



# A BETTER WAY

## Why I Am a Course Purist

by Robert Perry

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Labeling oneself a Course purist can sound so restrictive. It calls to mind old images of religious purity, in which a righteous fence is erected that encloses a tiny piece of holy ground and shuts out the whole world. It sounds like a curb on our freedom, so that just as we reach for joy, handcuffs are slapped on our wrists. It sounds like the triumph of the letter of the law over the spirit. Finally, it raises the ugly specter of fundamentalism, in which believers quote chapter and verse to defend intolerance, in which holy books

become weapons.

Yet being a Course purist is my life. It is a stance that I consider reasonable, healthy, freeing, and life-giving. In this article, I will attempt to explain why.

But first, what do I mean by “Course purist”? I mean that I take the Course at its word and that I consider it a complete and sufficient path, which means that I follow it alone. In essence, I treat its words the same way that I would treat the words of a living teacher. If I considered Jesus to be my teacher, and he physically walked into my house and began speaking to me in plain English, teaching me the truth and laying out a concrete path for me to realize that truth, why wouldn’t I disciple myself to him? Why would I say, “Well, what he’s saying is really all metaphor, and I should freely interpret his metaphors and then weave them together with everything I’m learning from other teachings”? I wouldn’t say that with a living teacher, and I don’t say that with the Course. That’s what I mean by saying that I’m a Course purist.

I didn’t start out this way, or anywhere close. For years, I was passionately eclectic, following many teachings at once. I focused mainly on those themes in the Course that I could read in other places. And I interpreted some of the Course’s more unusual teachings metaphorically. When it said that we made the world, I assumed it meant that we made our *mental* and *cultural* “world,” not the actual *physical* world. When it said the universe was the product of a mistake, I assumed that it was simply failing to mention the key point that it all happened for a purpose, as a result of God’s evolutionary plan (an idea I had read in so many other places that I knew it had to be true).

So what got me from there to where I am now?

### The Course asks its students to be Course purists

My main reason for being a Course purist is that this is clearly what the Course itself is asking of its students. This may sound surprising, but let me explain where I see that in the Course.

First, in the Manual for Teachers, the Course consistently speaks as if a teacher of God is following a particular path, “a special form of the universal curriculum” (M-1.4:1). This path is chosen for him:

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## CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT

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“One rule should always be observed:

No one should be turned away because he cannot pay” (P-3.III.6:1). If there are any of our materials or services that you want but cannot afford, please let us know, and give whatever you can.

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## WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

*A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

- ◆ 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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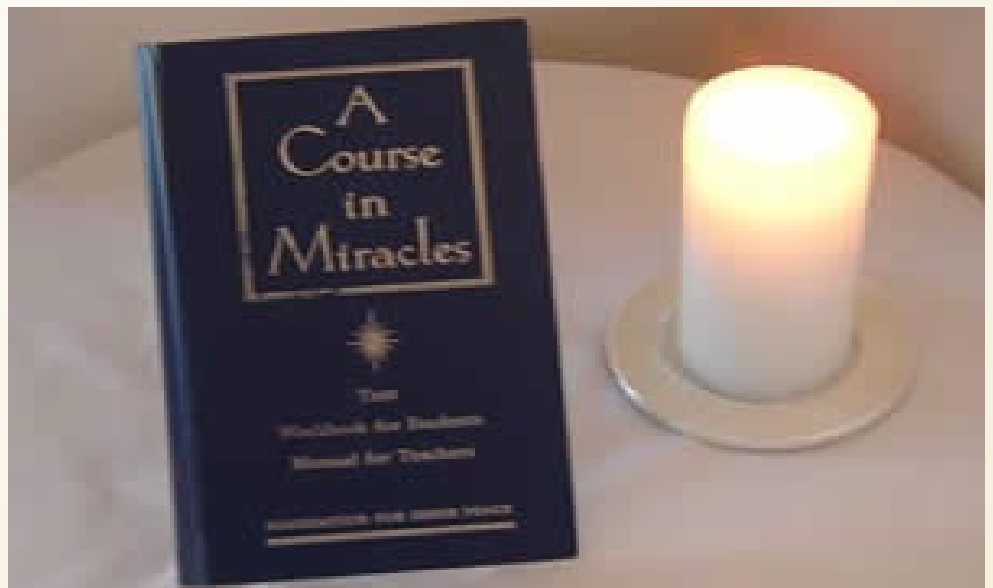
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“You are not free to choose the curriculum, or even the form in which you will learn it” (M-2.3:6). This path is what he will teach to others; it is “the form of the universal curriculum that he will teach” (M-2.1:2). Finally, the Manual was written for those teachers whose path is *A Course in Miracles*: “This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal curriculum” (M-1.4:1).

