enthusiasm for life, as well as an unshakeable belief in God as first cause. His advice always came from his own personal experiences and inspirational insights. His ability to bring ancient symbols and truths right into the field of every person's understanding today is the reason that he was also considered one of the best-known figures in New Thought to have gained recognition outside the movement (Alcoholics Anonymous used his writings before they developed their own, and his work was widely read by ministers of all denominations).

Ken Wilber, a contemporary theorist and considered a true philosopher-mystic, provides the interpretational framework against which Fox's ideas were discussed. Wilber's strong academic argument, with his theoretical framework of integral hermeneutics for humanity's all-encompassing evolutionary process that is itself Spirit-in-action, was only briefly looked into in chapter 4. This study was never intended to compare these two scholars, but to use Wilber's theory and models to determine the value of a teaching such as Fox postulates. One of Wilber's theoretical models, the great chain of being, indicates the path of transcendence and explains the evolutionary growth through eight levels from the physical or lower to the spiritual or higher. In his attempt to formulate a theory of everything, which

even according to him is impossible, he nevertheless believes that a little bit of wholeness is better than none at all. In looking for an integral culture, Wilber realised that the growth and development of the mind can be seen as a series of unfolding stages or waves. Within his model of spiral dynamics, he sketches eight major levels or waves of human existence (also referred to as memes), flowing into and overlapping one another and resulting in a meshwork or dynamic spiral of consciousness that unfolds. As a person moves through these levels, an increase in consciousness and compassion is observed. The four-quadrant model is an attempt to integrate everything, the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual waves, into the experiences of the self, culture and within nature. Not one of the quadrants can be overemphasised as more important or more significant than any of the others. They form an integrated whole, and only as a whole is it possible to make a shift in consciousness that again leads to the ascent into a higher realm of understanding.

Wilber is considered one of the most important contemporary theorists regarding religion today and, seen theoretically, his model is far superior to that of Fox. Within such a large and inclusive framework of interpretation, Fox's strong and weak points can be determined. One such weakness is the lack of structure within Fox's teaching. On the other hand, Fox had no intention of constructing a theological, academic and philosophical doctrine, or of providing his students with a strict and controlled scientific or philosophic view. The question is whether this lack of structure or doctrine is detrimental to Fox's religious thinking within the wider context of humanity's religious experience, or whether his simple and practical method of teaching and preaching is his strength and success. He is remembered for his simple, but not simple-minded manner in which he portrayed the truth and provided practical and understandable tools to apply these lessons in life. His audience were not academic or scientific students, but lay people who called out for assistance and guidance in their relationships, business challenges, ill health and money matters. He was first a preacher and teacher, and then an author, and therefore he was known for giving his students and congregants food for their souls. He did this with great respect and always honoured their religious background. His advice was challenging, but never foreign to the understanding of his listeners. From analysing his work, ideas and teaching and comparing them to the thoughts and structures of other scholars in the religious field, one observes that Fox was a well-educated, well-read, highly intelligent and very knowledgeable person. It was his choice, then, not to present his teaching within any

structure or doctrine, and this preconceived notion of writing and teaching became one of his valuable contributions to a world that is in need of spiritual transformation.

According to Fox, doctrines and theologies are human inventions and he is of the opinion that there is no system of theology or doctrine in the Bible. Present-day New Thought scholars have arrived at the conclusion that Fox does not have a theology at all. This statement brings one to the crucial question of whether Fox's teaching has any significance or relevancy for today. From this research it is obvious that Fox was, and indeed still is, a major and important player in the league of religious teaching. While the metaphysical model of a great religious theorist such as Wilber highlights the little league in which Fox is playing, it is crucial to affirm that Fox preferred not to teach within any scientific or academic framework. This refusal to bind himself to any specific religious dogma had become his foundation of popularity and makes his teaching relevant in the present day. Against the backdrop of Wilber's four-quadrant model, Fox's method of teaching gives the impression that he ignores the whole and concentrates only on the part, but it is evident that he has integrated everything he knew and understood (including esoteric, eastern and universal truths) into a practical and workable teaching. I have the impression that he formulated his lessons or teaching in such a manner that his students and readers only received the summary of an intense and very sophisticated research endeavour and line of thought. Although this method would have been suitable for students or people attending his church services, the lack of academic discourse and religio-philosophical evaluation leaves a discernable void in his work, but does not necessarily indicate failure on his part.

