

# Is 'Positive Thinking' Christian Thinking?

By Rev. Ralph Thomas, S.A.

IT'S STILL DIFFICULT to avoid Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Each time I go to the local Lending Library The Power of Positive Thinking stares at me from the "Suggestions" bookshelf. On my last two browsing expeditions to the bookstore I've seen weary customers hopefully purchasing their copy of the "bible" of positive thinking. Dr. Peale's syndicated column Confident Living is in the weekly paper I read. Every week I encounter his



DR. NORMAN VINCENT PEALE  
"Take three deep breaths."

In His system of thought and practice, believe and you will overcome all fear, hate, inferiority, guilt and every form and manner of defeat.

THIS AMALGAM of ideas from Dale Carnegie, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Baker Eddy, and others which is being passed off as Christianity has even led some of Dr. Peale's fellow Protestant ministers to protest. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary claims that Protestants have made a shocking error in helping to make Dr. Peale their "most popular apologist."

Speaking on the subject of painless Christianity at the University of Virginia, the Rev. Stuart Grizzard warned students that some Americans are "trying to turn God into an aspirin tablet and Christianity into soothing syrup." And Dr. Linton Pope of Yale Divinity School believes that in the "positive thinking" cult "God becomes a sort of master psychiatrist who will help you get over your difficulties." He goes on to say that "the peace of mind cult represents a re-definition of the Christian faith in its central themes."

It is impossible not to agree with these judgments of the Protestant ministers on the Peale message.

This newest redefinition of Christianity ignores not only original sin, but all sin. It has no place for the Christian doctrine of suffering or the Cross. It ignores most of the Gospel and retains a few texts which are explained in a new way. It glorifies success as virtue. It offers schemes for making God perform any selfish impulse of man.

Nevertheless, it is an odd phenomenon for Protestant ministers to make judgments on other Protestant ministers' judgments. Is not the basic principle of the Reformation the freedom of private judgment of the Scripture? Was not each Protestant considered free to judge the Gospel in his own way?

LUTHER'S NEW doctrine was that man is saved by faith

alone without good works. Calvin redefined Christianity in terms of absolute predestination. Michael Servetus, the first "Unitarian," denied the doctrine of the Trinity. And in 1820, near Palmyra, New York, Joseph Smith effected a new "restoration" of the Gospel, which resulted in the beliefs of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints.

These and other redefinitions of Christianity, based on private judgment, have resulted in hundreds of different Protestant sects in our day. To this number Dr. Peale has added his own watered-down version.

The "positive thinking" cult, deriving as it does from an individualistic and selective interpretation of the Bible, represents a radical departure from the Christian tradition—an "end of the line," as it were, and is therefore eminently a problem which Protestants themselves will have to reckon with.

The crux of the matter is just how they can prevent the total loss of every semblance of the Christian teaching. One of John Wesley's basic principles was, "Think and let think." This axiom appears broad enough to permit Peale's "positive thinking" to qualify.

Nevertheless, if Dr. Peale's popularity is an indication of contemporary Protestant religious ideas, a Catholic must voice his concern.

We cannot ignore the fact that his books and sermons reflect the religious ideas of more and more of our Protestant neighbors. We must realize that many of them regard Christ as a mere man, the sac-

raments, as purely symbolic, and the Bible as a no-man's land where any idea is valid.

IT IS ON such vital issues as these that the Catholic Church preserves the precious heritage of Christian thought pure and integral. Amid the varieties and extravagances of self-made theories, she defends and maintains the deposit of traditional faith.

Consider, for instance, the questions: Is Jesus Christ true God? What is the purpose of man's existence? What are the means to attain this purpose? It is obviously essential that man clearly know the answers to these. Otherwise he is like the captain of a ship who is either in error or in doubt with regard to his destination.

Of what happens to men after death, Dr. Peale writes, "Where are they? What is their condition? What sort of a body have they? . . . The idea of a different dimension is probably the most tenable, or it may be more accurate to believe that they live in a different frequency cycle."

Here there is no mention of Christ's explicit teaching about Heaven or Hell—about an eternity with God as the reward of a good life and an eternity without God as a punishment of a life of evil.

What kind of thinking is it then which blurs the very words of the Gospel regarding the last things?

What kind of thinking is it that creates the things of the world—wealth, ambition, comfort—as if they were more important than eternal life? Call it what you will, but do not call it Christian thinking.

## Supreme Court Rejects Nudism As Religion

Washington, D. C.—(RNS)—A contention that nudism is a "religion" and therefore entitled to the protection of the Bill of Rights was rejected by the U. S. Supreme Court.

The court dismissed an appeal for a writ of mandamus to compel Ohio Secretary of State Ted W. Brown to issue a non-profit corporation charter to a group which wanted to advocate the practice of social nudism. Such practice is illegal in Ohio.

Miss Edith Church of Toledo and other applicants for the charter asserted that they "consider nudism a religion."

"Nudism, as a group, maintain high and strict moral standards," they said. "To its adherents the practice of social nudism offers a real and genuine philosophy of life. To many it is a religion."

