



High Council S.R.I.C.

Instituted: 1877 | Reconstituted: June 29 1997

"Post 120 Annos Patebo"

New Thought in America

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Several twentieth century movements seem to have been influenced by Rosicrucian ideals. These movements were largely religious in nature and offshoots of different Christian denominations, like the New Thought Movement, the Unity Church of Christianity, and Norman Vincent Peale's Christianity of positive thinking.

One writer especially typifies these early twentieth-century movements, namely Thomas Troward. He seems to be the most systematic thinker to have described the foundations of this New Thought movement. He expresses himself succinctly and writes about metaphysical subjects not in an abstract and mystical manner, but practically and grounding his thinking in the scientific ideas of his day.

Troward's first and best known book was a collection of talks he delivered in Scotland and England under the title of ***Edinburgh Lectures On Mental Science***. I have been unable, through my researches, to establish the date and place of his first talk. The earliest mention of his lectures I have been so far able to find is in ***The Times Index*** for October 27, 1916. There are references suggesting that the talks were given much earlier than that date.

First, allow me to establish Troward's connection with the new religious movements of the time. They were called New Thought. These new movements, and Troward's connection with them, are mentioned in the ***Encyclopedia Americana*** (Volume 20, 1984 edition), under "New Thought." His name is mentioned among several early writers on the subject of New Thought, the others being Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Edwin Markham, Prentice Mulford, Ralph Waldo Trine, all in the United States, and Thomas Troward is mentioned as a representative of New Thought in England.

Next, I'd like to present evidence from Troward's writings themselves demonstrating his connection with Rosicrucianism. In his *Edinburgh Lectures On Mental Science*, Troward ends his lectures with the following words, to quote:

The Question of the specific lines on which the individual may be most perfectly trained into such recognition of his true relation to the All-embracing Spirit of Life is therefore of supreme importance, but it is also of such magnitude that even to briefly sketch its broad outlines would require a volume to itself, and I will therefore not attempt to enter upon it here, my present purpose being only to offer some hints of the principles underlying that wonderful three-fold unity of Body, Soul, and Spirit which we all know ourselves to be.

We are as yet only at the commencement of the path which leads to the realization of this unity in the full development of all its powers, but others have trodden the way before us, from whose experiences we may learn; and not least among these was the illustrious founder of the Most Christian Fraternity of the Rosicrucians. This master-mind, setting out in his youth with the intention of going to Jerusalem, changed the order of his journey and first sojourned for three years in the symbolical city of Damcar, in the mystical country of Arabia, then for about a year in the mystical country of Egypt, and then for two years in the mystical country of Fez. Then, having during these six years learned all that was to be acquired in those countries, he returned to his native land of Germany, where, on the basis of the knowledge he had thus gained, he founded the Fraternity R.C., for whose instruction he wrote the mystical books M. and T. Then, when he realized that his work in its present stage was accomplished, he of his own free will laid aside the physical body, not, it is recorded, by decay, or disease, or ordinary death, but by the express direction of the Spirit of Life, summing up all his knowledge in the words, "Jesus mihi omnia."

And now his followers await the coming of "the Artist Elias," who shall bring the Magnum Opus to its completion. "Let him that readeth understand."

This quote would seem to indicate quite openly that Troward considered his thinking to be a contemporary representation of Rosicrucian philosophy.

In the 1921 Christmas Supplement to *The Bookman* (Volume 61-62, containing the issues of *The Bookman* from October, 1921 to March, 1922), a photograph of Thomas Troward appears on page 121, with the following caption: "The Late Mr. T. Troward, a new and uniform edition of whose works in mental science Messrs. Philpot Ltd. are publishing." It is from that edition that I have quoted Troward's reference to Rosicrucianism.