Second, the Course bills itself as a path “in which nothing is lacking that is needed” (W-pI.42.7:2). Think about it. If you are buying a car and a voice booms out of the sky and says, “This is a car in which nothing is lacking that is needed,” do you immediately tell the salesman to start adding on accessories?

Third, Jesus told Helen that we shouldn’t try to walk someone else’s path. Once, when Helen was judging someone whose spirituality she felt was flaky, Jesus told her, “Don’t take another’s path as your own; but neither should you judge it” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 450). The message here is obviously twofold: Don’t judge someone else’s path. Maybe it is just the right path for that person. But if it is not your path, don’t walk it. Don’t take it as your own.

Fourth, the Course cautions us that mixing outside ideas into its thought system may weave threads of fear into its tapestry of love. It tells us, for instance, not to uncritically mix in ideas from the New Testament. “As you read the teachings of the Apostles, remember that I told them myself that there was much they would understand later, because they were not wholly ready to follow me at the time” (T-6.I.16:1). In other words, realize the teachings of the New Testament are a mixed bag. Otherwise, you may take in a teaching—like Jesus dying for our sins—that implies a fearful God. And, as Jesus explains, “I do not want you to allow any fear to enter into the thought system toward which I am guiding you” (T-6.I.16:2). You can see this same discerning stance in how Jesus handles the teachings of Edgar Cayce and Sigmund Freud in the Urtext (the original typescript of the Course).

Fifth, the Course says that mixing in outside ideas can detract from its radical, practical focus. In the section on reincarnation (M-24), the Course says the idea of reincarnation is basically a neutral form that can be filled with content of the ego or of the Holy Spirit. Being a neutral form, it is not inherently transformative and is therefore nonessential, invites controversy, and causes distraction. Consequently, “it would not be helpful to take any definite stand on reincarnation” (M-24.3:1). “The teacher of God is, therefore, wise to step away from all such questions” (M-24.4:4)—*all such questions*. We may believe in reincarnation, UFOs, or the Atkins diet, but we don’t see them as part of the Course or teach them as part of the Course.

Sixth, the Course tells us to practice *its* methods, not to practice the methods of other paths. This extremely important point is found in “I Need Do Nothing” (T-18.VII). This section describes two practices: “long periods of meditation aimed at detachment from the body” (T-18.VII.4:9) and to “wrestle with temptation and fight against the giving in to sin” (T-18.VII.5:7). Then it contrasts these practices with the Course, saying, “Your way will be different” (T-18.VII.5:1). It explains that the Course’s way is not solitary, but rather is undertaken “together with your brother” (T-18.VII.5:3), and that its way is not a tedious process of earning holiness, but a faster process of realizing our inherent holiness. Then comes the key line: “You are not making use of the course if you insist on using means which have served others well, neglecting what was made for *you*” (T-18.VII.6:5). Could any student take that line to heart and not be a Course purist?

Seventh, the Course says that we should not design our own curriculum, because we are retarded. You may find it hard to believe that the Course actually says such a thing, but it’s in there. The Course flatly states, “You have learning handicaps in a very literal sense” (T-12.V.5:1). Now, “learning handicapped” was the term back then for “developmentally disabled.” Jesus is calling us retarded. Then he says,

In this situation you clearly require a special Teacher and a special curriculum. Poor learners are not good choices as teachers, either for themselves or for anyone else. You would hardly turn to them to establish the curriculum by which they can escape from their limitations. (T-12.V.5:4-6)

Most of us are essentially trying to design our own mix-and-match path. We are trying to design our own curriculum. Yet Jesus likens that to telling a bunch of learning disabled kids, “Okay, you’re the teachers now. Design your own curriculum. Make up lesson plans. From now on, you’re going to teach yourselves.” Who would do that?