The state of Ohio maintained, however, that nudism is not a religion within the commonly-accepted meaning of that term, and argued that the Ohio Supreme Court had ruled correctly when it held that denial of the corporation charter did not deprive the advocates of nudism of freedom of speech.

Relief Director  
New York — (NC) — Mgr. George M. Carroll, N. M., Catholic Relief Services National Catholic Welfare Conference director  
COURIER-JOURNAL  
Friday, November 18, 1955  
5  
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**AUTHOR**  
This article on Dr. Peale's "Positive Thinking," written by Father Ralph Thomas of the faculty of St. John's Seminary in Montross Falls, N. Y., appears in the November issue of THE LAMP, published by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement at Graymoor, Garrison, N. Y.

question-and-answer page in Look. And his television show What's Your Trouble keeps reappearing on my TV screen with troublesome regularity.

To avoid the message of the "Minister of the Millions" who occupies the pulpit of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City is not, of course, to forsake positive thought. Nor is it to espouse the principles of the satiric brochure called The Power of Negative Thinking which takes up arms against Dr. Peale's "I can do anything . . . with the motto 'I don't wanta . . . I'm not gonna'."

No, a concern about Dr. Peale's confident message goes deeper than this. It prompts the question as to how the "positive thinking" scheme for making one feel good or making one a worldly success accords with the words of Christ which warn us that "Unless a man take up his cross daily and follow me, he cannot be my disciple" or "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his immortal soul?"

Let us take a representative sampling of what Dr. Peale is

propagating under the name of Christianity.

1) God is conceived of as a limitless reservoir of energy and power. Higher his devotees of "positive thinking" are called to find relief for their pains and aches. The only prerequisite is the belief that they are receiving the cure.

Here are the Doctor's words: "Take three deep breaths — in and out slowly. Practice resting yourself in God. Practice depending on Him for His support and power. Believe He is giving it to you now and don't get out of touch with that power. Yield yourself to it — let it flow through you."

2) Christ, the Son of God, is

presented as a man — a man wonderful and wise to be sure — but no more. Nowhere in The Power of Positive Thinking is it claimed that He is God. Rather, He is presented, along with Edison, Franklin, Emerson, and others, as an example of one who was "well organized from an emotional and psychological point of view."

3) The aim of the Gospel message is to bring man earthly comfort and success. For this reason Peale advises belief in Christ: "Believe; believe

## EMPTY HANDS ARE WILLING

Father Philip writes a touching appeal from Nellocamp, India. A year and a half ago he came to this uncivilized section with poor but energetic and hopeful pioneers and founded St. Sebastian parish. They have planted rice and popcorn for immediate return. The rice harvest won't yield for another eight years. Last year the crop did the work. He must fill their willing but empty hands with materials. We directly need \$100. Whether you can give more, please send it TODAY. God and His poor will bless you.

We feel that we can never picture fully the abject poverty of most of our missionary priests in the Holy Land and surrounding countries. They live almost entirely from Mass offerings. Last year we had only enough to give each priest a few every month. Please remember them with your MASS OFFERINGS.

THREE ROOMS FOR GOD IN YOUR WILL? REMEMBER HIS NEAR EAST MISSIONS.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS MADE EASY—and more deeply significant. Arrange through us to have Mass offered by our missionaries for friend or relative. Or give to a mission chapel; sacred article in their name—like Mass Bell, \$5; Mass Book, \$25; Altar Stone, \$10; Picture, \$15; Chalice, \$40; or \$75. Our NEW CHRISTMAS GIFT CARD will tell them. We enclose with a PRESSED FLOWER FROM THE HOLY LAND.

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When you sit to eat your turkey, remember there are almost 900,000 Arab refugees from Palestine. Lord's fellow-countrymen—who are begging for a loaf of bread or a bowl of soup—LAND ROSAEX needs of olive-oils for each package you donate.

BAFIQ has just entered the seminary in Bell Jala, one mile from Bethlehem. We need \$100 a year for the essentials to train him during the next six years. The need for priests in the Holy Land is very great. Won't you help this poor lad by sending him this yearly sum in any convenient payment?

NO GIFT CAN ESCAPE GOD'S EYE.  
YOUTH CRIES OUT. We appeal this year for new members to our DOLLAR-A-MONTH CLUB for new members to our BASILIAN CLUB. The future of the Church is in its young. Won't you help us train the future Church. Join by sending your mite today and ask a friend to join also.

PLEASE, DEAR GOD  
Ardenly do SISTER ROMULA and SISTER PROTIESIA beg the you Lord to send them a benefactor. This year they began their two years' training with the Clarist Sisters near Fath, India. We need \$120 each year to keep

UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN—Our Sisters at the leper hospitals in India have pressing needs everyday as they gather their unfortunate patients. Have you a mite to send them? Our DAMIEN LEPPER FUND is another MISSION CLUB to aid this meritorious work. Members give \$1 monthly. Have you joined yet? Write us for particulars.

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