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Open Forum

Inside 'A Course in Miracles'

Among the most beneficial of contemporary spiritual paths, the Course has its share of pitfalls as well.

By Richard Smoley

Attitudes toward the Course vary widely, but usually they take their cue from the fact that it claims to be the work of Jesus Christ, as transmitted through a New York psychologist named Helen Schucman. Conventional Christianity regards it as a heresy and dismisses it out of hand, while those who believe in it treat it virtually as scripture. Thus there has been very little real critical scrutiny of the Course from the point of view of the serious, but not credulous, student of spiritual truth.

Helen Schucman began to hear an inner voice in the mid-1960s while working as a professor of medical psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. Disturbed by it, she began to worry that she was becoming schizophrenic and confided her fears to a colleague, Bill Thetford. Thetford pointed out to her that she wasn't suffering from the withdrawal from reality that schizophrenics normally experience; her life and career were functioning well. When she asked him for advice, he suggested that she do as the voice asked — which was to write down what it would dictate.

Over the next several years, the voice, which claimed to be that of Jesus Christ, transmitted a work that would ultimately occupy three volumes and nearly 1,200 pages. *A Course in Miracles*, as it is called, presents a training program in esoteric Christianity set out in a 622-page text, a 478-page workbook, and an 88-page teacher's manual. Although, as the