Finally, the Course says that it “means exactly what it says” (T-8.IX.8:1). Seeing the Course as filled with

metaphor is a common perspective. This includes Ken Wapnick's approach, which openly says that the Course is mostly metaphor, as well as approaches like my early one, in which I assumed that when the Course said we made the world, it couldn't really mean *the world*. A metaphorical approach seems to grant us license to reinterpret extreme statements, unusual teachings, or difficult instructions. Now we can relax their intensity by seeing them as mere metaphor. Yet the Course itself doesn't encourage such an approach. It will often emphasize that it means an extreme statement "literally" (as in the above quote: "You have learning handicaps in a very literal sense"). It says things like, "Think not this is merely allegorical" (T-18.VIII.1:4). Finally, it claims to be "perfectly clear" (T-11.VI.3:1), "simple and direct" (T-20.VII.1:3), "very simple, very clear and totally unambiguous" (W-pI.39.1:2), and "a simple teaching in the obvious" (T-31.IV.7:7). Does it sound like Jesus is granting us much wiggle room in how we interpret his words?

Let's look at the eight points I just drew from Jesus' own words:

1. The teacher of God follows and teaches a particular path that was chosen for him. The Manual was written for those teachers whose path is *A Course in Miracles*.
2. The Course is a path "in which nothing is lacking that is needed."
3. We shouldn't "take another's path as [our] own."
4. We should be cautious about mixing outside ideas into the Course's thought system, for that may weave threads of fear into its message of love.
5. We should be cautious about mixing in outside ideas, for that may detract from the Course's radical, practical focus.
6. We should practice the Course's methods, not the methods of other paths.
7. We should not design our own curriculum, because we are retarded.
8. The Course "means exactly what it says." We should treat its words as being "perfectly clear," "direct," and "totally unambiguous."

If you take these eight points to heart, then I think you end up where I am. You end up being a Course purist.

Now, these points may be incorrect. I think that in stating them, I have been fair to the Course, but maybe the Course itself was wrong when it made the statements that I was drawing from. Or maybe those statements were meant only for Helen and Bill, not for everyone (though I see no good reason to believe that). And even if the above points are correct, I think they (especially 4, 5, and 6) apply to those who have become clear that the Course is their path, not to newer students who are still exploring that question. However, if you are clear that the Course is your path, and if you agree with all of the statements in the Course from which I have drawn my points, then I don't see any option except being a Course purist. Do you?

### **Why being a purist is a gift, not a restriction**

Yes, I know, the above eight points can seem to tie us up in a straitjacket. And that's exactly how I would have felt twenty years ago. But I don't feel that way now, not in the least. Instead, here is how the options look to me: I can spend my time shuttling between a number of different homes, with my toothbrush in one place, my computer in another, some of my clothes here and some there. Or I can settle down in this incredible mansion, which has been designed and built to perfectly suit my needs, which is so spacious that I will never stop finding new rooms, closets, and cubbyholes, yet in which all of the different parts work together flawlessly. Frankly, it's not much of a choice. Let me explain what I love about having settled down in this mansion.

First, I have come to believe that the Course is uniquely wise. Nothing I have found knows the interior of my mind in such depth and detail. And nothing I have found has fashioned keys that so perfectly fit the locks in my mind. When I read other teachings, even ones that I respect, I feel that I have come down to a lower elevation. I am sure I must be biased in this. On the other hand, I started out seeing a more level playing field. Much of why I am so totally focused on the Course now is that the more closely I worked with it, the more I realized that a unique force of wisdom was moving through its pages.

Second, I have to come to see the Course as uniquely practical. The world's spiritual traditions are a trea-

sure house of practices with power to awaken us, yet for me the Course's practices have proven uniquely effective. For changing my perception, for healing my emotions, for bringing me peace through meditation or intimacy with God through prayer, nothing has worked for me like the treasures in the Course's storehouse. One of the best things that ever happened to me was falling in love with its practices. But those practices only came alive for me when I paid *very* close attention to the instructions. And I only did that when I decided that the Course was it for me.