Wilber's theory without a doubt shows the religious thinking of an evolving humanity over a long period. Presented in this format the line of thinking as well as the progress (or lack of it) of people in their attempt to rediscover their highest and purest form of being is evident. It seems that regardless where humanity finds itself at any particular time, evolved or not, the fundamental truths are necessary at every step of the way. Fox focused on these fundamental, yet highly significant and important aspects of life. It was this approach to life that made Fox's teaching valuable to his audience of that era, a changing American consciousness, as well as appropriate to a transformational South Africa, and, most of all, beneficial to every person in his/her inner spiritual journey towards the ultimate truth. That his methodology was simple, forthright, practical and easy to apply, that he preferred not to

conform to any teaching, or to compare and validate his beliefs against any other existing philosophy, does not guarantee his success. Neither does it disregard the value of existing doctrines and schools of thought such as Wilber's. Fox was indeed aware, informed and inspired by these truths and philosophies and their influence is reflected all through his teaching.

Throughout this study Fox's underlying religious thought is repeated – that 'the thought is the thing'. To him 'thought' is the real causative force in life and with this he endorses the whole of New Thought teaching, which states that 'whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve' or 'be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind'. He declares that there is only one Mind in the universe, Divine Mind, and that we are all individualisations of that – undivided parts. And this to him is the true meaning of being created in the image and likeness of God. Everything will not be all right, he says, unless you think rightly, and thinking rightly, of course, means putting God first in all your affairs. This line of thinking, that life is consciousness and that mind, ideas and thoughts are the basis of reality and the causal force(s) behind material objects, events and conditions, earns Fox, according to deChant, the title of the one who is really expressing the idealistic basis of New Thought. The debate over whether Idealism is the essential philosophical basis of New Thought was discussed in chapter 3 and continues among New Thought scholars. Fox is adamant that thought is the only cause and while thought has its origin within a person's consciousness, the actual manifestation or result of it is measurable or observed in the without (as you believe, so shall it be done unto you).

A similar line of thinking is explained by Wilber in his four-quadrant model. He also states that the within of things is consciousness and the without of things is form. One is reminded of his notion that every exterior has an interior, and Wilber acknowledges that although forms of consciousness do emerge, that consciousness has been around all the time as the interior of whatever form there is.

An exploration of Emmet Fox's religious thought regarding creative mind, prayer, meditation, healing and his understanding of concepts such as God, Jesus Christ, church and tithing, as well as his views on the process of death and dying, the doctrine of reincarnation, karma, the end times and finally his method of biblical exegesis reveals the

apparent affinity between Fox and Wilber. Although the intent of this study is not to compare these scholars, it is interesting and valuable to Fox's interpretation that they advocate a similar underlying belief in the holistic Kosmos and the importance of having an integral vision. They differ in their approach, explanation and application of their understanding of what truth is, but both acknowledge the evolutionary process of humanity through the various levels and stages of consciousness, and consider meditation a vitally important tool in reaching this point of development within a person. Yet again Wilber's theoretical framework indicates Fox's understanding of this process – the sense of movement, progress and development and that it gives the impression of the individual spiralling towards his/her destiny, all the time integrating, transforming and ultimately transcending into a higher level of consciousness.

