



STATEMENT DN050

THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT – WHAT IS IT? New Age series – Part One

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This article first appeared in the Summer 1985 issue of the *Forward*, currently the *Christian Research Journal*. For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

What is the New Age movement? Evidence of a new phase in evolution? Harbinger of the Antichrist? A passing fad? A conspiracy myth created by paranoid Christians? Or is it so amorphous and enigmatic that it is impossible to adequately characterize? The question posed by this article's title has been a live one for Evangelicals over the past few years. Answers have varied widely, including, but not limited to, those given above. Discussions of the topic have frequently generated a great deal more heat than light.

This article hopes to shed some good light on the subject, and in the process provide a Christian evaluation of some New Age teachings and claims.

The New Age movement is not impossible to describe, just difficult. It is a complex sociological phenomenon not unlike the proverbial elephant discovered independently by three blind men: one came upon his leg and described him as a tree; another got hold of his trunk and likened him to a hose; the third stumbled onto his tail and insisted he was like a rope. Things that may be true about parts of the New Age movement are not necessarily true of the whole.

DEFINING THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

The New Age movement is best understood as *a network* — or, to be more exact, *a metanetwork* (network of networks). What is a network? According to New Agers Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps (who have provided a useful analysis in their book *Networking*), a network is an informal, loosely knit type of organization very different from other types of organizations: “Networks are composed of self-reliant and autonomous participants — people and organizations who simultaneously function as independent ‘wholes’ and as interdependent ‘parts’.”¹

Networks are “spontaneously created by people to address problems and offer possibilities primarily *outside* of established institutions”² There are many different *levels* of networking, so that one network can exist within a larger network, which in turn can exist within a still larger one (i.e., a metanetwork). The borderlines of networks are characteristically fuzzy, “frustrating outside observers determined to figure out where a network begins and ends.”³ Networks tend to be decentralized, often having no single leader or headquarters, and with power and responsibility widely distributed.

Bearing in mind my suggestion that the New Age movement is a network, one more characteristic of networks needs to be noted:

Like the fly whose “one” eye comprises thousands of individual eyes, networks “see” through many perspectives, although the unknowing observer may think they have only one point of view.

At times, a network seems to “see” with one eye and “speak” with one voice, testifying to consensus around an idea or a strategy. Such moments of unanimity are important, because they often reveal the essential common values and bonds that explain the unity among the diversity of network viewpoints.

At other times, a network may appear to be a babble of disconnected concerns and interests, or an arena of internecine warfare. (Anthropologist Virginia) Hine calls this trait “the ‘fission-fusion’ characteristic that confuses observers and leads the

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bureaucratically-minded to see networks as ‘lacking’ in organization.” Networks not only tend to put up with disagreement, in many ways they depend upon it. The forthright independence of the members keeps the network as a whole from being dominated by any single node. Hine writes that while it is a shared vision that keeps a network together; “it is the conflicting concepts of goals-means that prevent any one segment from taking permanent control over all the others”...
...The many perspectives of a network derive from the autonomy of its members. All have their own turf and agendas, yet they cooperate in the network because they also have some common values and visions.⁴

The New Age movement, then, is an extremely large, *loosely* structured network of organizations and individuals bound together by common values (based in mysticism and monism—the world view that “all is one”) and a common vision (a coming “new age” of peace and mass enlightenment, the “Age of Aquarius”).

New Agers may differ over such questions as when the New Age begins, whether it will be preceded by a worldwide cataclysm, how it will be politically structured, whether there will be a Christ-figure governing it, or who the true avatars (god-men) or messengers from the spirit world are (if there are any). Nonetheless, they agree that they can hasten the new order that they *all* await by cooperating to influence developments in our culture’s political, economic, social, and spiritual life.