My own copy of the *Edinburgh Lectures On Mental Science* gives no date of publication. The only reviews of the book I could find were published in 1915, one on the 3rd of March in *The Outlook*, and the other on the 3rd of June in the *Boston Transcript*. The forward in my copy of the book, by Troward himself,

is dated March, 1904. Presumably, the lectures were delivered before 1904 and published in a first printing much before the 1915 review in the *The Outlook* and the *Boston Transcript*. Originally the lectures were delivered in Edinburgh, and apparently these lectures became the first in a series of lectures on philosophy, psychology and religion. The title of the book mentioned in the *Boston Transcript* review is in fact the *Edinburgh Lectures On Mental Science (Edinburgh Lecture Series)*. But, remember, the reviews mention that the publishers were providing later editions of his works, were revised and enlarged editions. I do not know how much they were revised and enlarged, for I have been unable to find copies of the originals.

The Edinburgh Lectures are described in the *Boston Transcript* as a course of lectures given by the author in Edinburgh. The review is a short synopsis of what's in the book. It's about the relation between personal and universal mind, the connection being demonstrated, according to the review, with great force of logic, arguing that subjective mind is universal. Moreover, Troward is said to argue that this subjective mind is the same one at work throughout the universe. This, indeed, does seem to be an important metaphysical principle for Troward, and it also happens to be a principal tenet of Rosicrucianism.

This review further continues to elaborate the main points of Troward's *Edinburgh Lectures*, that, in a manner of speaking, our individual subjective mind, if technically speaking we can call it **our** mind, is more strictly speaking our share in the universal mind; that this subjective mind may be imagined as a fountain of perpetual life which is continually renovating the body by building in strong and healthy material; and that this subjective mind acts only under suggestions coming from the objective mind. Moreover, the kind of suggestion impressed upon it is amenable to control by the will.

The review published in *The Outlook*, in that same year, 1915 (three months before the *Boston Transcript* review) described Troward's lectures as likely to appeal to anyone "trying to cross the great divide between the medieval and the modern conception of God."

About Troward himself I have been able to learn very little. I have found two references to his death and two references connecting him with the New Thought movement. In a review of his book *The Law and the Word*, which appeared in the *Book Review Digest* in 1917 (page 565), the reviewer wrote: "the author, who died in 1916, was one of the leading exponents of New Thought."

The other reference about Troward's place in the New Thought movement appeared in a review of same book, *The Law and the Word*, appearing in *The Times Literary Supplement* of London on September 16, 1917. Here he is identified as the late Mr. Troward, a Divisional Judge in the Punjab. The reviewer adds that Troward's approach to Christianity is from "a fresh avenue" and that his book "may help those whose religious attitude is represented by such

a body as the International New Thought Alliance, of which Mr. Troward was the first vice-president." This clearly connects Troward with the New Thought movement in North America. Troward must have had a wide audience in North America, because his books were reviewed in many American literary magazines of the day.

Troward's book, *The Law and the Word*, is a collection of his essays. Paul Derrick, who appears to have been a close friend, wrote an appreciative forward. My copy has a copyright date of 1917 and signed as the twenty-fourth printing of the lectures. The original publication must have been long before 1917 and somewhat after the Edinburgh lectures, which would suggest these particular lectures were first published sometime after 1904 and before 1917.

The review of *The Law and the Word*, published in 1917 in *The Times Literary Supplement* of London, gives the clearest and most comprehensive description of Troward's philosophy. This particular review, more than any other, seems to reveal the Rosicrucian character of Troward's philosophy. The review acknowledges that Troward has based his philosophy on the principle of a "Universal Subconscious mind," and that man's subconsciousness is no more nor less than universal and infinite God-consciousness, "from which man was created and is maintained, and of which all physical, mental, and spiritual manifestation is a form of expression."

The reviewer then mentions an important idea occurring in *The Law and the Word*, in the chapter on psychic experience, namely the idea of an ether pervading all space and all substance, which idea should help us to see that many things popularly called supernatural are to be attributed to the action of known laws working under unknown conditions. This kind of thinking puts a Rosicrucian stamp on the new religious thinking called New Thought. This makes New Thought more metaphysical and mystical in nature than it is Christian and religious. Furthermore, this kind of thinking was not restricted to just a handful of people. Apparently Troward had a rather wide following at the time.