Fox has a tendency, as stated earlier, to interconnect everything into a tight and complete product and then to offer it to his students and readers as the truth according to his understanding. He does not make clear distinctions between the various levels or quadrants that Wilber explained. Against this theoretical framework it seems that Fox is guilty of reducing all thought to one quadrant, the upper-left of Wilber's model. Fox does state, however, that everything starts with God or a thought, thus having his departure from the whole in order to arrive at the holonic destiny as encouraged by Wilber. I do not believe that this lack of discussing and comparing religious thoughts within quadrants suggests a failure in Fox's method, nor does it reflect back to the seeming void within his work that underscored a lack of academic discourse and religio-philosophical evaluation. The latter is an observation by those who are scientifically inclined, whereas the former, once again, emphasises Fox's intent of not upholding any structure. While Wilber advocates an integral vision in order to correct the flatland consciousness that results from a lack of seeing a holistic Kosmos or the failure to grasp the entire spiral of development, Fox seems to have always had such a belief – the whole as point of departure and the whole as place of arrival. Presenting his belief structure from the whole – God or thought – without giving the different parts that constitute the whole appears to be the recipe for a religious model that works in changing times and for a humanity that differs in its choice and preference of structures. Wilber himself is conscious that any theory is simply the latest attempt by someone in a long line of holistic visions.

The importance of a model such as Wilber's becomes imperative in understanding Fox's thought on certain religious concepts. Ideas such as creative mind, prayer and meditation can all be linked to the upper-left quadrant of Wilber's model, whereas healing, the demonstration into the outer level, relates to the upper-right. The interconnectedness between mind (thinking) and the result of it (the actual demonstration) is so tightly woven within Fox's model that it is impossible to separate it within the different levels. However, it can clearly be seen within the upper individual quadrants, as supported by Wilber. The attempt to explain concepts such as God, Jesus Christ, death and reincarnation is as difficult as Wilber's account of someone who visits a foreign country with a foreign language. In this scenario, although being part of a social system (lower-right), the individual is never part of that culture (lower-left). It is one thing to hear concepts, theories and philosophies as presented, preached and taught by any society (lower-right), and it is something completely different to understand the underlying concept as believed by such a culture or school of thought (lower-left). Again Fox does not make any clear distinctions regarding these quadrants and had no intention of doing so either. Wilber's model merely underlines Fox's clear comprehension and insight into these social shared worldviews.

Fox believes that one cannot define God, but that one can gain insight into the nature of God. It is worth noting that Fox did mention that God has no gender. However, in the time that he preached and wrote about his religious experiences, he stated that he preferred to address and refer to God as a male. And he asked his audience to make the necessary adjustments within their minds when they read and hear his words. According to my interpretation of Fox's work, he may be more panentheistic in his understanding of God, for he insists that God is The All, but not separate from the world, for a person is the I AM of God and therefore part of the greater whole. I am convinced that concepts such as theism, pantheism or even panentheism were the least of his concerns. He contemplated God in a very personal way. In certain instances God took on such a personal role that it appears that God as the only power does everything for his children, which is acceptable to Fox as he believes that the children of God have the right to ask for help. God being first cause, it seems that God is doing everything. Then in the same breath he states that God cannot do anything for anyone. He emphasises that as a divine being, everyone has the power within to bring about a positive outcome. It is the moment that a person realises his/her divine heritage that the change in thought comes about, and this choice, he maintains, is the

responsibility of everyone. In my opinion, whenever Fox uses the word God, he really means the 'inner self', or the 'Christ-within', or even the 'word/thought'.

In the person of Jesus Christ, Fox distinguishes between two individuals: the historical Jesus, or the human being, and the Christ, or the divine aspect within a person. Both Wilber and Fox consider Jesus the example that illustrates a person's true nature – their divineness. According to Fox, Jesus' fundamental message is 'the kingdom of heaven is within' and he preferred to convey this message to his students through his sermons and writings. Although he did have a church, he did not believe in organised religion and he had no hierarchical structure or complicated organisations. Neither did Fox believe in death. Dying is just a process of falling asleep in order to wake up on the other side minus a physical body, but enriched with the knowledge that one has not really died. He is, however, aware of the fear of death. Wilber affirms this fear of dying as the forgetting of one's true self and then the frantic attempt to search for substitutes to avoid facing this final transition (what he has termed the Atman Project).