Within the New Age metanetwork and movement are hundreds of smaller (but still sometimes very large) networks and movements encompassing a wide variety of interests and causes (all compatible with the ends of the larger network). The consciousness movement, the holistic health movement, the human potential movement, all have contributed generously to the New Age movement, as have the followers of many Eastern gurus and Western occult teachers. However, participation in one of these movements does not always indicate conscious or actual participation in the New Age movement (remember that networks have fuzzy borderlines). Nor do all Eastern/gnostic movements believe in a coming new age, or participate in the networking process (such groups, like the Hare Krishnas and Christian Science, should really not be considered a part of the New Age movement, in spite of the many beliefs they hold in common with it).

Additionally, such movements/networks as ecology, “appropriate technology” the “peace movement” and future studies overlap the New Age network to varying degrees, though they are *by no means* entirely encompassed within it.

The New Age movement is not a cult by any accepted sociological definition of the term. Although there are several cults which could be classified within it (for example, the Rajneeshes, Transcendental Meditation, and the Divine Light Mission), most are on the movement’s periphery. Some, like the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness (MISA) and the Sufi Order in the West, are more in its mainstream, but only because they are *less* exclusive, and their leadership *less* authoritarian than most cults. Cult membership is by far the exception, and not the rule, for New Agers.

New Agers tend to be eclectic: they draw what they think is the best from many sources. Long-term, exclusive devotion to a single teaching, teacher, or technique is not the norm. They move from one approach to “wholeness” to another in their spiritual journeys (*firewalking* as a means to “personal transformation” is the latest sensation!). *New Age Journal* observes:

...the many issues of the new consciousness are like peanuts: you can’t eat just one. The stockbroker, for example, who began dabbling in alternative body therapies ten years ago has quite probably gone on to the likes of meditation or the ecology movement of Zen studies by now, and no doubt he notices the aperture in his personal cosmic egg getting wider all the time.⁵

Basic Beliefs

This eclectic tendency underscores the fact that New Agers consider spirituality much more a matter of experience than belief. Any teaching or technique that facilitates experience is welcome, but there is most often no loyalty to a rigid, elaborate system of belief.

Are there *any* beliefs that are universal, or almost universal, among New Agers? Some of them would answer “no” (in fact, beliefs are often portrayed as direct impediments to enlightenment).⁶ However, certain assumptions cannot be separated from New Age thinking, or it would no longer *be* New Age thinking.

As noted earlier, *all* New Agers believe that “all is one”—everything that exists composes one essential reality. A second assumption is that this Ultimate Reality is neither dead matter nor unconscious energy. It is Being, Awareness, and Bliss (which is to say, a Hindu conception of God as an impersonal, infinite consciousness and power).

The first two assumptions imply two more: all that is, is God (which is pantheism); and man, a part of “all that is” is likewise divine. But how do New Agers answer the inescapable fact that most people don’t at all *feel* one with God?

In agreement with all pantheists, New Agers explain that man is separated from God *only* in his own consciousness. He is the victim of a *false* sense of separate identity which blinds him to his essential unity with God, and this is the cause of all his problems. How then can man be saved (or made whole, as New Agers would prefer to put it)? It becomes a matter of *spiritual technology*.

New Agers believe that any or all of a variety of techniques for *altering* the consciousness (including meditation, chanting, ecstatic dancing, and sensory deprivation) can enable the seeker to *consciously* (mystically) experience his supposed oneness with God. Thus, salvation for the New Ager is equated with *gnosis* (experiential knowledge). It is *Self-realization* or the realization that one's *true* Self is God. Such mystical experiences are viewed as doorways to "personal transformation," a lifelong growth process marked by increasing wholeness and personal power.

For the New Agers, experience and intuition are the final authorities. Such subjectivism makes sense, if one believes he's in a universe where nothing ultimately exists but one solitary Self, or subject. How can there be an objective authority? The very concept of objectivity loses ultimate validity and meaning in such a world view. Thus, objectivity is not appreciated by New Agers as it has traditionally been in the West, though they like to consider themselves objective.

