

PRIVATIZING ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE RE-EMERGENCE OF RELIGION

Gabrielle M. Wood ♦

... Cochabamba, Bolivia. In this semidesert region, water is scarce and precious. In 1999, the World Bank recommended privatization of Cochabamba's municipal water supply company... through a concession to International Water, a subsidiary of Bechtel. On October 1999, the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law was passed, ending government subsidies and allowing privatization. In a city where the minimum wage is less than [US]\$100 a month water bills reached [US]\$20 a month, nearly the cost of feeding a family of five for two weeks...The government promised to reverse the price hike but never did...The citizens' demands, which drove a stake through the heart of corporate interests, were violently rejected...Protesters used slogans like "Water Is God's Gift and Not A Merchandise" and "Water Is Life." (Shiva 102)¹

1. Introduction

While water is life for the living, true spiritual teachings mean eternal life to those seeking salvation. Spiritual teachings, which show the way to experience spiritual development and enlightenment, become a well from which the seeker can draw truth. Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."² Just as water should be available to all who thirst, the timeless spiritual teachings that illuminate religious truths should be available to all who seek. Buddha explained that: "When the *Tathagata* ["fully enlightened Buddha"] or the *Tathagata's* disciples live in the world, it is done for the good of the many, for the happiness of the

♦**Dr. Gabrielle M. Wood**, a specialist in leadership studies, holds a Ph.D. in Industrial and Organizational psychology from George Mason University, U.S. She lectures on leadership at Christopher Newport University, in Virginia, U.S.

¹Shiva Vandana, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, Cambridge: Sound End Press, 2002, 102.

²John 4:13.

many, out of compassion for the world—for the good, the welfare and the happiness of gods and men.”³

Contrary to this view, many independent spiritual leaders who are rising to positions of religious authority are actually reserving their “spiritual teachings” for the select few. In many places, these leaders have played a large role in the re-emergence of religion and its presence in public life. Their teachings influence the way that people act, think, and feel, having a tremendous impact on societies. Religion is re-emerging in a variety of ways, but there is also this unquestioned shift in which modern spiritual leaders are actually reserving access to their teachings. In this paper, we will explore this shift and consider the implications it has on devotees and on our perceptions of the *spiritual*.

To preserve the sanctity of authentic spiritual teachings, we must consider the defining characteristics of these eternal truths. It is important to examine the nature of spiritual teachings from a theological perspective. This paper explores three characteristics of spiritual teachings: a) spiritual teachings are divinely inspired; b) spiritual teachings lead us to spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation; and c) spiritual teachings are shared with humanity. In this paper, *spiritual teachings* include both religious teachings found in ancient texts and modern spiritual teachings. We will examine the tendency for some spiritual leaders to regulate the availability and use of their teachings, as well as the potential effects of privatizing enlightenment on devotees and on how we view the spiritual. Examples of modern leaders and their teachings are presented to illustrate the complexities of privatizing enlightenment. This paper concludes with a discussion on whether we should continue to call privatized teachings *spiritual*.

2. Spiritual Teachings: Divinely Inspired

When we consider traditional spiritual teachings, a common characteristic that emerges is that they were divinely inspired. The information found in the teachings, such as the Ten Commandments, came from a divine source. In the world’s major religions, this source is typically God. For example, Jesus Christ gave teachings directly from God, “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.”⁴ Jesus explained that he did the will of his Father, which was to help *anyone* who believed to have eternal

³Agamas II.146.

⁴John 3:25.

life. The Gospel of John is filled with examples showing that Jesus came on behalf of God, that his teachings were from God, that he had a responsibility to publicize the teachings, and that he would help anyone who was interested to attain salvation. Additionally, spiritual leaders have typically continued their own religious journeys, living according to the teachings they give, gaining an experiential understanding to share with humanity. The fact that spiritual teachings are *divinely* inspired means that individuals cannot create spiritual teachings on their own. A person can give great advice for living, gaining wealth and prosperity, and being happy, but a person cannot delineate the steps needed to reach salvation. This distinction is important now because so many people are stepping into the role of “spiritual leader” and advising others on spiritual matters. Have they had the experience and expertise needed to direct souls towards spiritual development, enlightenment, or salvation? Another implication of this characteristic is that spiritual teachings would be most useful when the information remains unaltered, in the words of the one who received them. When teachings are altered, some of the meaning could be lost. Distorting the teachings could weaken the authenticity, potentially causing tragic outcomes.