Fox supports the idea of an after-life, and the next world, he points out, consists of many different planes, each vibrating at its own density and all interpenetrating. He insists that one can prepare for the after-life by living rightly in this life. Fox's religious thinking regarding concepts such as reincarnation finds resonance with much other religious thought, especially the Eastern philosophies. This universal line of thinking is also observed in his thoughts and insights about the end times, and the structural similarities between New Thought, Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta and Buddhism deserve further attention. He demonstrates a knowledgeable insight into the various cycles and ages, as well as a keen interest in the zodiac and astrology, which is reminiscent of Wilber's cycles and waves of, for example, the great chain of being.

Probably the most remarkable feature of his religious thinking is his allegorical interpretation of the Bible. Dell deChant has referred to this as a popular allegorical interpretation that was directed at a popular culture. Fox insists that the Bible must be spiritually interpreted. Whether this insistence, coupled with other features such as the role of healing in his religious thinking and practice, indicates a relationship with the esoteric tradition in Western religious history may deserve attention. It has not been addressed in

this study, however. His thoughts on prayer and healing are very much in line with the esoteric concept in Western Christianity. The metaphysical movement's emphasis is on alternative healing methods, which again are based on the idea that healing the body is in reality healing thought. It has been observed that the concept of esoteric belief is evident in modern science and physics, Eastern thought, mysticism and within shamanic culture. Determining the origin of these esoteric aspects warrants extra consideration.

Fox is also known for his ability to bring ancient symbols and truths right into the experiential field of every person's understanding today. For example, he would mention that in the days of Abram the people worshipped palpable idols of wood, stone and metal and then he would comment that our idols today are more subtle, such as money, power, pull and position. Through this identification the reader can immediately relate to the characters in the story and thus the Bible does not remain just an interesting book about some people's lives many thousand years ago, but the story of everyone today. This method makes reading the Bible lively, appropriate and transformational for the student. Regarding the Bible as the grand diagram of a person's destiny, he nevertheless disagrees with many of the more popular and fundamental interpretations. For example, 'If ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins'. He believes that the translators wrongly inserted the word 'he' to complete the sentence grammatically (as it does not appear in the original text). Fox (1993:211–212) argues that Jesus was not talking about himself in this case and that it should mean that 'unless a person believes in the I AM, the Indwelling Christ in every man, he has misunderstood his relationship to God, and he will die without knowledge of the Word of Power'. This unwavering passion for the Bible queries his openness to other interpretations and facts regarding the stories in the Bible. He firmly believes that Moses took the Israelites dry-shod through the Red Sea, because he believes in the power of thought. According to his interpretation anything can manifest when you believe in it. He suggests this type of literal and even biblicistal interpretation, especially if it works for a person. Then again he is adamant that as a person evolves in his/her spiritual understanding, the interpretation opens up to a more universal awareness. He insists that the Bible is written in symbol and allegory and that it teaches psychology and metaphysics.

This popular allegorical method of biblical interpretation confirms the structural link with what he considers the fundamental belief in life, namely that 'thought is the thing'.

Emphasising that the Bible must be spiritually interpreted, he refers to the essential principle that if everything (a name, person or concept) represents a state of mind, then a changed thought can bring about a higher revelation. He also maintains that the Bible uses outer concrete things to express inner, subjective or abstract ideas as its method of imparting its teaching. This to him means that one cannot have the hidden inner or spiritual meaning without an obvious, physical and visible vehicle (just as a soul needs a body in this reality). Thus the Divine teaching needs a form or doctrine for its revelation, and this to him is the Bible or a theology. This concept is reminiscent of Wilber's four-quadrant model, in which the inner level is dependent on the outer one for its revelation. Actually all the levels or quadrants are so integrated that only as a whole do they provide the opportunity for a shift in consciousness and the ascent into a higher realm of understanding.

According to Fox Jesus did not teach theology, but had a spiritual or metaphysical approach. He believes that although historical Christianity concerned itself with theological and doctrinal questions, the teaching in the Gospels did not. Thus, he upholds that 'there is absolutely no system of theology or doctrine to be found in the Bible; it simply is not there' (Fox 1938:3). It can be said that Fox did not have a theology in the sense of a careful, balanced and elaborate system either. However, if theology is (theo-logos) 'discourse on God', then Fox most certainly had a theology. I think Fox lacked a formal theology in the sense of a formal academic discipline, where 'it is God talk of a more careful, deliberate, and reflective kind than the common sense, popular conversations all of us have engaged in at one time or another' (deChant 1995:129). Formal theology, according to deChant (1995:130), requires 'systematic consideration, presentation, and disputation of issues facing a religion; the application and sound ('scientific') methods of critical inquiry and analysis; and the assertion of conclusions that are internally logical, rationally coherent, and academically supported'.