Third, I have come to see the Course as breathtakingly original. They say that people like to hear what they expect, like churchgoers who want the comfort of the old familiar themes. Personally, though, I find that boring. I want to hear something I've never heard before. I want my mind stretched. I want to stand before genius. I want to hear something original. And I get that all the time from the Course. I don't think people realize just how deeply original the Course is. As an experiment, I just opened my book at random to see if my eyes fell on something that I couldn't read in any other teaching. I opened to the section in the Manual entitled "Is Each One to Be Judged in the End?" (M-15). Where else but in the Course can you read that, yes, in the end, each one of us will stand before God to be judged, yet instead of opening the book of all our misdeeds, He will throw it away, and announce to the entire world, "This is My Son, and all I have is his" (W-pII.FL.In.6:3)?

Fourth, I have come to see the Course as bottomless; it will never stop teaching me more. As long as my mind is unawakened, I want to learn new things that will contribute to my awakening. I want to come across new ideas that will trigger little awakenings. And I learned long ago that the Course is an inexhaustible ocean of new ideas. Yes, I have read it many, many times. But the amount that is actually in there is immeasurably greater than what meets the eye. As a result, there are always new things to learn. Some of them are tiny details and some of them throw new light on everything. Yet all of them spark awakenings.

Fifth, this is a path in which all the parts fit together. The Course has a simply amazing ability to run a straight line between its loftiest metaphysics and its most practical instructions. Everything seems to fit together seamlessly, which means that all the oars are rowing together. However, if I were to introduce elements from other paths, would they fit this well? Let's say, for instance, that I practice being in the present by tuning into the pure sensation of the moment, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the touch, without pasting on my busy mental overlays. How would this fit with the Course's teaching that my sight, hearing, smell, and touch are "senses without sense" (T-28.V.5:6) designed to show me a false world, to show me a world that looks like the present but is actually the ancient past (see T-26.V.5:6)? Couldn't it be that by loading on this other software I risk experiencing a software conflict and even a system crash?

Sixth, I have come to believe that by following the Course I am following one who knows the way. Humanity has produced a small number of towering religious geniuses, and I personally believe the author of the Course is one of them. This is partly because I believe he really is Jesus, but it's mainly because of how he shows up in the Course. He conveys such a mastery of the journey and such a feeling of having reached the end, such a feeling of egolessness. Yet he has none of the remoteness one might associate with egolessness. He feels like he is really with us in the process, that he honestly treasures us, just as he says (see T-13.X.13:2), that he genuinely cares about our welfare, even more than we do. I get the sense that he is totally on my side, yet is just as fully on God's side, and that he therefore holds the key to bridging the apparent distance between the two. I can't help but feel that as I traverse this unfamiliar territory, I am in the hands of the most reliable guide imaginable, one who walks with me all the way and yet also stands at the end, waiting with open arms.

I hope you can see why I feel that by sticking just with the Course and just with the straightforward sense of its words, I am living in that mansion I described. Why on earth would I want to go back to moving around from house to house? Why would I want to evade the plain sense of Jesus' words and read in my own metaphorical meanings, when that plain sense offers me such treasures? This doesn't mean that I don't have great respect for other teachings and other teachers. It just means that this is *my* teaching and *my* teacher. I once heard Huston Smith relate how a Hindu pandit told him that it's better to dig one well of sixty feet than six wells of ten feet each. I thought, true, but only if you have found the right place to dig. I have no doubt that, for myself, I have found that right place.



E-mail your comments to the author at: [robert@circleofa.org](mailto:robert@circleofa.org)

Robert Perry. He is the author or co-author of twenty books and booklets, including *Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'*.

## WHAT WE'RE READING

### **Greg Mackie:**

***Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* by Andrew Newberg, M.D., Eugene D'Aquili, M.D., Ph.D., and Vince Rause**

*A Course in Miracles* says that the mind should not be equated with the brain, but I find brain science interesting because if the mind made the brain, studying the brain can tell us things about the mind that made it. This book explores research on the relationship between the brain and spirituality. The authors reach the intriguing conclusion that the spiritual impulse, including the ability to have self-transcending mystical experiences, is built into the brain—part of its standard equipment. Is, then, the experience of what the authors call “Absolute Unitary Being” merely a product of brain chemistry, or is it a genuine experience of a transcendent reality, as the mystics claim? While the authors stress that they can't objectively prove which view is true, they are inclined toward the latter view.

