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A BETTER WAY

Who Made the World?

by Robert Perry

The question of how the world began and who made it is one of the central issues for students of *A Course in Miracles*. What student hasn't wrestled with this issue? How many of us have tried on various positions on the origin of the world, trying to settle down on just the right spot? And there *are* various positions to choose from out there, all the way from we made it and God doesn't know about it to God created it and it's perfect and divine.

I've found myself rethinking this issue recently. For many years, my position has been that the world came from us, not from God, but that after we made it, the Holy Spirit was able to exercise some influence within it. While the broad strokes of my position haven't changed, I am now seeing the Holy Spirit's involvement as being earlier and slightly greater.

I've been rethinking this primarily because of closely examining eleven passages in the early dictation of the Course, all in the equivalent of the first two chapters. These passages definitely seem to ascribe a larger role to the Divine in the genesis of the world than what I have believed. I wrote about some of these passages several years ago (in "[Urtext Passages Suggesting God Created the World](#)"), but my conclusions were tentative and ultimately didn't seem to me to hit the nail on the head.

Some of these eleven passages have been influential for me since I got the Course. After all, all but two of them survived the final edit, and although they have been edited, their import often still shines through. For example, look at this line from the FIP Course: "The Atonement was built into the space-time belief to set a limit on the need for the belief itself" (T-2.II.5:1). If the world is nothing more than a belief in space and time, as an earlier passage tells us ("Ultimately, space is as meaningless as time. Both are merely beliefs"—T-1.VI.3:5-6), and if the Atonement was "built into" that belief, then the Atonement *was built into the world*. That has massive implications, and it's straight out of the FIP Course.

Now imagine ten more such passages, all of which come together to produce a larger vision of how the world was made. It is this larger vision that has gripped me recently. Let's look at that vision, and then we can figure out what to do with it.

The vision of the origin of the world in the early dictation

In many ways, these early passages about the world sound just like the later Course. They say that in the beginning there was no world. We were with God in a timeless Heaven. Then, however, we chose separation. As a result, we acquired the "space-time belief," and this belief is actually all the world is. There is no real, physical world. Given that "only eternity is real," there cannot be a real domain of time. Rather, there is only an "illusion of time." We, however, are meant to use this illusion constructively, for the sake of our learning, and when our learning is complete, the space-time belief will be at last undone. We will return to the awareness of our unity with God, and the illusory world will be gone. Time "will cease" (T-1.I.15:4) and space will disappear.

So far, this sounds like the rest of the Course. However, there is another aspect to this vision. These passages also say

PUBLISHED BY

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

A Better Way is published monthly by e-mail. If you wish to subscribe, please visit our website.

CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT

is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to *A Course in Miracles*. It was founded in 1993. Its publishing division, Circle Publishing, was founded in 2003.

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- ◆ Text : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.
- ◆ Workbook for Students: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.
- ◆ Manual for Teachers: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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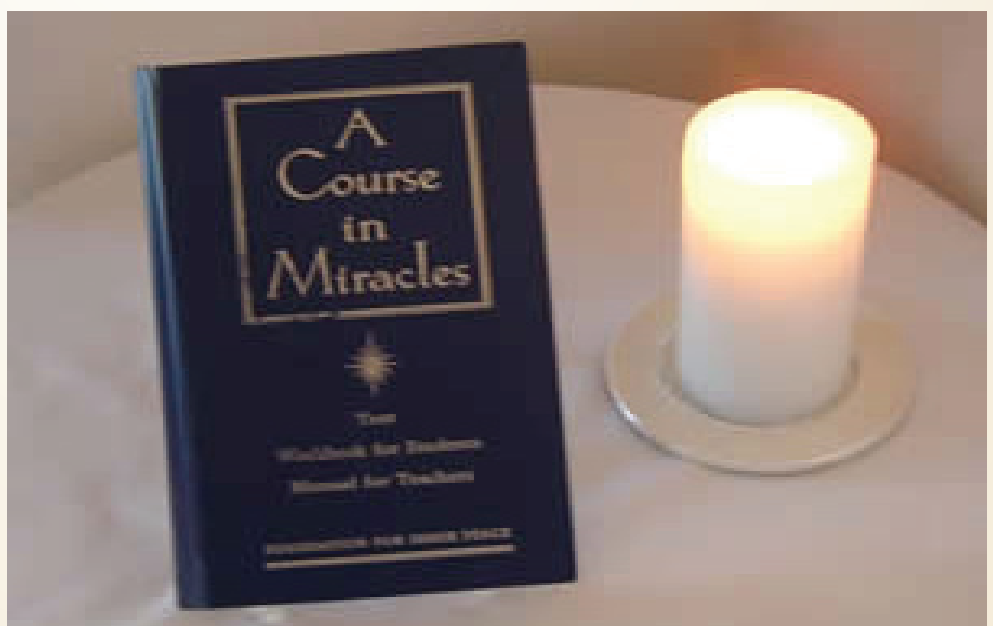
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that “God created time,” not out of the blue, but specifically as a response to the separation, so that it could ultimately be undone. They say the world was designed as “a teaching aid” (T-1.I.15:3), a “device” for healing the separation, a classroom for our learning (T-2.II.5:3):

