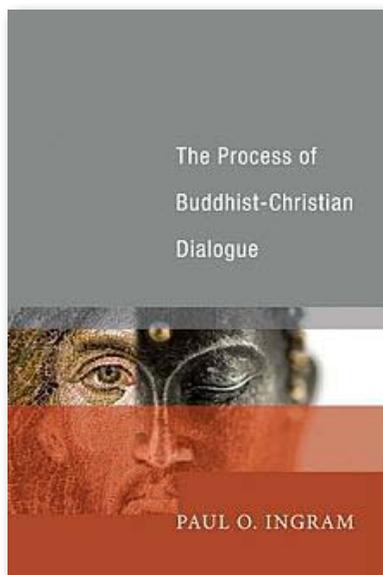


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## Buddhist and Christians in dialogue and prospects of a Buddhist-Christian-natural sciences trilogy

Paul O. Ingram, *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*. Eugene: Cascade Books 2009. 149 pp.



Paul O. Ingram is a retired professor of the history of religions from Pacific Lutheran University, Washington, and a veteran in Buddhist-Christian, as he prefers to say, dialogue. His latest book reminds us of the fact that although—mainly for political reasons—Christian-Muslim, or Muslim-Christian, dialogue now dominates the religious dialogue scene, there are other important on-going dialogues in which the Christians, or rather some of them, are involved.

Ingram's book under review, *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, opens (Ch. 1) with the author's discussion of what he understands by dialogue. He defines it as pluralism, meaning, if I understand him correctly, that in a dialogue each participant is engaged in one's own particular faith, but acknowledges oneself to be represent-

ing only one form of religion that is continually developing and thus not absolute. While feeling sympathetic towards this kind of conceptualisation of dialogue, I found it a bit wanting. I believe that to place a particular dialogue in a context which is true to life we need to consider the participants' actual understanding of what they actually will achieve, not only a theoretical no-man's point of view what makes up an idealistic dialogue.

In what follows Ingram tackles the Buddhist-Christian dialogue from three perspectives, which he calls conceptual, engaged and internal. The first term refers to a clarification of theoretical, or doctrinal, concepts, the second means involvement in social activities shared, or agreed upon, by Buddhists and Christians, and the last one indicates the exchange of experiences of meditation and similar practices. Ingram also devotes much space to the religions' encounters with natural sciences, muses on eventual advances of a Buddhist-Christian-natural sciences trilogy, and, it seems to me, believes that dialogue for example between neuroscientists and Buddhists and Christians practising meditation might be fruitful.

Ingram himself is a liberal Lutheran theologian with process theology inclinations, as he frankly admits. His view is that a dialogue, be it religious or not, aims at some sort of transformation of both partners. Exclusivist and inclusivist presuppositions are incorrect, because they essentialise, and thus reify, religion, whereas in Ingram's view religion is an unfolding natural process.

The book does not give the reader a history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which I think is a pity, because with a historical preview the reader could more easily place various references to places, topics and persons into a context. How-

ever, in chapters 2 and 5 Ingram briefly presents some prominent Christians, mainly Protestant, and a few Buddhist thinkers having contributed to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The Christians include Westerners such as John Cobb, Paul Tillich, Hans Küng and Thomas Merton, and Japanese theologians Seiichi Yagi and Masaaki Honda. Except for Merton, who was engaged in an interior dialogue, all of them were mainly interested in conceptual dialogue.

Ingram briefly reiterates their main points, aiming, as far as I understand, to clarify a few things, namely, (1) to find some common conceptual frame for a dialogue, (2) to refute eventual claims of superiority from each part, and (3) to offer the reader a context not only for a dialogue between modern Buddhists and Christians, but also for the above-mentioned trilogy between Buddhist, Christians, and natural scientists. I do not really know why he does not pay much attention to Buddhist thinkers. Admittedly, there have been few such thinkers engaged in conceptual dialogue, so to neglect Buddhist partners from this perspective could be understandable. But I wonder why, in the case of so-called engaged Buddhism, Ingram was satisfied with some references to Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama.

While the title of the book refers to Buddhists and Christians in general, the actual texts focus on liberal Protestants and modern Buddhists either living in the West, or being familiar with Western philosophy and its world-view. This focusing reveals the present situation of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. A great majority of Buddhists and Christians are not engaged in any sort of mutual dialogue—although there are more dialogues taking place than Ingram mentions, initiated, for example, by the World Council of Churches. Those, who

are involved in a dialogue have found a common ground on social activism or engagement, which is probably the most realistic mode of dialogue. For I think that Buddhists and Christians will never agree at a conceptual level, nor should they do so, but, as Ingram points out on several occasions, they may have much in common in facing the challenges of globalisation and the market economy, fostered by both religious and non-religious persons.