### **Robert Perry:**

***The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem*, by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan**

This is a masterful book. Two of today's most influential Jesus scholars team up to take us through Jesus' final week, one day at a time. This does not mean that these scholars believe everything the gospels say about Jesus' final week—they don't. But they get around their professional skepticism by defining their job as simply drawing out and illuminating the story as presented in the gospels—actually, in one gospel: Mark. Mark is the source of the story of the last week in Matthew, Luke, and probably John. And only Mark presents an actual day-by-day account of that crucial week. What comes out through Borg and Crossan's richly detailed presentation is just how much Mark's story is about Jesus' vilification of, conflict with, and death at the hands of the “domination system,” the social and economic system headed up by the elites of Jerusalem and ultimately the empire of Rome, which was exploiting the vast majority of the population.

***The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything*, by Brian D. McLaren**

This is the first book I have read by Brian McLaren, hailed by Time magazine as one of the 25 most influential Evangelicals in America. So far (I am not done with the book yet), I am pleasantly surprised. Though considered an Evangelical, McLaren switches the focus from the person and death of Jesus to the message of Jesus. He clearly feels passionately about this message and openly states his conviction that it “could change everything.” Music to my ears. He is clearly conversant with contemporary scholarship about Jesus, and crafts a version of Jesus' message that, overall, I find attractive and agreeable. He writes vividly and personally. Recommended.

### **Dee (Webmaster):**

***The Inferno*, by Dante, translated by Robert & Jean Hollander**

I am reading this in a class taught by Dr. Richard Fadem, recently retired from the faculty of Columbia University. He is the most gifted lecturer I have ever heard—his tour de force presentation of the times brings books to life. Dante, was the first author to write in Italian rather than Greek or Latin. This book's success is responsible for

the success of the language as well. Dante used a *terza rima* verse scheme—reflecting the Trinity. Dante was the first to write extensively about the underworld and his vivid descriptions of hell remain with us today. The readers of his day looked forward, with great expectation, to reading the descriptions of each realm and discovering its occupants. Dante did not hesitate to put Pope Boniface (who exiled him from Florence), and others, whose actions he disapproved of, into one of the realms. The translation is well-done with good footnotes.

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

Thank you for sharing the presentation you gave at the San Francisco conference in February [“What If Jesus Really Did Write This?” *A Better Way* #63]. I think you did a great job in presenting “publicly observable reasons” for believing that Jesus is the author of *A Course in Miracles*. Surely the facts you presented about the Course do make the belief that Jesus is author at least intellectually responsible and take this belief out from the realm of things like belief in Santa Claus.

As I was reading this 25 page article I became impressed with the idea that this was one of your finest compositions. At least it was obvious that you devoted a lot of time, effort, research, and good thinking in preparing this presentation.

Thank you so much for this masterful composition! It was a delight to read and a model of “persuasion through the use of facts and reason”.

—Robert J. Hellmann, M.A.

## CIRCLE NEWS

Sign up now for our NEW online course!

### Manual Reading Program Starts May 7th.

#### **Purpose of the Class**

The Manual is often taken to be a kind of Q&A afterthought to the Course. Yet it is far more important than that. It can lift to a new level our understanding of what the Course is. It can show us that the Course wants to leave the realm of the purely mental and stride into our external lives. This program will lead you step by step through each section of the Manual, allowing you to grasp the real purpose of this final volume and process its implications for your life.

#### **Class format**

This is a 17-week class designed to take you through the Manual with Robert Perry. Each week you will receive 2 sets of class notes by e-mail, and have the opportunity to attend 1 live telephone class led by Robert Perry on that week's class material.

The live telephone class will be held on Wednesdays from 10am – 11am Pacific time, and will be recorded and available for download (at no extra cost) in the event that you cannot attend.