3. Spiritual Teachings: Development, Enlightenment, and Salvation

All major religions appear to share a timeless, underlying spiritual message. Cultural differences and the time in which the religion, or sect, emerges create differences. Many scholars have analyzed the theological similarities of the world’s religions. For this paper, let us consider the common goal of devotees to achieve *spiritual awakening*, which involves spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation.

There are two major conceptualizations of spiritual awakening. One form occurs spontaneously or through spiritual practice. Termed “sudden awakening” by Buddhists, the person experiences sublime moments similar to the religious experiences described by William James as “sudden conversions.” James cited the example of the conversion of Paul of Tarsus.⁵ Experiences often involve becoming fully in the moment, a sense of unity, sudden insights, separation from materialism, and/or

⁵James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study in Human Nature*. New York: The Modern Library, 1902, 15.

feeling connected to humanity.⁶ Many recognize the value of sudden awakenings, but acknowledge that attaining the level of awakened one, Buddha, can require lifetimes of persistence to achieve.⁷

Teachings of many religions speak about the path of spiritual awakening, which results in a permanent state with eternal and supernatural qualities. Zen Buddhists free themselves from attachments to materialism to achieve spiritual awakening. Christian Gnostics gain self-knowledge and use spiritual practices to transform into spiritual beings, and they view the events of Jesus' life as symbols to guide them in their spiritual journeys. Sufis dedicate their lives to internal and external moral action to achieve spiritual awakening. Similarly, Hindu sages and saints live according to Dharma to reach enlightenment and to become free from the wheel of Samsara.

While there are differences regarding the concept of spiritual awakening, most teachings have emphasized spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation. Spiritual development involves a shift from acting out of self-interest (e.g., pride or material attachments) towards acting in selfless ways that are aligned with spiritual values. This process typically occurs through spiritual practices, rituals, prayers, and/or other active approaches. In some mystical traditions, this process allows individuals to transform into spiritual beings. As the devotees change inside, they tend to act altruistically and out of love for others. Spiritual teachings, such as the Ten Commandments, also describe behaviors that prevent spiritual development. *Enlightenment* involves gaining a deep understanding of life, death, and things of a cosmic and spiritual nature. The pursuit of enlightenment is often addressed in spiritual teachings, and devotees can learn about these truths through spiritual practices. An example of this is the Eightfold Path. Finally, *salvation* refers to absolute freedom associated with the afterlife. Major traditions emphasize each of these, as well as spiritual awakening.

Unless the way to spiritual awakening has changed, we should expect that modern spiritual teachings will encourage and direct devotees

⁶Lange Rense, and Michael A. Thalbourne, "RESEARCH: The Rasch Scaling of Mystical Experiences: Construct Validity and Correlates of the Mystical Experience Scale (MES)." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 17.2 (2007): 121-140. *Religion and Philosophy Collection*. EBSCO. Web. Sept. 2009.

⁷Heine Steven and Dale S. Wright. *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 31.

in these pursuits. We should also expect that spiritual teachings will *accurately* instruct devotees. Some aspects of the truth may not coincide with what people want to hear. Buddhists must live a life of detachment, Hindus a life of Dharma, and Christians a life free of sin. All of these involve sacrifice. Living a spiritual life may not appeal to everyone because of the sacrifices involved. However, spiritual teachings are divinely inspired, and they are intended to help humanity to achieve spiritual development, enlightenment, and salvation. Should we not expect spiritual teachings to reflect these goals, regardless of current trends or the desires of humanity?

4. Spiritual Teachings: Shared with Humanity

The third major characteristic that spiritual teachings share is that they are given freely to everyone who is interested. Spiritual teachings traditionally appear to be given by the divine for all of humanity; they are not for the sake of one special person to attain their quest, nor are they reserved for the powerful, the wealthy, or the elite. These teachings are for each and every one of us. We can see this in the life and words of Jesus Christ.

Jesus placed no limits on who could hear his teachings. His message was not reserved for certain types of people, even though there were great divides among people.⁸ He gave the teachings to everyone, shocking the Pharisees by teaching the tax collectors and the sinners.⁹ He taught Jews and Samaritans alike.¹⁰ Further, he told his disciples to teach anyone who would receive them, and to teach freely (as they had been taught).¹¹ He explained that anyone who believed in God and “lives by the truth” could reach salvation.¹² His deep compassion for humanity was clearly illustrated in his ministries.¹³ This adherence to a universal approach is shared among world religions. For example, the teachings of the Torah were intended to be spread, “to every nation and to every tongue,” not just to Jews.¹⁴ Guiding texts of Chan Buddhism suggest that the path to spiritual awakening is for all of humanity and that it should not be reserved

⁸John 3:21.