In addition to the above universal beliefs, almost all New Agers adhere to the ancient Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma. By the law of karma it is understood that whatever a person does, good or bad, will return to him experientially in an exact proportion of good or bad. Since most people are unable to experience all of the "bad karma" that they have accumulated in one lifetime, they are compelled to return in few incarnations until all of their bad karma has been balanced by good karma. Thus, salvation for New Agers is clearly a matter of works.

Also central to New Age belief are a spiritualized doctrine of evolution, the conviction that personal transformation leads to planetary transformation, and the concept of the New Age itself (usually defined astrologically). We will reserve discussion of these beliefs until later in this and the following article.

It should be pointed out that underlying the New Age belief system is an acceptance of the "truths" purveyed by the humanist establishment. While remaining within the frameworks of humanism and existentialism, New Agers have simply gone on to spiritualize the universe by making consciousness its essence, rather than matter. New Age activist Mark Satin writes, "...consciousness is 'ultimately' determining. That is my perspective. It is not 'right' or 'wrong' - there is no 'ultimate' answer."⁷ Denying that there is any objective truth we need to worry about (e.g., a personal God with a definite will for mankind), New Agers see belief as something that we create to meet our cultural needs. When these "myths" are no longer serving the culture (which is how they tend to see the orthodox Judeo-Christian faiths today), they should be discarded for the common good.

Though New Agers have definite beliefs, this underlying utilitarian attitude explains their seemingly careless approach to issues of faith which, to the Christian, have ultimate consequences.

A Growing Influence

Often when I answer inquiries about what I'm researching these days, people reply, "I've never heard of the New Age movement." They may be familiar with yoga, est, and beliefs such as reincarnation and astrology, but many people in the mainstream of American culture are unaware of this movement as a whole.

Popular New Age teacher David Spangler, in the Foreword to the book *New Times Network*, comments:

Our newspapers, news magazines and television programs...suffer from a kind of evolutionary myopia, unable to see a larger context of growth and change in the world around them. If one looks beyond the range of the media, though, and examines some of the activities represented in this book, a different perspective emerges.⁸

This "different perspective" pertains to what Lipnack and Stamps call "Another America": a growing subculture with an alternative world view and values, actively working to change society along the lines of their own vision.

The Evangelical church has swelled its ranks, thanks to a revived religious instinct, evident in American life over the past 15 years. But many modern seekers for a variety of reasons (including poor examples of Christianity) prefer more unconventional forms of spiritual expression.

A Gallup survey released a few years ago projected that 10 percent of Americans have participated in one of several New Age spiritual movements (including Transcendental Meditation, yoga, Oriental religions, and other forms of mysticism).⁹ Drawing upon this ground swell, the New Age movement has become a significant American spiritual and social force, existing alongside of the secular and religious establishments, competing with them for cultural dominance.

The New Age movement is not a passing fad. It is decidedly a minority within our society, but a mobilizing, active minority. Its fortunes will ebb and flow with the political, economic, and spiritual climate (the recent economic recovery has been a setback to the movement). It currently has very little political power,¹⁰ but an ever-expanding social influence. It views its ideas and programs as the wave of the future (not without *some* good cause), and considers that it need only achieve a “critical mass” (not a majority) of public support to overturn the cultural strongholds of secular humanism and traditional religion.

As we proceed in this examination of the New Age movement, we will have frequent occasion to refer to its spokespeople (see sidebar). It should be remembered that since the New Age movement is a loosely knit network, and not a tightly run organization, participants are free to dismiss statements made by other New Agers as not representing their own views. Scenarios often differ at points, though the world view is the same. I have generally sought to select quotes that represent the views of the entire movement, but quoting a New Age leader is not the same as quoting a spokesperson for a denomination, sect, or cult.

