



Absence from Felicity : The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles

By *Kenneth Wapnick*

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This biography of Helen Schucman focuses on the lifetime conflict between her spiritual nature and her ego, and includes excerpts from her recollections, dreams, letters, and personal messages from Jesus -- all never before in print. The book gives a detailed account of Helen's personal experiences of Jesus, her relationship with William Thetford, and her scribing of the Course. The last part contains reminiscences of Helen by Kenneth Wapnick, which draw upon their intimate relationship that spanned the last eight years of her life.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist and one of the foremost teachers of A Course in Miracles, which he has been working with since 1973, when he joined Dr. Helen Schucman, scribe of the Course, and Dr. William Thetford at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. He has written more than 25 books on the Course, including *Love Does Not Condemn*, *Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of 'A Course in Miracles,'* *The Message of 'A Course in Miracles,'* and many others. He has also produced over 150 audio and video titles discussing the principles of the Course. He is President and co-founder, with his wife Gloria, of the Foundation for A Course in Miracles in Temecula, California.

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From the Preface:

Helen Schucman, the subject of this book, was the scribe of A Course in Miracles. From October 1965 through September 1972, she "heard" the voice of Jesus dictating to her the three volumes that comprise one of the most significant spiritual messages of our time. This book, in part, is the story of this dictation, set in the context of Helen's lifetime search for God.

One afternoon, several years after the Course was completed, Helen and I were sitting on her living room couch, our favorite spot when the weather was not conducive to walking. We began to discuss the distortions about her life and the Course's origins that were already beginning to be heard, and this at a time when she was still very much alive. Imagine, we thought out loud, what would happen after she was gone. Helen, incidentally, seemed rather certain that she would die at the age of seventy-two, that being the number written on her tombstone she had seen in a vision. In point of fact, she died about five months short of her seventy-second birthday. While I do not recall the exact date of our conversation on the couch, it was most likely around two or three years before Helen's death in 1981.

It was mutually understood by us that her unpublished autobiography was hardly a true and accurate account of her life, being rather an overly stylized, literary rendering -- her public stance -- that did not truly reflect the deeper level of Helen's feelings and experiences. Our one attempt to correct the inaccuracies and edit out the distortions, while an improvement in some places, proved in many others to be even worse than the original. Recounting certain events in her life -- especially those of a religious nature, and even more specifically, those events surrounding A Course in Miracles -- aroused tremendous anxiety in Helen, and her discomfort directly led to an almost fierce over-editing that affected the faithfulness of her life's retelling. It was out of this context, therefore, that I said to Helen that I would write her story, as well as the related events -- inner and outer -- that preceded, accompanied, and followed her taking down the Course.

Helen agreed that this was a good idea, and then, as one of us would often do, I quoted from our mutually favorite literary work, *Hamlet*. It was from the final scene where Hamlet is dying of the poisoned cup, and his trusted Horatio begins to drink the poison to join his friend in death. Hamlet quickly seizes the cup from Horatio's hands, exclaiming: O good Horatio, what a wounded name, Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me! If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, Absent thee from felicity awhile, And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, To tell my story (V,ii). I hardly think this is a harsh world, nor do I experience my surviving Helen as painful, nor did I think that way then. However, I had some premonitions of what the

world would do to Helen -- "what a wounded name... shall live behind me!" -- unable to resist the temptation to sensationalize, mythologize, or otherwise distort her life and experiences. This I knew would only obscure the truth of what was an inspiring and powerful story simply by being what it was, without need to have it conform to Hollywood standards. And so the need for a biography I would write -- as I truly held her in my heart -- that would more closely reflect Helen's experience: a life dedicated to bringing forth the message of Jesus, and yet a life that was in truth, in Helen's conscious experience at least, an absence from felicity.

Helen, thus, not only left the world A Course in Miracles -- in my opinion the world's most psychologically sophisticated account of the mind's subterranean warfare, along with teaching the means for undoing this war against God through forgiveness -- but her own life provided a model for its teachings as well. Very few, if any at all, knew fully these two sides of Helen -- Hamlet's "Things standing thus unknown" -- and it is this complex combination I hope to capture in this book. While Helen would not have wanted what I am to write to have been public knowledge during her lifetime, for reasons that form one of the important themes of this book, I know she would be pleased that I am at this time presenting her story and that of the Course's beginnings. I therefore hope that this book will restore to Helen's reported experience a balance that has been heretofore lacking, and that will record for posterity the wonderful if not painfully human story of a woman who remained absolutely faithful to Jesus, the one she both loved and hated above all others.

And yet, all this being said, the love and hate but veiled the Love in her that existed before time was, and will continue after time ceases to be. For beyond the personal and ambivalent side to Helen, rested a totally different self. In fact, "Self" may be a more appropriate spelling, for this part of her inner life was totally impersonal, and transcended the love-hate relationship with Jesus that in effect was her personal self. Almost always hidden in Helen, this other-worldly side nonetheless was the ultimate foundation for her life, and gave it the meaning from which all else must be understood.

This book, therefore, has two principal themes. The first, which predominates, is Helen's love-hate relationship with God and Jesus, what A Course in Miracles refers to as the conflict between our right- and wrong-minded selves. The second, which runs throughout as an undercurrent, is the Love of Christ that Helen truly knew and was, called One-Mindedness in the Course. Although I shall make reference to this trans-personal Self from time to time, especially in connection with Helen's recurring image of the priestess, I shall leave for the Epilogue a fuller consideration of this aspect of Helen, letting the development of her personal side form the basic contours of this book. At the conclusion of Helen's personal story, I shall then return to this Self, as a composer concludes a symphony with a coda: the final episode that introduces new themes, yet which nonetheless remains intimately connected to the spirit of the music preceding it.

Helen and I shared a deep love for one another, and for Jesus in whose love we knew we were joined, and on behalf of whose Course we had come together. It is my prayer that I am able to convey that love in these pages. In the words that Beethoven inscribed over the opening measures of his choral masterpiece Missa Solemnis: "From the heart, may it go to the heart."

Users Review

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