Interestingly, in this same issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*, there is a review of a book entitled *Christian Science and the Ordinary Man* by Walter S. Harris. The book is described as a discussion of some of the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy, discoverer and founder of Christian Science. Of course, we now know that Mary Baker Eddy's claim to be the founder of Christian Science is unquestionable. But it is indeed certain that she was not the discoverer of the idea of Christian Science, nor were she and her disciples the only ones teaching the ideas embodied in Christian Science doctrine. The distinction of discoverer of those ideas seems to belong to Quimby, ideas subsequently parallel with the growth of the Christian Science Church and enshrined in the New Thought movement. Among the discoverers was Thomas Troward.

In that same issue of *The London Times Literary Supplement* is another review, one announcing the publication of a book by Horatio W. Dresser, called a *Handbook of the New Thought*. Dresser is the one who edited and published Quimby's papers, arguing that Quimby, not Mary Baker Eddy, first discovered and taught the ideas germane to Christian Science. This handbook was written apparently as a manual for those who wish to know the origin, history, purpose and method of the so-called New Thought movement. To quote:

The 'old' thought against which the 'new' reacts is any form of authority, whether medical or ecclesiastical, in so far as physicians and churches keep people in subjection to creeds. It is in particular a protest against materialism in all its forms.

The editions of Troward's books which were reviewed in the English and American literary magazines and newspapers of the early twentieth century were always advertised as revised and enlarged editions. These revised and enlarged editions seem to have enjoyed a popularity just around the time World War I ended, a time unlike any other in Europe, a time which seemed to have tried the religious faith of many people, people who perhaps wondered how a God could have allowed such widespread inhumanity among mankind. It was also described as a time of reconstruction.

There appears to have been a resurgence of interest in the humanistic study of ancient Greece. Much was being written about the newest advances in medicine, especially around the idea of "psycho-neurosis," ideas which owed much to knowledge gained from treating soldiers who had survived the dreadful experiences of man's brutality to his fellow man in battle. Metaphysically, it would seem to be accurate to say that there was a general upset in mankind's conception of reality. Was a unified conception of reality the correct one, or was the correct conception a pluralistic one? These were the issues being discussed in 1917 in *The Times Literary Supplement of London*.

May Sinclair, in her book *The Quest of Reality*, reviewed in the September 16, 1917 issue of *The Times Literary Supplement of London*, made this observation:

The doctrine of the One has been worked so hard and so incessantly, and with such passionate variance among its adherents as to the nature of their 'One,' that the reaction against it was bound to set in, and the tendency of modern metaphysical thought is in favour of the Two or the Many.

The question of Idealistic Monism versus Idealistic Pluralism seems to have divided the early Greek philosophers into two camps. It is problem central to Eastern philosophy. How are we to test the question? Are we to test it a priori, or from our experience, a posteriori? Sinclair continues her analysis of the dilemma by hoping that no reasonable person would demand certainty at this point in the

evolution of human thought, and by hoping that all men could accept the fact that the utmost we are entitled to demand is a certain balance of probabilities.

The review continues to remind us that the quest for an Ultimate Reality is as much a necessity of thought for the Monist as it is a passion of the soul for the Mystic. In the words of the reviewer, "the saints of Mysticism are poets, and its counterpart in Philosophy is Spiritual Monism." In the words of Mary Sinclair, the author of *The Quest of Reality*:

Religion that begins in the fear of the supernatural and ends in the consuming love of it is the historic witness to the passion for unity common to the Monists and the Mystics.

The New Mysticism, like the New Thought, is alien to forms of Mysticism and religious worship that are ascetic at one extreme and sensuous and erotic at the other. We are advised to get rid of all magical thinking that gives rise to Mystery. Yet, at the same time we are urged to keep a mind open to the possibility of "occult powers of the human individual" with their disputable results. Too much that is called mysticism is simply a pathological form of "dissociation", and the mention of the "unconscious" and the "subconscious" is a lapse into the primitive and the savage, according to Sinclair.