UNDERSTANDING NEW AGERS

Misunderstanding often inhibits fruitful dialogue with New Agers. They have been the victims of some rather unfortunate stereotyping, both by secularists *and* Christians. Secularists have often seen them as little more than flighty visionaries, or as socially indifferent narcissists. Some Christians have viewed them as demonized Luciferians, consciously conspiring to usher in the Antichrist, and have thus regarded them with mixed fear and loathing. Though there may be a limited basis in fact for some of these views, as general descriptions they are grossly misleading.

New Agers are generally sincere. Many are also intelligent — if one grants their basic world view premises, their beliefs are not as irrational and inconsistent as some think. They tend to be candid; even about their “conspiracy.” (Marilyn Ferguson’s *The Aquarian Conspiracy* — see sidebar — is a forthright declaration of the movement’s intentions and activities. If in any way it is misleading, it is due to excessive optimism, not sinister subterfuge.) And by and large New Agers are genuinely humanitarian, sometimes putting Christians to shame by their willingness to serve humanity.

It is not that there is nothing sinister or dangerous about the New Age movement, but we must resist the temptation to try to locate the evil in simplistic, black-or-white categories, for in so doing we will fail to see New Agers for who they really are. This will only reinforce their *own* misconceptions about *us*, *and* our gospel.

Let us proceed, then, to seek a better understanding of New Agers, considering both those characteristics that relate them to other movements, and those characteristics that set them apart and make them unique.

Life and World Affirming

In some respects, New Age religion can rightly be classified as a Western expression of classic monistic Hinduism (called *Vedanta*).¹¹ The most basic beliefs (about God, the world, man, and salvation) are the same, as are the mystical experiences that are at the heart of both. Much of the New Age spiritual technology that produces these experiences has come straight from India, brought here and taught since the 1960s by Hindu swamis and gurus. Their followers make up a sizable — though by no means dominant — contingent of the movement itself.

In spite of these commonalities, the New Age movement (including its Oriental components) is very different from traditional Eastern mysticism. The key to this difference lies in the fact that New Agers are life and world affirming.

In traditional Hinduism the earthly is set in direct conflict with the spiritual, so that those who are serious about seeking God and salvation are expected to renounce the world of temporal pleasures and responsibilities. The world is *maya* (illusion), and is considered a formidable obstacle to eternal bliss. In the enlightened state, all is seen as God. Events in the world (being illusory) have no ultimate importance. Historic Hinduism is therefore world denying.

In keeping with their Western heritage, New Agers have rejected this aspect of Eastern mysticism. They affirm the value of temporal realities: people, nature, culture, education, politics, even science and technology. In fact, contemporary New Age thought represents an effort to graft the fruits of higher learning onto the various branches of mystical tradition.

Most New Agers are not romantically seeking to turn back the clock to a simpler time. They embrace the future, with all of its increasing complexity and automation, as long as things are developed along the lines of global peace, unification, and ecological balance. They stress a balanced exploration of both “inner space” (through meditation) and “outer space” (i.e., the world external to the self).

One reason New Agers have rejected the traditional Hindu view of the world is that they have a social conscience. They desire to change the world, not drop out of it. Another reason is that they desire *personal* (earthly) as well as *spiritual* fulfillment.

The question might be posed, “But isn’t world denial a natural consequence of a monistic world view?” Historically, there seems to be a strong tendency in this direction, but New Agers are struggling to work out a metaphysical basis for their positive view of the world — a way to make social action and personal fulfillment compatible with mysticism.

New Agers are now advocating a “trans-material” world view, which is (they claim) neither non-materialist (as with Hinduism), nor materialist (as with secular humanism). It agrees with the Hindus that on a certain level of consciousness (the “spiritual state”), all is seen as one, and there are no distinctions between, for example, subject and object, or good and evil. It would also agree with the materialist that on a certain level his perspective is valid. But New Agers argue for a third level, which incorporates both. Mark Satin comments, “In this state, objects, events, and self are neither separate, as in the material state, nor identical, as in the spiritual. Objects, events, and self are seen as separate *and* as flowing into a larger unity. As David Spangler puts it, difference is seen ‘as really an enriching manifestation of this unity rather than a fragmentation of it.’”¹² In this perspective, the diversified created order can be viewed positively, rather than in the negative light in which Hinduism has long perceived it. The world, therefore, has value and purpose.