God created time so that man could use it creatively, and convince himself of his own ability to create. Time is a teaching aid, and a means to an end. It will cease when it is no longer useful in facilitating learning.
(original version of T-1.I.15:2-4)

The active ingredient in this classroom is the Atonement, which, as we saw, was actually built into the fabric of the classroom. The Atonement, this material explains, is a defense that can only be used constructively. When we call upon it, it wipes away what stands between us and God. It frees us from our errors and restores us to our unity with God. It is because the Atonement is built into the classroom of the world that this classroom is guaranteed to work: “The world *was* a way of healing the separation, and the Atonement is the *guarantee* that the device will ultimately do so” (see T-2.III.5:12-13).

The statement “God created time” will, to the seasoned Course student, seem shocking at first. However, it isn’t as problematic as it initially appears. To begin with, the Holy Spirit is not really part of Course terminology yet. (He is only mentioned six times before Chapter 5.) Further, the distinction hasn’t yet been made between “create” and “make.” (That happens in Chapter 3—T-3.V.2:1). As a result, “God created time” may actually mean “the Holy Spirit made time.” Given later Course terminology, this is really the only permissible option. This, too, may sound problematic, yet, as we’ll see in a bit, there are references to this exact idea later in the Course.

There is one more issue to resolve here: Is the world a product of our space-time belief or is it the product of God? This early material actually tells us both things. It says the world is just our space-time belief and it says that God made it as a classroom. It even says both things at the same time. Look at this sentence: “The physical world exists only because man can use it to correct his *unbelief*, which placed him in it originally” (see T-1.VI.4:1). This line says that the world was caused by our own unbelief *and* implies that God brought the world into being in order to *correct* our unbelief.

Given that these two explanations—God did it, we did it—are found in the same place, they clearly must go together. But how? I think the best explanation is that we are talking about a three-step process. First, we chose to believe in separation. Second, this belief in separation mutated into the space-time belief. After all, space and time are both just variations on the idea of separation—space is separate places, time is separate moments. Third, our space-time belief finally appeared in the form of the (apparent) physical world.

So who did what? The first step in the process had to be all ours; *we* chose the belief in separation. However, as the process went forward, the Holy Spirit had more and more of a hand in it. In the second step, He was able to build the Atonement into our space-time belief. This is what allowed the world, in the third step, to actually manifest as a useful classroom, in which we would learn to undo separation. Without His input, the world would presumably have been just an endlessly revolving door in which the original error was continually reinforced. We would never get out.

To recap, then, we chose separation, which mutated into our space-time belief, which manifested as the illusory physical world. But that wasn’t all that happened or we’d be trapped here. Therefore, the Holy Spirit entered into the process right after it began and contributed His input. By building the Atonement into the entire edifice, the world became a useful classroom in which we would undo our error, rather than a hopeless prison in which we would forever *repeat* our error.

What do we make of this vision?

Of course, this whole picture could be mistaken. Helen’s hearing wasn’t as good in this early part as it was later on, and so Jesus would often tell her that she heard something incorrectly. Could this origin-of-the-world material be something she heard incorrectly?

That is not an unreasonable idea. That the world is God’s device to get us home sounds quite different than the later Course, which specifically says of the world, “God did not create it (C-4.1:2). This means much more than God did not create the world *as we see it*. The aforementioned passage explains that He didn’t create it because everything in it changes and passes away. And we know from physics and from experience that change is fundamental to the world *as it is*, not just as we see it. Rather than God being responsible, the Course repeatedly tells us, “you made the world you see” (T-21.II.11:1; W-pI.132.5:5; W-pI.152.6:1). And we did so, it says, for some very dark reasons:

The world was made as an attack on God....Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him. (W-pII.3:2:1, 4)

As a result of such teaching, when I first saw these early passages ten years ago, I assumed that they were not “pure Course” but had been influenced by Edgar Cayce’s readings. Helen and Bill were reading Cayce at the time, and being an old Cayce student myself, I immediately saw the similarities with Cayce’s cosmology. In that cosmology, there was some primordial error on our part, in response to which the Creative Forces manifested the physical world as a kind of feedback device, to show us our errors so we would choose to get out of them. (That, at least, is how I understood Cayce.)