However, I feel that Ingram's book implies that a Buddhist-Christian dialogue is possible mainly between liberal, or modern, representatives of both faiths, and only between those, who agree, with Ingram, that religion is important for this world, too, and not only for a salvation, or awakening into an elsewhere. I hope I am wrong. But I cannot help wondering, how for example conservative Christians, Protestant fundamentalists or Catholic or Orthodox traditionalists, could have a dialogue with traditional Buddhists, and for what reason.

I do not blame Ingram for not providing me with an answer, nor was it his intention. But I think that an enormous obstacle in the way of all kinds of dialogues is the unwillingness of a majority of religious persons to engage in such an effort, mainly, I think, because they suppose that it requires some sort of betrayal, or giving up, of, the truth of their own religion.

What could I then say to that majority? On the basis of Ingram's book, I could suggest to them that they consider the facts that (1), any dialogue takes place in a larger social and ideological context, which means that it is influenced by, and has repercussions in, the world outside the small circle of its participants; that (2), religions today in any case face each other, as well as the secular world, and already

for that reason it were better to discuss with the other than ignore or discriminate against her; and that (3), a dialogue's aim should not be the transformation of what is transcendent in religions, but the mutual sharing of what is immanent in them. Acquaintance with meditative techniques by Buddhist monks in US Catholic monasteries and by Catholic monks in Japanese Zen monasteries could, in my opinion, be one basis upon which to develop such a dialogue.

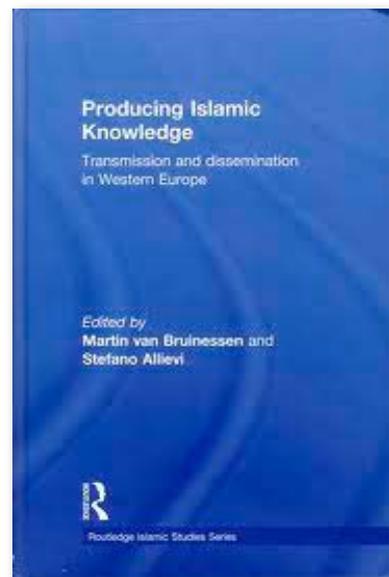
However, Ingram himself underlines dialogue as a process, which I take to mean that in a dialogue there are neither given answers nor pre-established goals, but both are created and re-created as the dialogue goes on, and it goes on endlessly, transforming those who have the courage to participate in it; both representatives of religions and, if Ingram's wish comes true, also those of science.

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**Reconfiguring Islamic knowledge in Europe**

Martin van Bruinessen & Stefano Allievi: *Producing Islamic Knowledge. Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*. Oxford: Routledge, 2010. 196 pp.

This timely collection, published in the Routledge Islamic studies series explores the reconfigurations of Islamic knowledge production taking place in the contemporary European context. As Martin van Bruinessen proposes in the preface, alluding to Talal Asad's famous definition of an 'Islamic tradition', it aims to investigate 'how Islamic knowledge (defined as what Muslims hold to be correct Islamic be-



liefs and practices) is being reproduced in West European contexts by looking at specific settings, institutions and religious authorities' (p. viii). What is particularly promising with such a broad definition of Islamic knowledge, is that it allows us to go beyond the mere study of scriptural knowledge, instead pointing to the intersection of scriptural tradition with everyday practices. It looks not only at the sites of production of this knowledge but also at the multiple and various sites of its consumption, and even more important, of its application. It is notably the question of applicability which underlies many of the contributions in this volume. Their insights importantly reflect how the Islamic knowledge produced refers less to an abstract or dogmatic knowledge (which would confirm the idea of religion as a set of abstract ideas and belief), but is always related to questions of concrete (ethical) practice, whether discursive or embodied. The chapters demonstrate how—given the strong relation to practice and therefore its demand for plausibility—the production of knowledge in a European context has to take into account the social realities of

the environments in which Muslims live. Those who wish to gain access to young, European born Muslims, as well as to converts, have to employ different modes of communication, but also consider the difficulties of incorporating an Islamic ethos into everyday life.