In this third state of consciousness, called the “religious state,” the barrier that “maya” has long presented to ethics and social action (as in India) is seemingly “transcended”:

The religious state of consciousness is as valid as the others and as necessary to us, for without it we could have no morals, no guidelines for living. In the material state, morality is meaningless. An action works or it doesn’t work, and that’s that. In the spiritual state, morality is impossible; if you wish for something for your self, even guidelines of principles, you’ve already separated your self out from the One (and besides, everything is as it should be). But in the religious state, a moral principle is inherent in the universe, since *whatever is done to one part affects the whole*. As [Lawrence] LeShan puts it, “if one part moves another toward greater harmony with the whole, all of the whole — including the part that took the action — benefits”; and the reverse is also true. Therefore, “anything that moves a part toward its fullest development and fullest integration with the whole is good,” anything that does the reverse is evil.”¹³

But the question is, can such a convenient, arbitrary designation of “states” really sustain ethics?¹⁴

Hippies Come of Age?

The New Age movement bears a loose relationship, not only with Hinduism and the guru movements that have come from India, but also with the Western counterculture of the 1960s. It’s true that many of the old hippies are not a part of today’s New Age movement (a healthy minority in fact, are Christians), and most 1980s New Agers were probably never a part of the sixties counterculture. Nevertheless, the 1960s counterculture is a *major* historical tributary among the several that have converged to become today’s rushing river of New Age activity.

Theodore Roszak, who gave us *The Making of a Counter Culture* in 1969, observes, “People who grew up in the sixties have become part of the adult middle-class world. . .doing all the things people do — raising families, paying bills.”¹⁵ But because of their broad range of education and spiritual experience, Roszak points out, their values are different.

Though the hippie movement was pronounced dead sometime in the early 1970s, much of its spirit continues, having evolved into new cultural forms. Many New Agers carry on such sixties distinctives as emphases upon community, and a lifestyle of “simple living and high thinking” an exaltation of nature, rejection of materialism and many traditional values, and fascination with the occult. No New Ager would dispute the old hippie conviction that the answer to humanity’s problems lies in the cultivation of “higher levels of consciousness.”

Although the New Age movement has historical continuity with the hippie movement, in many ways they differ. 1) The New Age movement is not primarily a youth movement, but spans all ages. 2) New Agers are usually not distinguishable from the rest of society by outward appearance. 3) Hard rock music is not a rallying point. Instead, they are developing their own “New Age” music style, described in a recent *Newsweek* as

. . . a loosely defined school that encompasses. . . lyrical jazz folk. . . airy harp fantasies. . . spacey synthesizer noodlings. . . What ties these musicians together is a vaguely mystical world view and a striving toward a relaxing musical mood.¹⁶

4) The New Age movement is not anti-establishment; at least not in the sense of the 1960s. 5) Whereas the sixties counter culture tended to be either radically left (socialistic) or anarchistic in political philosophy, New Agers have developed an entirely new approach, termed “radical center” (to be described later in this series). 6) New Agers have not continued the hippies’ emphasis on free sex, though their morals could hardly be called “traditional” 7) While psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs were the doorway to the spiritual realm for most hippies, the mysticism of the New Age movement is largely drug-free.

We see then that many New Agers could be described as “hippies come of age,” but it would be a great oversimplification to suggest that the New Age movement is little more than a new name for the hippie movement. It represents a much broader cultural trend.