There are, however, some serious problems with the notion that this material is the result of scribal error.

First, there is just so much of it. As I said, there are at least eleven passages, one as long as 123 words. And these are sprinkled throughout quite a large volume of material. They span the first 37,000 words of dictation that Helen took down. That is the equivalent of nearly a hundred pages in the Course. Given that they recur so many times throughout such a large body of material, it is hard to see them as just a fluke.

Second, Jesus never corrected any of these passages. Indeed, most of them occur in the equivalent of Chapter 2, and by Chapter 2 Helen seems to have been virtually done with hearing him incorrectly. Almost all the corrections come in the Chapter 1 material. I can find only one instance in Chapter 2 material in which he says she didn’t hear him right, and that was a minor grammatical error. If Jesus promised Helen that he “will make every effort to correct” scribal errors, and if this material on the beginning of the world was so fraught with error, why didn’t Jesus ever say anything about it?

Third, and most significantly, there are specific and distinct echoes of this early vision later on in the Course. Let’s look at these.

In Chapter 25 of the Text, we are told that “this world has two who made it. To each it has a different purpose, and to each it is a perfect means to serve the goal for which it is perceived” (T-25.III.3:3-4). Doesn’t this “two makers” idea sound like what we just saw from the early dictation? Here are other quotes from the same section:

There is another Maker of the world, the simultaneous Corrector of the mad belief that anything could be established and maintained without some link that kept it still within the laws of God. (T-25.III.4:1)

There is another purpose in the world that error made, because it has another Maker Who can reconcile its goal with His Creator’s purpose. (T-25.III.5:1)

Another section tells us that the Holy Spirit could inject “a hidden spark of beauty” into the world that “the Son of God made in insanity” (T-17.II.5:5). And when we see this spark of beauty, “The smallest leaf becomes a thing of wonder, and a blade of grass a sign of God’s perfection” (T-17.II.6:3). This, of course, sounds much like the Holy Spirit building the Atonement into the world.

There are even two passages that clearly say that “time was made” by the Holy Spirit. Speaking of our Workbook practice, Lesson 193 says, “Let mercy come to you more quickly....Time was made for this” (W-pI.193.10:2, 4). Time was made for us to do our Workbook practice? Doesn’t that sound like “God created time so that man could use it creatively”?

Lesson 138, “Heaven is the decision I must make,” provides an even fuller picture: “So we begin today considering the choice that time was made to help us make [the choice for Heaven]. Such is its holy purpose, now transformed from the intent you gave it; that it be a means for demonstrating hell is real” (W-pI.138.7:1-2). So, we made time, as proof that hell is real. And then the Holy Spirit *remade* time, giving it a new and holy purpose. In His remake, it became solely a means for us to make the choice for Heaven. Here, then, is another instance of the “two makers” teaching.

Lest we think these two “time was made” passages are flukes, two other passages refer to the same idea. One says that time’s “intended purpose” (W-pI.rIV.In.7:3) is for us to do our Workbook practice. The other says that time’s “appointed purpose” (M-24.4:5) is for us to work toward a complete reversal of thought. Over and over again, the later Course tells us that “time was made” for a holy purpose. These passages are direct links to the early statements that “time *and* matter were created” for a holy purpose.

Just to play devil’s advocate, however, one might get the impression from these passages that all the Holy Spirit did was assign the world that holy purpose. He didn’t actually change any of the structure or events of the world. Perhaps He just assigned a new content and left intact the form.

However, this idea is disallowed if we look at the Course’s view of what generates the world’s events. So let’s do that.

We might assume that the specific events of our lives are caused by the projection of our own mind, as if we hooked up a movie projector to our unconscious and the result is what we see happening around us now. And this idea *is* there in the Course. However, it’s *barely* there. I’ve looked for years and have collected only four references to it (T-21.II.2:5-3:3; T-10.In.2:6; W-pI.152.1:5; W-pII.253.1:1-4).