The new mysticism is to be robust and joyous, and reconciled to the world, like Rabindranath Tagore in his *Gitanjali*. Sinclair agrees with Tagore that the destiny of the East is to "spiritualize the West." Eastern mysticism is to be preferred to Western Mysticism, and especially Christian Mysticism which seems pledged to Dualism. Perhaps, the meeting of East and West is to be found in the Christian Humanism following upon the heels of World War I, a humanism which some Popes denounced. More likely, what some people were yearning for at that time is being expressed presently in the Christian movement of Creation Theology, being promulgated by the American Dominican priest Matthew Fox and the **Applewood Centre** in Toronto, Canada.

In 1910, Troward delivered a series of twelve lectures in London, subsequently published in a small volume as *The Dore Lectures on Mental Science*. Again, this information comes from a review which appeared in the *Boston Transcript* on page 22 of the June 30th, 1915 issue. The Dore lectures were considered part of the Edinburgh lecture series, but not identical to the lectures on mental science given in Edinburgh. The reviewer notes that the lectures seem to have a certain progressive development of thought. In spite of any differences between the Edinburgh and the Dore lectures, one theme seems to run throughout, to quote:

though the laws of the universe can never be broken, they can be made to work under special conditions which will produce results that could not be produced under the conditions spontaneously provided by nature.

Again, my edition of the *Dore Lectures* claims to be the twenty-fifth printing and carries a copyright and publication date of September 1909. It's most unlikely that the lectures were published before they were delivered, so they must have been delivered after 1904 and before 1909.

What is this New Thought movement with which Troward was associated? According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Volume 13, 1984, pp 14-16), the New Thought movement is "a mind healing movement based on religious and metaphysical presuppositions concerning the nature of reality," originating in the United States in the nineteenth century and branching out into a great variety of New Thought groups. The *Encyclopedia Americana* describes it as "a philosophical and mental therapeutics" movement begun in the mid-nineteenth century. It became a popular religious movement with an extensive literature and with churches and centres throughout the world.

The New Thought movement has been described as "the religion of healthy-mindedness" or "the mind-cure movement." Many New Thought advocates considered themselves to be Christians, but this reference became more ambiguous in the mid-twentieth century. It has been described as an individualistic, nonliturgical religion with emphasis on the power of constructive thinking. An example fitting this description would be the Unity Church of Christianity.

The earliest advocate of New Thought in North America is said to be Phineas Parkhurst Quimby of Belfast and Portland, Maine, whose life spanned 62 years from 1802 to 1866. This raises the question for me whether New Thought had its origin in England or in North America. At least, we can assuredly claim that it first became institutionalized as a movement in North America.

Quimby was considered one of the most famous hypnotists of his day, believing and teaching the idea that illness is a matter of the mind. Accordingly, then, healing must make use of mental and spiritual methods. One of Quimby's most famous patients, by the way, was Mary Baker Eddy, who, as we have already noted, was the founder of the Christian Science Church.

In 1904, thirty-eight years after the death of Quimby, the first New Thought Congress was convened, followed by the New Thought Alliance in 1908, then the International New Thought Alliance in 1914. In the United States there were many who joined the Alliance, like the Unity School of Christianity founded by the Fillmore's and the Church of Religious Science founded by Ernest Holmes.

These events were happening in North America at a time when, judging from his publications, Troward was evidently advancing his own ideas similar to American New Thought teachings, ideas about the relationship of body and mind to spirit. I have found no evidence that Troward knew about the work of Quimby, or for that matter, that he knew of the existence of any other American New Thought writer at the time that he started lecturing.

Allow me to list for you a variety of ideas that seem to have been officially publicized as characteristic of the New Thought Alliance. The New Thought principles mentioned in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* are:

(1) ideas are more real than matter, suggesting that the New Thought Movement may be a kind of neo-Platonism;

(2) the material realm is one of effects whose causes are spiritual and whose purpose is divine, which suggests a Swedenborgian influence;

(3) truth is a matter of continuing revelation; there is no final truth and no one person or group has the final answers;

(4) another position put forward by the Alliance, is not to place the movement in opposition to medical science, as Christian Science does, but to encourage its members to be positive and optimistic about life and its outcome.