⁹Matthew 9: 9-12.

¹⁰John 4:1-26.

¹¹Matthew 10:10.

¹²John 3:21.

¹³Matthew 9:35-36.

¹⁴Avodah Zarah 2b.

for the elite: "...When summoned by the monarch, they [monks] would not respond; when invited by the princes, they would not go."¹⁵ The only exception that seems appropriate is regulating spiritual teachings based on the spiritual level of the receiver. Regarding physical or material criteria, one could argue that spiritual teachings should be directed towards everyone; they should be available to each and every one of us, regardless of race, gender, economic status, wealth, prestige, position, authority, or place in society.

In summary, three major characteristics appear to define spiritual teachings: spiritual teachings are divinely inspired, rather than constructed by human reason; spiritual teachings guide people towards spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation; and spiritual teachings are shared with all of humanity. Next, let us consider how spiritual teachings are treated, by some spiritual leaders, during the re-emergence of religion. The focus of this discussion will be on the privatization of enlightenment.

5. Privatizing Enlightenment

For this paper, privatization will be defined as taking public resources and regulating the availability or use of these resources. In the example at the beginning of this paper, the availability and use of public water became regulated by a private company. Privatizing is becoming increasingly common. One of the major issues with privatization is that some people lose access to resources because they are unable to pay the price that private companies charge. This leads to tragedy in third-world countries where scarce natural resources, such as water, become unattainable to many. Proponents say that it allows resources to be distributed more efficiently. However, this comes with great cost and risk. Only the elite are guaranteed resources and services. Despite the tragic impacts, it is now so common that it is applied to "spiritual teachings."

Before discussing the privatization of spiritual teachings, let us consider the scope of this section. Firstly, some scholars have used the term privatization to describe the weakened influence of religion as a political and social force. However, in this paper, I am using the term to describe a tendency of some spiritual leaders to regulate the access of "spiritual teachings." Secondly, in this paper, true spiritual teachings are

¹⁵Poceski, Mario. *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 133.

viewed as a public resource for humanity. Thirdly, spiritual teachings are privatized in some ways that are beyond the control of the spiritual leader, such as when teachings are exploited by others who privatize them. Devotees may also be limited by physical or material issues that are beyond the control of the spiritual leader. In this paper, I will focus mainly on this tendency of some spiritual leaders to privatize the teachings that they received from a divine source. Finally, throughout this paper, comparisons are made between modern leaders and religious leaders of the past, such as Jesus and Buddha. This is to provide a perspective and not to imply that modern spiritual leaders are comparable to Jesus or Buddha in other ways.

If we consider how extraordinary true spiritual teachings are, it is clear that these teachings are a resource that those seeking enlightenment desperately need. However, today spiritual leaders are regulating the availability and use of teachings. “Spiritual leaders” are creating boundaries around who can benefit from their teachings. These leaders only give the information to certain people; their teachings are not available to all of humanity. While Jesus and Buddha made great personal sacrifices to share their teachings with humanity, many modern leaders and gurus are creating boundaries around theirs. They determine that certain people can have access to spiritual development and enlightenment, while others cannot. This information, which the spiritual leader or guru says will help people to experience spiritual development and enlightenment, is kept from those in need who cannot meet the criteria. These leaders claim to have these spiritual teachings and that they know how humanity can achieve lasting peace, yet they reserve the teachings for certain people. I will give an example using two modern spiritual leaders, Mark Pritchard “Belzebuub” and Eckhart Tolle, to explore this issue. The two were chosen because one could argue that they have strikingly similar teachings, but that they differ with regard to privatization.

Firstly, let us consider the striking similarities between the teachings of these two modern leaders. Belzebuub is a British author who has published many courses in Christian Gnosticism, from 2001 onwards.¹⁶ Eckhart Tolle is a German author who recently collaborated with popular talk-show host, Oprah Winfrey, to create similar courses as an independent

¹⁶Belzebuub. *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course*. 2001. Web. Nov 2004. <http://www.mysticweb.org>

spiritual teacher.¹⁷ From 2004 onwards, one could argue that Tolle's work shares many theological foundations with the teachings of Belzebuub.¹⁸ Both suggest that humanity is in a bad state (e.g., destroying our environment) because of drives, such as greed, referred to as ego(s). Both explain that the egos use our thoughts, emotions, and situations in life for strength, trapping our energy, but that this returns to the spiritual essence when we reduce the egos. Both suggest that to start separating from the influence of the egos, we must use awareness of the present moment. Further, both explain that when aware, we objectively recognize and understand the egos, and we objectively perceive life and respond intelligently to situations. Even more similarities include the notion that awareness activates the spiritual essence that allows us to feel peace and spiritual feelings. They suggest that we should always practice awareness, so that we live through this essence, not through the egos. Both say that being aware should be the focus of each day. Finally, both agree that the purpose of life is spiritual awakening.