As sites of knowledge production are cited in the different chapters a landscape of diverse institutional settings, from mosques and mosque associations, religious organizations (most often with transnational ties), and new types of Islamic seminaries and schools, to councils designed to issue legal advice, and finally, again virtual sites are presented. If traditionally educated scholars still make up the bulk of religious authorities, they do not possess the monopoly anymore; self-made preachers join the ranks of those who produce and diffuse religious knowledge in Europe today. What emerges from all the contributions, however, is that religious knowledge, whether learned through traditional channels or not, is not sufficient. To be able to connect to a European born Muslim on the one hand, but also to run one's institutions effectively and in a sustainable fashion, more know-how is demanded from these figures: familiarity with the national bureaucracies, entrepreneurial competence, acquaintance with the social and economic problems facing the community and with the dominant youth culture that impacts on Muslim youngsters.

The first two chapters, written respectively by the two editors of the volume, Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, function in some ways as introductory essays, sketching a sort of inventory of the landscape of Muslim knowledge production in Europe and giving a survey of the main issues that the institutions involved in this production are faced with. Van Bruinessen focuses on the 'practical Islamic

knowledge' that is disseminated, notably in order to enable practitioners to practice correctly their faith: this is a knowledge geared towards the development of inner dispositions that enable them to acquire the discipline and sensitivities necessary for adopting the Islamic ethos. But the channels through which this knowledge is disseminated are under much pressure. If, in the early years of Muslim migration to Europe, it was the imam of the local mosque who was in charge of this task, the author shows how his role has been increasingly contested and has gone through significant changes in recent years. This is due not only because of the proliferation of different types of Islamic institutions, better suited to the needs of European born Muslims, but also to a new scrutiny exercised, since 9/11, by state authorities attributing to imams a heavy responsibility regarding integration and security policies. Allievi complements this account by stressing the multiplicity of approaches to Islam co-existing within Muslim communities in Europe, which has a significant impact on the different ways of consuming and applying Islamic knowledge. On the other hand, he highlights importantly how the knowledge circulated within these diverse communities and their institutional structures also always has to be seen as a reaction to a knowledge of Islam produced and circulated within the public sphere of the mainstream society.

The next five chapters provide rich empirical examples, from different national settings, of the re-configuration of Islamic knowledge production, as well as of the sites of this production. M. Amer Morgahi's essay aptly demonstrates how the traditionalist organization, Minhajul Qur'an (MQ), originally from Pakistan, has developed different modernizing strategies in the context of the Netherlands.

These changes have been notably led by the younger and Dutch born generation of MQ members. The following chapter by Valérie Amiraux gives a rich ethnographic account of the evolution of a Parisian mosque under the auspices of its charismatic director, establishing a wide range of activities geared not only to Muslim practitioners, but also to a larger audience, involving topic-based instructive seminars, as well as social work for the deprived members of the neighbourhood. Jonathan Birt and Philip Lewis discuss the emergence of Deobandi led seminaries in England and notably the new social roles that young ulama, educated within these British seminaries, are assuming. These chapters strongly demonstrate how pious practitioners of the new generation do not feel at ease with styles of instruction and communication reflective of a pedagogy practised by the parents' generation. A recognition of these attitudes has championed the development of new pedagogies by the different types of religious authorities. Notably the two latter essays reveal how Muslim institutions in contemporary Europe had to change their traditional roles from being mere transmitters of religious instruction to interlocutors capable of engaging with the multi-faceted social problems that their communities are facing. This development has caused many observers to speak of new pastoral roles which are being assumed today by Muslim religious figures. These chapters also evoke the growing pressure these figures are facing, notably due to a new type of surveillance which is being exercised on them by state authorities after 9/11, which regards Muslim institutions through the lens of security concerns.

The subsequent chapter, authored by Alexandre Caeiro, takes the reflection on the development of religious knowledge a step fur-

ther, by examining the emergence of minority fiqh as it is materialized in the fatwas issued by the European Council for Fatwa and Research. He aptly analyses how these fatwas constitute a response to the growing and concrete demand by Muslim practitioners who express uncertainty as to how to apply Islamic normativity in a non-Muslim, secular context. Ermete Mariani's chapter then shifts his interest to a very different site of knowledge production, the one enabled by new media technologies, notably the internet. His study of two preachers, one representing mainstream Islam (Amr Khaled), one a Salafi-Wahhabi tendency (Omar Bakri), shows how global communication strategies enable these preachers to gain a new presence, being able simultaneously to address a specific local or national community and a delocalized virtual public.