The Course’s main view of the events of our lives is that they are the result of God’s plan. Here are a few of the many references to that idea:

What could you not accept, if you but knew that everything that happens, all events, past, present and to come, are gently planned by One Whose only purpose is your good? (W-pI.135.18:1)

Your passage through time and space is not at random. You cannot but be in the right place at the right time. Such is the strength of God. Such are His gifts. (W-pI.42.2:3-6)

Therefore, the plan includes very specific contacts to be made for each teacher of God. There are no accidents in salvation. Those who are to meet will meet, because together they have the potential for a holy relationship. (M-3.1:5-7)

This may or may not involve changes in the external situation. Remember that no one is where he is by accident, and chance plays no part in God's plan. (M-9.1:2-3)

No one is sent by accident to anyone. Relationships are always purposeful....Whoever comes has been sent. (P-3.III.6:2-3, 5)

In each of these quotes, external events and situations are the result of the Divine. They are arranged by: "One Whose only purpose is your good," "the strength of God," "the plan," "salvation," and "God's plan." So here we have yet another version of the "two makers" idea. Only here the Holy Spirit is having a hand in the *specific forms* of the world. He is orchestrating the events of our lives. If we combine this with the four passages I mentioned above, we have to conclude that there must be room for external events to be the result of both our dreaming *and* His orchestration.

Given all these references to the "two makers" view of the world and its events, I don't see how we can label those eleven early passages the result of scribal error. The whole reason we would label them as such would be if they conflicted with the later Course. Yet we find very clear echoes of them *in* the later Course.

Of course, we could say that those later echoes are just metaphor. But there is something highly suspect about this. If we find "two makers" passages in the *early* part of the Course, we say it was a scribal error, because it conflicts with the later Course. But then when we *do* find such passages in the later Course, we dismiss them as mere metaphor. At this point, aren't we just using two magic wands to negate a teaching that is present *throughout* the Course? We use one wand when that teaching appears early on, and then use a very different wand when that *same* teaching appears later on. Does that make sense to you?

The big picture

Out of all of this comes a consistent overall picture of the world. I don't understand all the details, but the broad strokes seem clear enough. The world has two makers. Its starting point was our choice to believe in separation. We then shaped this general belief into a more specific belief in space (separate places) and time (separate moments). And then out of this space-time belief, we dreamt a vast and detailed space-time world. This is why the world is such a painful place, because it is the outward picture of the painful idea of separation. As Lesson 138 says, we made it to demonstrate that hell is real.

And if this was all there is to the world, hell would be real, for we would be stuck here permanently, and what is permanent is real. Therefore, God, through the Holy Spirit, got involved in the world's formation from the moment we chose separation. The Holy Spirit was able to build the Atonement into our space-time belief. Or as the later Course teaches, He was able to make the real world part of our overall dream. He was, in a sense, able to *remake* the world we made. As a result, it became a device for facilitating our learning, so that we could ultimately return home. This meant that He assigned it a new purpose *and* that He was able to influence the forms and events of this world, so that they would actually serve that purpose.

I imagine these two makers as analogous to a screenwriter and a director. We are the screenwriter of this movie. But once we finish the screenplay, the final product is mainly in the hands of the director, who in this case is the Holy Spirit. And this Director is One Who takes liberties with the scripts given Him. Our script was a horror movie with a grisly ending. Yet when the Director shot it, even though He started out fairly faithful to the screenplay's story (due to contractual obligations to the writer), He wove subtle elements of redemption into each character and each scene. Thus, if you pay careful attention, you will hear a character briefly question the hopeless track he's on, or you'll catch a glimpse of an angel's wing through a dirty window. Under the Director's guidance, these hidden elements came increasingly to the fore. He even got the writer to okay the changes. Finally, the emergence of these elements allowed for an entirely different ending, turning this into a story of total redemption.

Who was the maker of this movie? Well, it's hard to say. Without the screenwriter there would have been no movie

at all. But without the Director the final form would have been quite different. We know who made the horror. And we know Who made the redemption. And yet each scene in the movie (except the last one) was a combination of the two. Perhaps the best we can say is that “this world has two who made it” (T-25.III.3:3).

This simple idea seems to honor everything the Course says about the origin of the world. The early Course emphasizes the Divine Maker, while the later Course emphasizes the human. Yet each place gives us a picture of *both* makers.

This view is only a small variation on what I have already believed. Yet it definitely *feels* different. Under this new view, I feel like I’m living inside a gigantic device that the Holy Spirit was involved in the design and operation of from the very beginning. His presence therefore pervades it. His lessons are under every rock and behind every door. Thus, despite all the horror present in this device, His influence means that, in the final analysis, it is not a house of horrors, but rather a classroom of mercy. And this classroom is so perfectly suited to its function that it is guaranteed to work. It is *guaranteed* to get us all home.

