

Marianne Williamson and the Bible

Robert M. Bowman Jr.

Marianne Williamson is a popular New Age teacher. She first came to national prominence through her bestselling book *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (Harper, 1992), referring to a New Age book called *A Course in Miracles*. Both of these books continue to be highly influential. This little study will document Williamson’s approach to the Bible, which we may charitably describe as “creative.”

Redefining Biblical Terms

Williamson is forthright in stating that she uses biblical language in “nontraditional” ways, which is how she learned to use such terminology from *A Course in Miracles*:

A Course in Miracles uses traditional Christian terminology, but it uses it in very non-traditional ways. Words like Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, Jesus, etc., are used for their psychological rather than religious significance.... So many Christian terms have been used to create and perpetuate guilt, that many thinking people have decided to reject them entirely” (39).

Here are some biblical terms with Williamson’s redefinitions.

Term	Williamson, <i>Return to Love</i>	Biblical Meaning
Atonement	“The Holy Spirit guides us to a different perception of reality, one that is based on love. His correction of our perception is called the Atonement. The only thing lacking in any situation is our own awareness of love.” (35)	<i>Atonement</i> means reconciliation of God and human beings by removing human sin as an obstacle to fellowship between them (Rom. 5:1-11).
Body of Christ	“We are holy beings, individual cells in the body of Christ.... We are all one, we are love itself.” (30)	<i>Body of Christ</i> is a metaphor for the church, in which different kinds of people are united through their faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12).
Charisma	“The word ‘charisma’ was originally a religious term. It means ‘of the spirit.’ Charisma is the power to effect what happens on the earth from an invisible realm within, and it is the natural right and function of the Son of God [which is all of us].” (160)	<i>Charisma</i> is a Greek word meaning “gift,” referring to the gift of salvation to those who trust in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23) and to the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on them (Rom. 12:6).

<p>Christ</p>	<p>“The word Christ is a psychological term. No religion has a monopoly on the truth. Christ refers to the common thread of divine love that is the core and essence of every human mind. . . . ‘Accepting the Christ’ is merely a shift in self-perception.” (29) “You and I have the Christ-mind in us as much as Jesus does. The difference between him and us is that we are tempted to deny it.” (38)</p>	<p>The name <i>Christ</i> derives from the Greek <i>christos</i> (“anointed”) and that translated the Hebrew <i>Mashiach</i> (Messiah). It means that Jesus—and he alone—is the promised Priest and King who would bring salvation to Israel and the world (Ps. 2:2; Matt. 24:5; Luke 2:11; Acts 17:2-3; 1 John 2:22).</p>
<p>Cross, Crucifixion</p>	<p>“Do not make the pathetic error of ‘clinging to the old rugged cross.’ The only message of the crucifixion is that you can overcome the cross. Until then you are free to crucify yourself as often as you choose. This is not the gospel I [Jesus] intended to offer you.” (259, quoting <i>A Course in Miracles</i>)</p>	<p>“Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38). “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14; see also 1 Cor. 1:18-2:8).</p>
<p>Faith</p>	<p>“To trust in the force that moves the universe is faith. Faith isn’t blind, it’s visionary. Faith is believing that the universe is on our side, and that the universe knows what it’s doing. Faith is a psychological awareness of an unfolding force for good, constantly at work in all dimensions.” (46)</p>	<p><i>Faith</i> means trusting in <i>God</i> and in Jesus his Son (John 3:16; 14:1), not the universe. <i>God</i> works all things for good <i>to those who love him</i> (Rom. 8:28).</p>
<p>Forgiveness</p>	<p>“Forgiveness is a major cornerstone of <i>A Course in Miracles</i> philosophy. Like many of the traditional terms used in the Course, it is used in a very nontraditional way. Traditionally, we think of forgiveness as something we are to do when we see guilt in someone. In the Course, however, we’re taught that it’s our function to remember that there <i>is</i> no guilt in anyone, because only love is real. . . . Actually, then, there is nothing to forgive. The traditional notion of forgiveness – what <i>A Course in Miracles</i> calls ‘forgiveness-to-destroy’ – is then an act of judgment. It is the arrogance of someone who sees themselves as better than someone else, or perhaps equally as sinful, which is still a misperception and the arrogance of the ego.” (61)</p>	<p>“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12; see vv. 14-15). <i>Forgiveness</i> acknowledges real guilt and then absolves the guilty (Is. 55:7; Rom. 4:7). Some sins God himself will not forgive (Matt. 12:31-32). Admitting we are sinners is prerequisite to receiving God’s forgiveness: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).</p>