Health and Growth Oriented

The 1970s was a decade characterized by introspection — a search for what psychologist Abraham Maslow called “self actualization.” Thousands of young people, burnt out on the drugs and militant politics of the sixties, sought answers in cults, or in a variety of Eastern and occult disciplines. But the same longings for qualitative change were being felt by the older and more established sectors of society. People of all ages desired to achieve meaning and direction in life, greater success and fulfillment, and increased physical and psychological well-being. These interests gave rise in the 1970s to the human potential and holistic health movements, which remain significant to the present.

Though they are not explicitly religious, both movements have built numerous bridges to the worlds of mysticism and the occult. So many ideas, practices, and techniques — as well as people — have crossed these bridges (both ways), that the various movements inevitably cohered, and assumed a common identity, which is the New Age movement of today. The overall body of New Age thought has been shaped by, and reflects, all of these influences.

New Agers as a rule, then, are very health and growth oriented. Much of the movement’s activities centers around these themes.

It needs to be noted that there is nothing wrong, and everything right, with desires to grow and be whole. The quests for spiritual reality, authentic identity satisfying relationships, and greater health are all, in and of themselves, desirable cultural trends. When carried out along biblical lines they should be applauded. For the Christian, the problem with the New Age approach to personal transformation is the metaphysical and spiritual context in which the concept is understood and pursued.

In the Bible, spiritual growth is equated with increasing dependence upon Christ, and conformity to His will (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:4-5; James 4:13-16; Eph. 4:15). In contrast, New Agers offer definitions like the following: “The personal and spiritual growth of a person can be described as the transformation from a dependent human being to one who knows and feels that he/she is in charge of his/her life and acts upon it.”¹⁷ These radically different conceptions of growth are perfectly consistent with the radically different universes which Christians and New Agers believe they inhabit.

Since for the Christian the distinction between Creator and creation is absolute and permanent, the limited creature must always depend on, and obey, the all-sufficient, sovereign Creator. Though personal growth may involve increasing independence on a *human* level, our relationship to *God* operates differently.

For the New Ager, though, the distinction between Creator and creation is illusory, and so that which *is* all-sufficient and sovereign must be the self! In such a case, growth or transformation would logically involve recognizing this fact and acting on it, in ever-increasing self-sufficiency and control over one’s own life.

When New Ager’s talk about “taking responsibility” and “being accountable” Christians can be disarmed, since these terms are part of their own vocabulary. Actually, the word “responsibility” can be used in very different contexts.

To the Christian, man is responsible and accountable to external authorities; beginning with God, and including those human authorities that He has instituted (e.g., Rom. 13:1-2). The New Ager, on the other hand, defines “taking responsibility” and “being accountable” ultimately in terms of the *self*. We have the power to create our own reality, but it will be created by external forces if we don’t take responsibility for whatever happens to us. This is why human potential seminar graduates have been known to blame such adversities as cancer and rape *on the people who suffer from them*.

New Age belief in unlimited human potential — our power to “take responsibility” and shape our own future — is increasingly being applied not just to the individual, but to society as a whole. New Ager and psychologist Barry McWaters writes of “the emerging potential of human beings to take responsibility individually and collectively, for a positive future.”¹⁸

Taking Responsibility for the Planet

New Agers are (understandably) very concerned about the many threats to global survival (such as the nuclear arms race). They don't believe they have to watch helplessly as the fate of all humanity is shaped by the vested interests of shortsighted political and economic powers. Just as they've embarked upon *personal transformation* by taking responsibility for their own lives, they believe that a critical mass of transformed individuals can take responsibility for society as a whole and bring about *planetary transformation*. Their highly optimistic view of human nature encourages them to believe that not only can the global crisis be survived, it can be turned into an evolutionary opportunity to realize our *racial* potential in a relative utopia.

New Agers such as David Spangler recognize that this longing for a “new age” is not of itself new:

The idea of the new age is rooted in one of the oldest human images, that of the holy (or holistic) human civilization. This image... is one of a human culture in full harmony and attunement within itself, with nature, and with God: a culture in which the divine perspective of love and wholeness can find full expression.