In looking for reasons for Fox's religious thinking being such a success, one naturally has to look at the time and period Fox lived in the United States of America. It is very clear from an article originally published in 1939, 'The American spirit' (the principles underlying the Constitution), and a lecture delivered in 1932 on 'The historical destiny of the United States' (Fox 1994:166–230), that Fox, besides having been a very patriotic citizen, discovered a foundation within them for his religious teachings. The historical roots of the

United States, says Fox, can be traced back to the old feudal civilisation of Europe, then through the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and onto the Revolution of the American Colonists. It was on American soil that humanity was going to take its next great step, the ground being prepared for a selected group of people from Europe to start afresh on a new continent. This was the only way for them to 'be set free from the bondage on innumerable outworn traditions and habits of thought' (Fox 1994:204). The next great step that humanity was about to take on American soil was the emergence of new ideas or Truth, otherwise termed Divine Science by Fox – in a sense it is primitive Christianity, now expressed as the doctrine of the Allness and Availability of God to every person all the time. The Declaration of Independence, which Fox considers one of the most vivid and colourful documents ever written (for it thrills one with hope, faith and enthusiasm), states clearly that 'All men are created equal' (note, Fox reminds us, that it does not say born equal, for that is not true); thus all have equality of opportunity and all have the freedom of growth that belongs to the idea that a person is the image and likeness of God.

The historical destiny of the United States, as termed and believed by Fox, brought forth this Truth; it produced a nation different from any other existing nation; and it established a society different from feudalism. This American Dream provided a new attitude to life and a new order of society. It endorsed equality among all, and equal opportunities, and it discouraged distinctions and upheld the idea of 'where there's a will, there's a way'. Such a foundation for a free, prosperous, and independent life for everyone, an eagerness to start afresh with equal opportunities, became the backdrop against which Fox delivered his teachings. The American people, hungry for spiritual freedom, were ready to hear the principles of Divine Science, so eloquently and simply explained and taught by Fox. His popularity at the time lay in his ability to feed a culture and society with his popular biblical interpretations. Would he have succeeded today? Probably not. The single danger that Fox predicted for this emerging and powerful nation was internal conflict among its people. With the 2004 election just completed and the September 11 (2001) ordeal still lingering in the minds of all Americans, one has reservations about the spirit of the American Constitution and whether decay or division is not already infiltrating the perfect American Dream. These occurrences stunned and challenged the simplistic and optimistic consciousness of the Americans. If this is the case, discord in the land of opportunity, then it seems that a

teaching such as Fox's would again be ideal for the emerging of a new consciousness. This type of spiritual insight is of paramount importance for any new beginning for it sets people free from old dogmas and embraces a new possibility. For this reason I regard Fox's religious thought as an important tool in a changing South African environment as well. After 1994 South Africans were standing at their next step into a new society. For this reason they had to let go of old and outdated paradigms and limited belief systems. A religious paradigm such as Fox presented proves to be relevant in bridging the different cultures, languages, religious beliefs in a country such as South Africa, but particularly in playing a significant role in assisting a continuously changing spiritually minded population. Fox's idea of Scientific Prayer prepares the way for neither running away from troubles nor fighting them with power, but 'by turning to God and realizing His ever-presence, to soar above them into the spiritual plane where there is eternal peace and harmony' (Fox 1994:218).

Many leaders of New Thought were never affiliated in any way with the three largest organisations (Unity, Divine Science and Religious Science), for they maintained totally separate ministries and some had their own schools or centres for teaching ministers, practitioners, counsellors and laypersons. Such an independent leader was Emmet Fox. The greatest monuments left to honour him are the mended lives of men and women everywhere who have found peace of mind, health of body and purposeful living through his teaching.