If all these case studies concern the far from homogeneous, but fragmentary and diverse Islamic revival movement that emerged originally in Muslim majority contexts and now has taken root in Europe, the last chapter is an important addition in that it points to a form of European Islam that is nourished by a quite different tradition of spirituality. Mark Sedgwick illustrates how the perennialist thought of René Guenon has given rise to a specific European interest in and practice of Sufism. He also reveals how this specific European phenomenon has enabled a Sufi revival on a global scale, concerned as much with spiritual renewal as with the successful integration of its members into their specific local contexts.

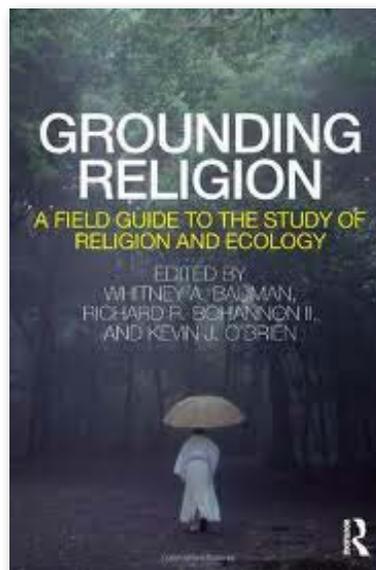
Producing Islamic Knowledge is an important contribution to the quickly growing field of the study of Islam in Europe. All the essays underline the need for practical knowledge among Muslim practitioners, as a sort of guidance that facilitates pious Muslim life in secu-

lar and, at times, hostile contexts. More than a programme for a new Islamic theology, this is perhaps the promise of the so often hailed notion of 'Euro-Islam'.

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**Social activism on religion and ecology in classrooms**

Whitney A. Bauman, Richard R. Bohannon II & Kevin J. O'Brien:  
*Grounding Religion. A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology.*  
London & New York: Routledge,  
2011. 239 pp.



*Grounding Religion* is an easy-to-grasp introductory book to the field of religion and ecology. Even though it is lucid, the book contains discussions, dialogues and analyses by established researchers within this interdisciplinary field. The book is divided into three parts, where the first part deals with religion, the second part with ecology and the third part consists of key issues such as sustainability,

animals, gender, economics, environmental justice, globalization and place. The two first parts start with an introductory but analytical chapter, by the editors, of the main notions of religion respective ecology, followed by a dialogue between Rebecca Gould and Mark I. Wallace discussing religion and between Celia Deane-Drummond and Lisa Sideris debating ecology. Both parts end with a case study. All key issue chapters except one have case studies at the end, illustrating and concretizing the topic discussed.

The book is designed as a textbook for students, but suits everybody interested in the field. Even for someone already familiar with the academic discussion of the topic, the definitions and analyses are good reminders of perhaps self-evident conceptions, such as what religion is. The editors Whitney A. Bauman, Richard R. Bohannon II and Kevin J. O'Brien start by stating that they do not provide a definition of religion, but that the concept is approached through different ways in which religion has been defined, studied and critiqued. For this purpose five definitions of religion by five recognized scholars have been chosen, namely Paul Tillich, D. T. Suzuki, Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz and Karl Marx. According to Geertz's inclusive definition of religion, that includes elements such as a system of symbols, long-lasting moods and formulated conceptions, environmental movements themselves can be seen as religions. Within this broad definition, almost anything can be regarded as religious. The main reason why religion is important to define is to understand that, depending on which definition we choose, we signify, mean and understand various contents. An important question raised by the editors concerning working within or outside a religious tradition is that every scholar chooses for him or herself how much dis-

tance is needed from the research field to obtain objectivity.

From the perspective of religion and ecology, the way we choose to see religion also affects the level of confidence in how religions can respond to the environmental crisis, which can be positive or skeptical. There are two assumptions which run all through the book, namely that there is an important connection between religion and ecology and that this connection is important, particularly at a time of environmental degradation. *Grounding Religion* is about ecology 'because it concerns what happens when the study of religion is shaped by the natural world and how that natural world forms a context for religious beliefs and practices' (p. 49). In the same way as with the notion of religion, ecology has different traditions and priorities and therefore it is vital to decide which approach will be given most attention and emphasis.