Further examples of similarities are presented in a recent research study,¹⁹ but now let us consider a major difference: based on the definition of privatizing presented in this paper, it could be argued that Belzebuub publicizes and Tolle privatizes enlightenment. Belzebuub gives lectures freely, provides hundreds of hours of audio and video teachings on his website, and tries to make his teachings accessible to all. Tolle gives some free access to his teachings, but he tends to charge money for his CDs, talks, and books, resulting in profit.²⁰ We will consider this example of Belzebuub and Tolle to see the possible implications of privatization with respect to the three characteristics of spiritual teachings outlined above: divinely inspired; teaches people how to achieve spiritual development, enlightenment, and salvation; and shared with humanity.

5.1. Divinely Inspired

The first characteristic, which suggests that spiritual teachings are divinely inspired, does not change depending on whether the person privatizes the

¹⁷Tolle Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awaking to Your Life's Purpose*, New York: Penguin Publishing, 2005.

¹⁸Belzebuub. *The Journey to Enlightenment: A Nine Week Course*. 2002. Web. March 2005. <http://www.mysticweb.org>

¹⁹"Research" 2010.. Feb. 2010. <https://sites.google.com/a/cnu.edu/gabrielle-wood/>

²⁰"Eckhart Store" Feb. 2010. <http://www.eckhartolle.com/eckhartstore/home/>

teachings. It is difficult to determine whether true prophets or enlightened ones have or would privatize authentic spiritual teachings. It seems very unlikely considering that the person was selected by a divine source to deliver a spiritual message. Why would God choose to impart such teachings on someone who would sell them for profit or reserve the teachings for the few? While it seems unlikely, I will not consider this issue further within this paper because it is too difficult to assess. Likewise, I will not elaborate on the two exemplars with respect to this characteristic because I cannot give evidence to support it beyond my personal inclinations. The last two characteristics can be seen more directly in relation to publicized versus privatized teachings.

5.2. Spiritual Development, Enlightenment, and Salvation

The second characteristic of spiritual teachings is that they direct people towards spiritual awakening through spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation. Theoretically, spiritual teachings are divinely inspired; therefore, we should expect that the teachings are most useful when preserved and undistorted. From there, devotees can use the teachings in a way that will allow spiritual development, such as applying the teachings in their lives.

Can we trust the “spiritual teachings” once they have been privatized? When leaders decide to privatize their teachings, in addition to guiding humanity, there is another motive: to appeal to a certain type of persons, such as celebrities, politicians, or wealthy individuals. There are aspects of all religious teachings that are unlikely to appeal, and the leader may be motivated to distort the teachings to increase the appeal. For a spiritual leader who is simply concerned with teaching humanity, this is not an issue. They are responsible for giving the information to humanity, clearly and undistorted, so that we can reach our full potential. It is unlikely that they would distort the teachings in any way. Contrarily, privatizing can potentially interfere with a spiritual leader’s ability to give the teachings in their true form.

It seems that those who publicize their spiritual teachings are likely to give the teachings in a more balanced way, explaining the benefits as well as the sacrifices involved. For example, Belzebuub prepares devotees for difficulties that are unappealing: “True wisdom costs a great deal to achieve and requires intensive effort, because we have to go through the various situations of life that give rise to each particular ego in order to see

and understand them and often those can be very painful situations...”²¹ This is aligned with how the path to salvation is described in ancient Christian texts. Belzebuub also focuses on ensuring that followers are objective. For example, he explains the risks of simply believing his teachings, describes precisely how to gain direct experience of his teachings, and describes how to reduce biased perceptions.²²

During the re-emergence of religion, many independent leaders present a teaching that is easier to accept. There has been an increase of “spiritual leaders” emphasizing positive, short-term rewards and de-emphasizing the negative aspects of religious strivings. Examples include an increased emphasis on using spirituality to attain wealth, happiness, and well-being, with little discussion on the repercussions of bad actions or the efforts needed to achieve a permanent spiritual awakening. It may be that this tendency is most prevalent in privatized approaches, and it has become more recognizable during the re-emergence of religion. Compared to traditional religious texts, one could argue that Tolle’s teachings give an overly optimistic view of spiritual development and enlightenment, claiming that humanity is naturally evolving. It could be argued that he presents spiritual awakening in a way that is more closely aligned with the Buddhist notion of “sudden awakening,” as opposed to the arduous path portrayed by Belzebuub and traditional religious texts.