#### **Class cost**

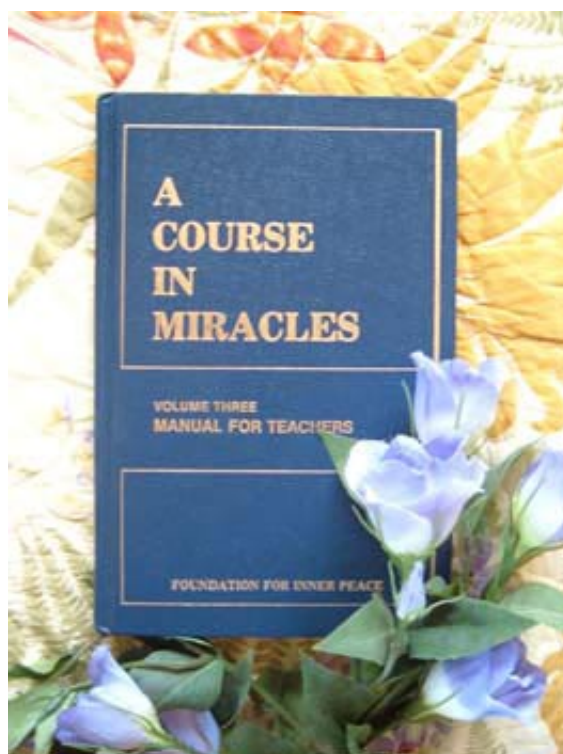
The cost for the 17-week class is \$170—that's just \$10 a week for 2 sets of class notes and a live telephone class! You can pay the full amount up front, or pay in two installments of \$90 each (this is a slightly higher class cost of \$180 and includes an additional administration fee).

#### **Class schedule**

The Manual Reading Program class will begin on Monday May 7<sup>th</sup> and will continue through the end of August. The first live telephone class will be held on Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup> at 10am Pacific time.

#### **Registration**

Go to our online registration page at [www.circlepublishing.org](http://www.circlepublishing.org)  
or call us at 928-282-0790.





## RECENT POSTINGS ON OUR WEBSITE

**Dialogs:** This month Robert Perry and Jim Marion are having a dialog about *A Course in Miracles* and the Perennial Wisdom. [Read more](#)

### Articles:

**Did We Make the World or Just the World as We See It?** by *Robert Perry*. When the Course says “you made the world,” what does it mean by “world”? [Read more.](#)

**How I Found the Course** by *Pari Hakimi*. One night a year ago I had a dream. I was standing in front of Jesus. He was sitting on the ground in a nice place, and he was meditating. I asked him, “My Lord, which path should I take?” [Read more.](#)

**Ten Character Traits of the Spiritually Advanced** by *Robert Perry*. Answers the question: What kind of person are we trying to become on this path? An exposition of the ten characteristics of God's teachers from the Manual. Taken from the final chapter of Robert's book *Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with A Course in Miracles*. [Read more.](#)

**This Course Is Perfectly Clear** by *Robert Perry*. The Course claims that it is perfectly clear. Yet anyone who has cracked the book has a somewhat different experience, to say the least. How can we reconcile the Course's claim with our experience? [Read more.](#)

**What Was the Meaning of the Empty Tomb?** by *Robert Perry*. Was there really an empty tomb? And if so, what did it mean? Did Jesus really appear to his followers? And if so, how do we reconcile that with the course's teaching on the unreality of the body? [Read more.](#)

**The Man Who Trusted God: Jesus' Final Parable?** by *Robert Perry*. What if Easter was another one of Jesus' parables, only this time one that was actually lived out? If it was, how would we tell that parable? [Read more.](#)

**Let Us Pray** by *Robert Perry*. What do we do with the prayers in the second part of the Workbook? We don't for God's sake, actually pray them do we? [Read more.](#)

**How Could They Do this to Me?** by *Robert Perry*. It is common to blame our parents for everything that is wrong with us. Jesus addresses this very issue with Bill Thetford's relationship to his parents. What did he have to say? [Read more.](#)

**Greg Mackie's Web Blog:** This month Greg posted the following blog entries: “The Long Haul” and “Blessed past; holy future”. [Read more.](#)

**Course Meets World Commentary** by *Greg Mackie*. This month Greg has posted the following commentaries relating A Course in Miracles to a topic “in the news”: “Does Hell Exist?”, “A Prayer for Virginia Tech”, “Healing the Slaughterhouse”, “The Perfect Lesson”, “God Still Speaks” and “Unmasking the 'Vain Brain’”. [Read more.](#)

**Questions and Answers** by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to several questions this month. “Karma”, “Could the Separation Happen Again?”, “How Can Illness Really Come from the Mind?”, “How important is Course interpretation?”, “When Did Jesus Wake Up?” and “What if I don't have a holy relationship?” [Read more.](#)