Holy Spirit	<p>“He is God’s ‘eternal communication link with His separated sons,’ a bridge back to gentle thoughts, the Great Transformer of Perception from fear to love.” (34, quoting <i>A Course in Miracles</i>). “Metaphysicians call it the Third Eye, Christians call it the vision of the Holy Spirit, and others call it the Higher Self. Regardless of what it’s called, love requires a different kind of ‘seeing’ than we’re used to – a different kind of knowing or thinking.” (xix)</p>	<p>The <i>Holy Spirit</i> is not our Higher Self, but a divine person, sent from the Father and the Son to indwell those who believe in Jesus. The world does not know him (John 14:16-17, 26-27; 16:7-15).</p>
Jesus	<p>“Words are just words, and new ones can always be found to replace ones that offend. In the case of Jesus, however, the problem isn’t as simple as just coming up with another word. Jesus is his name. There’s no point in pretending that his name is Herbert.” (40) “Who is Jesus? He is a personal symbol of the Holy Spirit. Having been totally healed by the Holy Spirit, He has become one with Him. He’s not the only face the Holy Spirit takes. He is <i>a</i> face.... Jesus reached total actualization of the Christ mind, and was then given by God the power to help the rest of us reach that place within ourselves.” (41)</p>	<p><i>Jesus</i> was empowered by the Holy Spirit, but not “healed” by him, because Jesus was the sinless Savior (Mark 1:12-13; 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). Jesus is <i>the</i> (not <i>an</i>) image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15); he is <i>the</i> way to God (Matt. 11:27; John 14:6; Acts 4:12).</p>
Love	<p>“Love is energy.... Love is energy, an infinite continuum.” (19, 29)</p>	<p><i>Love</i> is selfless giving of oneself, characteristic of God and those who know him (1 John 4:7-21).</p>
Miracle	<p>“I didn’t know, until reading <i>A Course in Miracles</i>, that a miracle is a reasonable thing to ask for. I didn’t know that a miracle is just a shift in perception.” (8-9) “Sometimes a miracle is a change in material conditions, such as physical healing. At other times, it is a psychological or emotional change. It is a shift not so much in an objective situation – although that often occurs – as it is a shift in how we <i>perceive</i> a situation.” (58)</p>	<p>A <i>miracle</i> is a wondrous act of God, either by providence or intervention, that reveals his exclusive, sovereign lordship over nature (Ex. 11:9-10; 34:10; Ps. 72:18; Dan. 6:28; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:4).</p>
Resurrection	<p>“The term resurrection means the energy pattern of love, which transcends fear by replacing it. A miracle worker’s function is forgiveness. In performing our function, we become channels for resurrection.” (68)</p>	<p>Resurrection means the restoration of bodily life to those who have died physically (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29). Believers have the hope of resurrection through the risen Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-23).</p>

Sin	“A sin would mean we did something so bad that God is angry at us. But since we can’t do anything that changes our essential nature, God has nothing to be angry at. Only love is real. Nothing else exists.” (85)	<i>Sin</i> is bad enough and real enough that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3). He died so that we might be saved from God’s righteous anger (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10).
Virgin Birth	“In Christic philosophical terms, Mary symbolizes the feminine within us, which is impregnated by God.... The Christ on earth is fathered by God, and mothered by our humanness. Through a mystical connection between the human and divine, we give birth to our higher Self.” (49; cf. 254)	The Virgin Birth is the miracle by which the historical man Jesus was conceived and born of a young virgin, Mary (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38).

Reinterpreting Biblical Texts

Here are some of Williamson’s creative interpretations of various biblical passages. Generally speaking, no comment is really needed to see that her interpretations do not fit what the passages actually mean in their contexts.

Gen. 1:26-27. “We were created in His image, or mind, which means that we are extensions of His love, or Sons of God.” (17)

Gen. 2:17. “Adam and Eve were happy until she ‘ate of the knowledge of good and evil.’ What that means is that everything was perfect until they began to judge – to keep their hearts open sometimes, but closed at others. ‘I love you if you do this, but not if you do that.’” (22)

Matt. 5:5. “This is what is meant by ‘The meek shall inherit the earth’: They will literally take it over because of their strength.” (72, quoting *Course in Miracles*)

Matt. 6:13b. “Each of us have different fears, and different manifestations of fear, but all of us are saved by the same technique: the call to God to save our lives by salvaging our minds. ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Love is the Kingdom, and Love is the glory, and Love is the power, forever and ever.’” (151)

Matt. 7:24-27. “Our house is our emotional stability. When the house is built on sand, that means our sense of well-being is based on fleeting things and passing moods. One disappointing phone call and we crumble; one storm and the house falls down. When the house is built on rock, it means we’re not so vulnerable to life’s passing dramas. Our stability rests on something more enduring than the current weather – something permanent and strong. When our house is built on rock, it means we’re depending on God.” (16)

Matt. 18:3. “In Zen Buddhism, there’s a concept called ‘zen mind,’ or ‘beginner’s mind.’ They say that the mind should be like an empty rice bowl. If it’s already full, then the universe can’t fill it. . . . In the Christic tradition, this is the meaning of ‘becoming as a little child.’ Little children don’t think they know what things mean. In fact, they know they don’t know.” (52)

Matt. 22:14. “The adage that ‘many are called but few are chosen’ means that everyone is called, but few care to listen. God’s call is universal, going out to every mind in every moment. Not everyone, however, chooses to heed the call of his own heart.” (60)

Mark 1:40-45. “How did Jesus heal the leper? By forgiving him. He stood in the midst of illusion and yet saw only the truth as God created it. He healed through corrected perception. When he stood in front of a leper, he didn’t see leprosy. . . . Jesus did not *believe* in leprosy. Since all minds are connected, in his presence the leper no longer believed in it either. And so the leper was healed.” (202)

John 8:32. “The unconditional love, or Christ within him [Jesus], is ‘the truth that sets us free,’ because it’s the perspective that saves us from our own fearful thoughts.” (38)

Romans 12:19. “‘Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord,’ means, ‘Relinquish the idea of vengeance.’ God balances all wrong, but not through attack, judgment or punishment.” (87)

1 Cor. 15:26. “When Jesus said, ‘Death shall be the last enemy,’ he meant that it shall be the last thing we perceive as an enemy. The problem is not really death, but what we think death is.” (229)

Revelation 10:6. “The biblical statement that ‘time shall be no more’ means that we will one day live fully in the present, without obsessing about past or future.” (63)