The discussion questions after every chapter and the study boxes throughout the chapters, with questions relating to the texts, function as a reminder that the book is a student textbook. All questions are formulated to call for more than a yes-no-answer and form the basis of a discussion. Some questions can be answered without aid, based on the foregoing chapter (e.g. 'Is scholarship on religion more reliable if it emerges from religious people, or if it emerges from an academic study of such people that does not assume the validity of their beliefs and claims?', p. 24) but other questions require preliminary knowledge or the internet (e.g. 'Look online for a copy of "Where You At? A Bioregional Quiz." How well do you know your bioregion? What additional bioregional wisdom would you add to tailor this quiz to your context?', p. 210). Later on the topics, and especially the discussion questions, remind the reader of the

strong Anglo-American angle of the approach.

The book is free from unwieldy theories and when theory is presented it is for the most part easy to follow and clearly structured. One example is the last chapter in the book, about place by Brian G. Campbell. The connection between place and environment is perhaps not immediately obvious and that is also Campbell's point. Place often goes without saying, but people, environmental issues and even religions are connected to and situated in particular places. These places matter to us personally and collectively, and shape our ethical commitments. Two concepts associated with place are phenomenology and bioregionalism. While phenomenology is more of an intellectual tradition, focusing on how the connection to place shapes our experience of the world, bioregionalism is more of a grassroots movement which has developed intellectual, practical and artistic responses to the environmental crisis.

However, the focus of the book also lies in activism and what people can and have been doing for the environment. The chapter which appeals most directly to this reader is about sustainability, written by Willis Jenkins with direct questions such as 'what must we sustain' (p. 104) and whether 'resources are substitutable for one another, such that exhaustion of one resource can be justified if it creates another of equal or greater value for human welfare?' (p. 105). If the answer to the latter question is yes, Jenkins writes, then sustainability questions seem to be an investment problem. Investments compete with one another and so do the three models of sustainability concerning the ethical future: the economic, ecological and political models of sustainability. Laurel Kearns concludes in the afterword that the main point in *Grounding Religion* about social ac-

tivism is that business can no longer continue as usual. Teaching in the classrooms is a form of social activism, and the job is to help others to see the ways in which we can act, care and speak up.

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**Miracles, mysteries and moralities**

Pernilla Gardeberg: *Mirakel, mysterier och moraliteter. Från puritanism till New Age – en religionshistorisk studie av Helen Schucman och A Course in Miracles* [Miracles, mysteries and moralities. From puritanism to New Age—a study in history of religion of Helen Schucman and *A Course in Miracles*]. Lund: Lund University, 2010. 386 pp.



Published in 2010, Pernilla Gardeberg's dissertation, among other things, has as its theme the text *A Course in Miracles*. About the author Helen Schucman (1909–81), Gardeberg states that while writing this book from 1965 to 1972, Schucman was a professor of the psychology of medicine and situated at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. Gardeberg, as well as other scholars, claim that 'it has been said' that the author had the content of the book dictated to her by an 'inner voice'. In accordance with this dictation the book is introduced with the words: 'This is a course in miracles, please take

notes.' The book proper consists of c. 1200 pages divided into three main chapters: 'Textbook', 'Workbook' and 'Manual for teachers'. Schucman herself presents her book as a course in miracles in a literal sense: 'Miracles are described as something natural and timeless. They occur when perception is changed to be aligned with the truth of God, although the need of miracles is temporary. When a person fully communicates with God, . . . there is no longer a need for miracles.'

In order to change one's 'mind and perception' so that miracles can start occurring, one is to take part of the 365 lessons in the form of self-study that is included in the Workbook. In the first section of her dissertation which is divided into four parts, Gardeberg has a passage entitled 'Aim of thesis' ('Avhandlingens syfte'). She writes: 'My aim is to examine the history of the making of *A Course in Miracles*, its shape and spread. My hypothesis is that the course can be linked to its context both at the historical as well as at the religious and personal levels and I therefore look for connections of evidence between them' ('Min tes är att kursen kan länkas till sin kontext, såväl på det historiska som på det religiösa och det personliga planet och jag söker därför efter beläggande förbindelser dessa emellan').

Of this could be said that it would be sensational if it was not possible to 'link' Schucman's book to its own context. What is even more problematic is the fact that through this hypothesis the author has chosen a very extensive task which has certain annoying consequences for the consistency of her dissertation, and thus for the possibilities of the reader to get an overview of the content of the book.