I think what had happened to me was that my view of Course theory was causing me to overemphasize the horrors. To a degree, this world was feeling godforsaken. Maybe you know what I mean. This new view, without denying the horrors, puts a brighter cast on things. It affirms that we are not just spinning our wheels here, that, *by design*, the river of the world is always flowing toward awakening. As a result, the following words from the Workbook read almost like me describing the change I have undergone in my view of the world:

I see everything upside down, and my thoughts are the opposite of truth. I see the world as a prison for God’s Son. It must be, then, that the world is really a place where he can be set free. I would look upon the world as it is, and see it as a place where the Son of God finds his freedom. (W-pI.rI.56.3:3-6)



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CIRCLE MAILBOX

Here is some of the feedback we’ve received on Greg Mackie’s article from Issue 102 of A Better Way, entitled “My Course-based Jury Duty.”

I love your article on jury duty in *A Better Way*. I’m inspired by your absolute integrity and determination to follow Course principles.

— Ben Bartle

• • •

Thanks for this article. I recently served on a jury for a criminal trial, so I was very interested in your perspective. So interested, in fact, I read your Q & A first. I felt the idea of “The world’s legal systems, like all of the world’s systems, were devised to serve the ego’s purposes” was somewhat overstated. While I don’t disagree, I understand the meaning I give such an idea is also a product of my ego’s judgment. But then I returned to your article, and realized the Q & A was obviously written before your jury experience.

It's been a several years since I've been a regular Course student, and I often worry what I learned is slipping away. Especially if I'm waiting (didn't I learn not to do that?) in a jury pool. What did stick was the idea that it's not that I *should not* judge, but that I *cannot* judge. That did raise a concern about what I might be asked to do, but it also suggested I cannot judge the system I'm being asked to participate in.

That understanding helped me enormously. Once I got over the shock of being selected (I too was sure I would be asked to explain my beliefs), I had a huge shift in perception. All I saw in the courtroom were a group of dedicated professionals determined to follow a system clearly designed to remove ego from the process. I'm sure they wouldn't describe it this way, but I saw the effect as the calling of the HS to enlist the jury and witnesses in the process. Everyone in the room was innocent—including fearful cops, truth-challenged witness, even lawyers!

It's probably a good thing I'm not permitted to say anything about what went on in the jury room. I wouldn't know how to describe it. It was astonishing, fast, and miraculous. I'm sometimes asked if I'm satisfied our verdict was "correct." My answer is, "It wasn't ours, so I'm certain it was."

The lesson for me is to take care not to let what I've learned from the Course make me even more judgmental about the world's forms. It doesn't matter what it is, my job is to let go of judgment and attack, and let the answer be given. Ever so slowly, I'm learning that only through complete surrender do I achieve anything real. Surrender doesn't mean inaction. Sometimes it means embracing a fearful form and allowing it be healed.

— Rick Wallace

• • •

It was with interest I read what you wrote regarding your experience on the jury.

Just want to ask...as the Course teaches, if we have made this world and all forms are a reflection of ourselves and what we judge is judgment on ourselves, why would you feel you have an obligation to "serve" the laws of this false world? The teaching is not to judge...at all.

I really don't understand and would appreciate your reply.

— Susan Ferren

Reply from Greg:

Thank you for your question. Actually, the teaching isn't "not to judge...at all," if by that you mean that we shouldn't make any decisions. We cannot help but make decisions about all sorts of things: "There are decisions to make here, and they must be made whether they be illusions or not" (S-1.1.2:4). This includes things like jury trials. We have to make a decision one way or another regarding how to live together in society, including what laws we choose to live by. There is no way to avoid judgment in this. To say "I don't believe in the laws of this false world so I won't serve on a jury" is no less a judgment than "I believe I am called to serve on this jury."

*The Course's teaching is that we when we make such decisions, we shouldn't rely on **our own** judgment (in that sense, it is true that **we** shouldn't judge), but instead we should let the Holy Spirit judge **through** us. That's what I tried to do with the trial. I could have gotten out of jury duty easily enough if I had wanted to. But I prayed about it, and my sense was that the Holy Spirit wanted me to be a part of this process, that this was a way He wanted me to be of service to my brothers. So, that's what I did. And when it was done, I felt that it was a positive, Spirit-guided experience and that I had indeed performed a valuable service for everyone concerned.*

Hope this helps.

— Greg