A major conflict that privatization presents to maintaining the integrity of spiritual teachings is that it limits the type of people who can achieve spiritual development, enlightenment, and salvation. If we are in a crucial time, spiritually, then one could argue that privatizing spiritual teachings puts souls at risk because it limits the teachings to those who meet the physical or material criteria. In a section entitled “The Urgency of Transformation,” Tolle explains that humanity has to work towards spiritual awakening now, or we will not survive. The terms “crisis” and “urgency” are used throughout the book, emphasizing the need to use the spiritual teachings quickly.²³ If this is true, then why privatize the information? If a divine source gives spiritual teachings to a person for the

²¹Belzebuub, *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course*, 2001. Week 3, 2. Web Nov 2004. <http://www.mysticweb.org>

²²Belzebuub, *The Journey to Enlightenment: A Nine Week Course*, 2002. Web. March 2005. <http://www.mysticweb.org>

²³Tolle Eckhart, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, New York: Penguin Publishing, 2005, 20.

sake of humanity, then it seems that the teachings are of most use when publicized.

5.3. Shared with Humanity

This characteristic of spiritual teachings, which is illustrated throughout time in traditional religions, requires that a spiritual leader publicizes, rather than privatizes, the resources. Considering the ministries of spiritual leaders, such as Jesus and Buddha, it appears that spiritual leaders actively strive to bring their teachings to all of humanity. During their lives, despite limitations on travel and on mass communication, both appeared to have made great sacrifices to share their teachings. When spiritual leaders privatize, then one could argue that they prevent the teachings of a divine source, the water of eternal life, from reaching the people who seek it — those thirsty for enlightenment and salvation.²⁴ The only justification that seems appropriate is when spiritual teachings are regulated based on the spiritual level of the receiver. For example, Jesus gave his disciples special teachings probably because they had the capacity to understand.²⁵

In the current example, there appear to be great similarities in the teachings, but it could be argued that one publicizes and the other privatizes. When publicizing his teachings, Belzebuub appears to reach out to as many people as possible. Examples of this include the following: breaking down barriers, such as geographic location (e.g., voluntarily doing international interviews and free public talks online) and helping people regardless of economic status (e.g., providing teachings freely and refraining from profiting). Belzebuub’s website provides hundreds of hours of free video and audio recordings of his spiritual teachings. Free articles, forums, and live weekly question/answer sessions are provided. He does not charge for any other interviews or lectures. Also, he sacrificed greatly to provide his teachings in a written form: “The heat took its toll and I had two painful kidney stones, the fatigue that I had been suffering from now produced migraine headaches on an almost daily basis...I often wrote the weekly topics in a lot of pain feeling quite ill.”²⁶ One could argue that, similar to traditional prophets and spiritual leaders, Belzebuub

²⁴John 4:13.

²⁵Matthew 13: 10-17.

²⁶Belzebuub, “A Summary of the Second Mountain,” Web Sept. 2009. <http://www.belzebuub.com/about-belzebuub/teachings/second-mountain-part-2?page=0,3>

strongly adheres to this characteristic of spiritual teachings and to his responsibility to make the teachings available to all of humanity. His website states, "...spiritual teachings are a gift from the universe and should never be for profit. To charge money would be to require that those who get spiritual knowledge are those who can afford to pay money, but true wisdom comes freely from the truly spiritual. Its cost is in being prepared and fitting enough to receive it."²⁷

Tolle offers similar online access to his teachings: subscribers get monthly access to 60-90 minute streaming video, the opportunity to ask questions in a monthly talk, 10-20 minute short videos, and other perks, such as access to his partner Kim Eng's material. This is produced in partnership with "Sounds True" for the monthly rate of US\$14.95. His "In-Depth Online Teaching Sessions," streaming audio and video sessions, are available from US\$9.95 to US\$14.95, with bundled options at a discount. Longer audio recordings are priced as high as US\$59.95.²⁸ He provides a sample of free videos online. Past events have cost people US\$145 to attend, although some scholarships may be available for some events. One could argue that Tolle's approach appears inconsistent with this characteristic of spiritual teachings.