Unfortunately, no unified presentation of the methods utilised by the writer has been included. This

means that the reader himself must try to find out about this connection upon reading the book. There is indeed a section entitled 'Perspectives in depth—theoretical concepts' ('Fördjupade utgångspunkter – teoretiska begrepp'), but here it is precisely terms and concepts that are discussed. This discussion is of course motivated as such.

In order to give the reader a notion of the structure of the book, I shall briefly present the four parts into which it has been divided.

Part one consists of two sections. The first one is called introduction and is traditionally structured around an account of the outline of the work, the aim of the thesis, the material, previous research, etc. As I have pointed out above, I miss an account for methods used, though. The second section is called 'New Age—a theoretical frame' ('New Age – en teoretisk ram'). Fifteen different scholars and some of their ideas in the field of New Age are presented over 21 pages. This section is finished off with a summary. It is not altogether clear to me why 15 scholars must each be presented separately. Here it had been possible to decrease the number of pages which now amounts to 385.

Part two, which amounts to 116 pages, forms the most important section of the dissertation, that is to say the presentation of Helen Schucman and Gardeberg's analysis of *A Course in Miracles*. Both of them have been expertly carried out. The only thing to which I take a questioning attitude is the last ten pages of part two, 'Religion psychological perspective on Helen Schucman' ('Ett religionspsykologiskt perspektiv på Helen Schucman'). These ten pages of deep psychology does not make the reader very much wiser.

The third part of the thesis consists of 186 pages. The writer states about the aim of this section: 'The third part aims to create an understanding of the components and

traditions that form the American historical and religious background and which made the growth of New Age possible' ('Avhandlingens tredje del syftar till att skapa förståelse för vilka komponenter och traditioner som bildar den historiska och religiösa bakgrund i Amerika, vilken möjliggjort framväxandet av New Age'). This is an interesting subject but in reality it implies that the writer, in a certain sense, establishes one more subject for her thesis. The theme may be relevant to the main purpose—the understanding of how Schucman's book came about—but the scope of this section is far to wide. I happily admit that part three is indeed instructive, but all this knowledge need not have to have been included in Gardeberg's dissertation; as it is most of the time not about her own research results but about previous results.

The colonial period is accordingly treated first, with an emphasis on the consequences of the colonisers' ideas of humankind and society. The immigration to America is also highlighted.

After that various early metaphysical orientations such as Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, and transcendentalism are discussed. In addition, purely religious phenomena like spiritism and the phenomenon of 'channeling' are acknowledged. This last phenomenon gives the writer reason to claim that '[t]he channelled messages are of particular interest to this dissertation, as it was channeling that Helen Schucman was said to dedicate herself to' ('De kanaliserade budskapen är av särskilt intresse för denna avhandling, då det var kanalisering Helen Schucman uppgavs ägna sig åt'). The third part is finished by a presentation of Christian Science. The writer has found similarities in dogma between Christian Science and ideas in *A Course in Miracles*. This is interesting, but it had been easier to assimilate the writer's

results if she, with *A Course in Miracles* as her starting-point, had shown similar or identical ideas elsewhere, for instance in Christian Science.

Part four of the thesis contains the writer's conclusions and suggestions for further discussion.

The writer draws some interesting conclusions concerning Helen Schucman. Gardeberg notes that she has come to conclude that Schucman 'was far from the religious *tabula rasa* that she herself and others after her have wished to present her as' ('ingalunda var den religiösa *tabula rasa* som hon själv, och andra i hennes efterföljd, har velat presentera henne som'). She has found evidence that Schucman went through a clearly reli-

gious process of socialisation in her youth and that she, during a part of her adult life, was very engaged in the Catholic church. The fact that Schucman later on became more ambivalent in relation to religion has a connection with her academic engagement, Gardeberg finds.

As far as the content of *A Course in Miracles* is concerned, the writer considers Swedenborg to have played an important role regarding 'the importance of the mind to the health of the body' ('sinnets betydelse för kroppslig hälsa'). Except Swedenborg also Christian Science and New Thought have played an important part in this respect. As regards Christian Science it can be noted that Schucman had contacts with this movement during her

early years. Gardeberg also indicates the importance of Schucman being an academically educated psychologist.

I find that the outline of the thesis is somewhat confusing and that the thesis could have been shortened to half its length. Nevertheless, Gardeberg's results on Helen Schucman and *A Course in Miracles* are highly interesting. The book in its present overly extensive shape is a goldmine for those who take an interest in New Thought, Christian Science, and last but not least, in Helen Schucman and *A Course in Miracles*.

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