In 1916, the following statement was published regarding the purpose and principles of the New Thought Alliance, namely, to teach the Infinitude of the Supreme One; the Divinity of Man and his Infinite Possibilities through the creative power of constructive thinking and obedience to the voice of the indwelling Presence which is our source of Inspiration, Power, Health and Prosperity. A revision of the purpose and principles of the New Thought Alliance was published in the 1950's with special emphasis on the immanence of God, the divine nature of man, the immediate availability of God's power to man, the spiritual character of the Universe, the idea that sin, human disorder, and human disease are basically matters of incorrect thinking, and that Jesus is to be characterized as a teacher and healer whose kingdom is to be seen as being within a person, and finally a growing tendency to think of material prosperity as the result of adopting and applying New Thought principles in one's thinking and actions. Interestingly, reference to Jesus was later omitted from the 1954 statement of purposes and principles.

Two other features of the New Thought movement seem worth mentioning. The New Thought seems to be a kind of monism, encouraging its members to see in all things the Oneness of this world. Their basic principles are strongly gnostic, namely a rejection of a philosophy of dualism for a philosophy which gives primacy to spirit rather than to matter, and which sees dualism as opposed to the idea of spirit.

Books and magazines began to be published to spread the New Thought philosophy, magazines like *New Thought, Unity, Daily Word, Divine Science Monthly, Science of Mind, Religious Science, Crusader*, and books written by Ralph Waldo Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897), Orison Swett Marden's *Pushing to the Front* (1894), Robert Collier's *The Secret of the Ages* (1926), Emmet Fox's *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (1940) and *Sermon on the Mount* (1934), Glen Clark's *How to Find Health*

Through Prayer (1940), Norman Vincent Peale's ***The Power of Positive Thinking*** (1952), and Thurman Fleet's ***Concept-Therapy*** and ***Rays of the Dawn*** (1948).

Several groups eventually splintered from the original Unity School of Christianity. Fillmore, who was a Methodist, founded the Unity Church of Christianity, with headquarters in Unity Village, Missouri. Frank Rolinson, a Baptist, founded Psychiana. And the Ballards, Mr. Ballard being a mining engineer, founded the I AM Movement, with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois.

I have shown that there is much in the thinking of Troward and in other writers who identified themselves with the broad terms of the New Thought movement that is consistent with what we know today about the Rosicrucian metaphysics. One reviewer of the ***Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science***, ably summed up that philosophy in his review in the March 3, 1915 issue of ***The Outlook***. He thought the book to be valuable, although he criticized Troward for not being strictly precise in his terms.

Troward substitutes words like "Spirit" and "Life" for the term "God." This could be said to be what Jesus thought, when he is quoted to have said "God is Spirit..." Troward's ideas also seemed to correspond philosophically with the ideas of evolution, namely, "one life in all lives." And that one life is intelligently building all living bodies, actively carrying on all our subconscious processes of nutrition, growth, repair, and welling up into conscious activities controlled by our will. The review goes on eloquently to state that in this universal Life or Spirit we each dwell island-like in an ocean, we in God and God in us. Our challenge is to identify our individual selves in conscious thought, desire and purpose with the Universal Life in the subconscious depths of our being, trying to think the thought and do the will of the indwelling One so as to realize our Unity with Him and all the good conditioned thereon. The present trend, notes the reviewer, is to reduce theology to biology, and Troward's Mental Science seems to take this line throughout.

It would seem that Troward's thinking and the Rosicrucian philosophy that it represents continues to find expression today in the continued existence of the New Thought Alliance and its related organizations, chief among them being the Unity Church of Christianity, the Concept-Therapy movement, the Silva Mind Control movement and the Creation Theology movement within the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. And as Eastern philosophy and psychology gains greater acceptance in the West, the philosophy and metaphysics of Rosicrucianism will perhaps find greater appeal among students looking for a religion and mysticism that harmonizes with the truths and facts of science, for as Teilhard de Chardin demonstrated, in true Rosicrucian fashion, the boundaries between science and religion are fine indeed, if indeed in the final analysis nonexistent.