The desire for such a civilization has empowered human striving and efforts throughout our history, particularly here in the West. It has been the impetus behind numerous millennial movements and eschatological expectations. It has been the imagination behind the idea of utopia.¹⁹

As “millennial” as the New Age movement may be from a sociological standpoint (and as indebted to Christianity as it may be for this emphasis), it does not believe in the biblical millennium (Rev. 20:1-6). Rather than base their hopes on biblical prophecy, New Agers appeal to astrology.

Belief that we are entering a more enlightened astrological age has been popular among occultists for over a century. The Introduction to *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, a turn-of-the-century spiritistic “revelation,” offers this classic definition:

The Aquarian Age is pre-eminently a spiritual age, and the spiritual side of the great lessons that Jesus gave to the world may now be comprehended by multitudes of people, for the many are now coming into an advanced stage of spiritual consciousness.²⁰

For some New Agers the “Age of Aquarius” is little more than a convenient symbol for the anticipated new order, but for a majority, it is a deeply held religious belief.

NEW AGE RELIGION: ANYTHING BUT CHRISTIAN!

Belief in an astrologically rather than a biblically defined new age is indicative of the fact that New Age religion is thoroughly occultic, and totally unchristian. Discernment of this truth is sometimes woefully lacking, even in traditionally Christian circles.²¹

Intellectually, if the basic New Age beliefs outlined earlier are adhered to, the central components of the Christian faith cannot remain intact. If all is One (God), there can be no sin and death. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sins becomes meaningless — even illusory.

It cannot even be said that Christ took our “bad karma” upon Himself. Karma is seen as an impersonal law *in* the universe, not the personal judge *of* the universe. It therefore is exacting, making no merciful provision for the sinner's atonement.²²

The New Ager will agree that Jesus Christ is God — his world view will allow that. But his world view will also compel him to say that Jesus is *no more* God than anyone else. The difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity must therefore be that He more fully *realized* and *demonstrated* the divine (Christ) potential we all have. His value to us becomes primarily one of example. New Agers say that Jesus wanted us to become His equals, not to worship Him.²³

By holding that “Christ” refers to a divine principle within *all* men, and that Jesus simply attained consciousness of it (“Christ consciousness”) as we all can, New Agers seemingly resolve the dilemma that the obvious uniqueness of Jesus poses for a pantheistic world view. In the process, however, they brand themselves as “anti-christ,” for it was exactly *this* error that the apostle John was responding to when he used that term in 1 John 2:18-23.²⁴

Though some New Age groups identify themselves as Christian, and most New Agers think highly of Jesus, their endorsements of Him need to be evaluated in the light of 2 Cor. 11:3-4 and 13-15. It is there we learn that there can be a *counterfeit* Jesus, preached by counterfeit apostles, who serve a counterfeit “angel of light” (Satan).

The New Age Jesus became “the Christ” only after purifying himself of “bad karma” through many incarnations, and even now (as many believe) he is only one of several “masters” who serve humanity from a higher (but not the highest) plane.

As exalted as this Jesus may be in the *New Ager’s* universe, he is a ghastly substitute for the Jesus of the Bible, the creator and sustainer of the universe (Col. 1:16-17). Reverence for the New Age “Jesus” will not impress the historical, biblical Jesus, who is “ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Pet. 4:5).

A Return to Paganism

While some New Agers profess affinity with Christianity (at least their “esoteric” version of it), others are more open about the essentially *pagan* nature of New Age spirituality. In fact, there is a growing attraction in New Age circles to an “earth mother” deity, as opposed to a heavenly Father. Mark Satin comments on this trend:

Significantly, among those of us at self-development stages six and seven, religious worship has already begun to rely less on the tradition of the sky god and more on the tradition of the earth goddess. As sociologist Robert Bellah sees it, “The sky religions emphasize the paternal, hierarchical, legalistic and ascetic, whereas the earth tradition emphasizes the maternal, communal, expressive and joyful aspects of existence.”²⁵

Satin even insists that “We have more to learn from North American Indian spirituality than we do from Christianity.”²⁶

How could Westerners with a nearly 1,700-year Christian heritage drift so far from their biblical moorings? An insight can be gained from yet another affirmation by Satin: “A spiritual path is valid *for us* if it is appropriate to *our needs* as *we ourselves* define them”²⁷ (emphasis in original). What is revealing about this evaluation is that it is made without reference to the judgments or wishes of any power external to the self.