6. Conclusion

Before concluding this discussion of whether privatized teachings can be considered spiritual, let us consider a few rationales for privatizing. Firstly, one could argue that spiritual leaders must privatize their teachings to earn a living. I cannot suggest specific ways that spiritual leaders should earn money. However, it seems that if spiritual leaders choose to earn money in a way that prevents access to their teachings based on physical or material criteria, then this puts boundaries around who can receive the teachings. This would not be aligned with the characteristics of spiritual teachings presented earlier.

Secondly, one could argue that spiritual leaders cannot publicize their teachings during the re-emergence of religion because of threats posed by technology. For example, the Internet allows spiritual leaders to make teachings widely and freely available, but it puts them at risk of

²⁷Belzebuub, "The Teachings are Free," Web Feb. 2010. <http://www.belzebuub.com/>

²⁸*Eckhart Tolle TV*, Web Sept. 2009. <http://www.eckharttolletv.com/eckharttolle.com>

exploitation. Belzebuub’s course books “Searching Within”²⁹ [Second Edition, “The Peace of the Spirit Within”³⁰] and “A Course in Astral Travel and Dreams”³¹ were both available freely online for years. However, some people copied the material, and then they posted the material on other websites as part of their programs. Some actually removed his name and replaced it with their own. Could it be that others have even gone so far as to have published his spiritual teachings, in a modified form, as privatized information? In this example, the spiritual leader was able to protect his teachings by putting them into book form.³² Rather than profiting from the book sales, he uses surplus money to produce more books and to reduce their costs. His teachings were copied and presented by other people as their own, yet he overcame this and other obstacles to publicize his spiritual teachings.

Now, let us consider what it means to be entrusted with spiritual teachings, information that people need to achieve spiritual development, enlightenment, and salvation. Considering that the leaders of so many of the world’s great religions have always emphasized the universal application of spiritual teachings, it is clear that spiritual teachings should not be reserved for a select few. Spiritual teachings are like water: they are entrusted to individuals with the responsibility to share them with humanity. Privatizing water puts a boundary between people and their physical survival. One could argue that privatizing enlightenment puts a boundary between humanity and spiritual awakening, and ultimately salvation. If an individual takes “spiritual teachings” and sells them for profit or only shares them with an elite few, this may be considered legal and ethical from a business perspective. However, in the theological world, can we continue to call it *spiritual*? These leaders say that the teachings are urgently needed, but some withhold the teachings from those who cannot meet the physical or material criteria. It seems inaccurate to call this spiritual, and one could even argue that it becomes secular.

The re-emergence of religion has had a great impact on societies, bringing people together and helping communities to address major issues.

²⁹Belzebuub, *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course*, 2001.

³⁰Belzebuub, *The Peace of the Spirit Within: A Guide to Transform Yourself*, Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2006.

³¹Belzebuub, *A Course in Astral Travel and Dreams: A Nine Week Course*. 2001.

³²Belzebuub. *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course in Gnostic Psychology*, Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2010.

People appear to be acting in very self-transcending ways and experiencing positive results from some modern religious approaches. It is through spiritual teachings that individuals often learn how to achieve these positive results. Throughout the world, people use teachings, both publicized and privatized, to guide their religious pursuits. Traditional spiritual teachings have always been valued when given undistorted, for all of humanity to pursue spiritual development, enlightenment, and salvation. Applying the term *spiritual* gives devotees the impression that the information comes from a divine source and that they can trust the information to guide them. If some privatized teachings are being distorted to appeal to certain individuals, this could have tragic effects on those who seek enlightenment. It seems vital that we take a closer look at what leads humanity during the re-emergence of religion.

If someone seeking spiritual awakening follows privatized teachings, to what extent will they be guided towards spiritual development, enlightenment, and ultimately salvation? We have to consider whether the re-emergence of religion will actually help humanity in its religious quest. To examine these issues, we can start by considering the water that we drink. Are we simply getting good advice, or will the teachings guide us towards spiritual awakening and salvation? In this urgent time when we need religion and spirituality the most, it is necessary to preserve the sanctity of spiritual teachings. Anyone who claims to hold spiritual truths is free to restrict their access in whatever ways they would like, just as every individual is free to choose which teachings to follow. However, privatizing brings costs and risks that are unaligned with the characteristics of spiritual teachings. Perhaps referring to them as privatized teachings or simply teachings is more accurate. Making these distinctions can help to protect the sanctity of the eternal message, in whatever form it takes in the re-emergence of religion.