Thanks to the increased influence of secular ideas in our culture, for “baby boomers” like Satin, the sovereign God of the Bible has been dethroned from the universe. In His absence, spiritual needs must be satisfied in seemingly novel ways. And though the autonomous seeker seems free to choose from a multitude of possibilities, the options open to the human condition turn out to be more limited. Ultimately, the forms of religion experimented with are little different than those employed by our prechristian forefathers.

In a tragic sense, the biblical proverb (2 Pet. 2:22) is exemplified, “The dog [a word Jesus once used for the Gentiles — Matt. 15:26] returns to his own vomit” (i.e., the idolatry of his distant past). And modern man is doing so on a bridge built by his own intellect! (This fact is evident in the simultaneously sophisticated, imaginative, and yet tortured philosophizing that New Agers employ to justify this revival of the “earth tradition.”) The implications that this rising interest in paganism holds for Western civilization are disconcerting, to say the least.

Occultism: The Heart of New Age Religion

A study of religion in world history demonstrates the near universality of psychic phenomena and the mystical experience, as well as such practices as divination, magic, and spiritism. Only the biblical tradition really stands apart (e.g., Deut. 18:9-14), offering a different kind of spirituality the sovereign and gracious workings of the Holy Spirit among the covenant people of the true God.

Thanks to the profound historical influence of biblical faith in the West, pagan spirituality was forced to the cultural periphery, and given the stigmatizing rubric, “the occult” Now, in the form of the New Age movement, paganism is attempting to regain *all* of its lost ground. By New Age design, Western culture is being permeated with a variety of techniques for altering the consciousness and tapping “universal energy” (e.g., yoga, “creative visualization,” and “therapeutic touch” for healing). Because of the scientific or pseudo-scientific language that is offered to explain these techniques, their occult connections often go unrecognized. In fact, the New Age’s multiple, doorways to spiritual power and experience *all* open up to the *same* world that has been populated for millennia by witches, shamans, and mediums.

What is the New Age movement? This article has attempted to answer that question from a number of angles, pointing to a variety of temporal factors, and emphasizing the sincerity and humanitarianism of many of its participants. But from a biblical

perspective (that is to say, from the perspective closest to eternity that we are capable of), the New Age movement is *most* significantly a sophisticated, contemporary representation of the same old spiritual kingdom that has always stood in stark opposition to the kingdom of Jesus Christ (e.g., Acts 13:8-12).²⁹

New Agers desperately need this biblical perspective, lest they devote their lives to saving the world, only to find they were serving the author of its destruction (John 8:44; 10:10). Introduced to the *biblical* Jesus, they will find a resource for personal transformation that they have never dreamed of (2 Cor. 2:18), and a vision for human service grounded in the unshakeable kingdom of God (Heb. 12:28). In *His* service, their idealistic energy will not be wasted (1 Cor. 11:34).

NOTES

- 1 Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, *Networking* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1982), p. 7.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 226–227.
- 5 Lillie Wilson, “The Planetary Initiative: A Plot to Save the World,” *New Age*, Jan. 1982, p. 43.
- 6 It is true that mystical experience can *precede* and *stimulate* belief; a fact which gives New Agers a tactical evangelistic advantage over Christians (we will see how they exploit this in an upcoming article).
- 7 Mar Satin, *New Age Politics* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1978), p. 328.
- 8 David Spangler, “Old Voyage, New Voyagers: The Maturing of Planetary Culture” (Foreword), in *The New Times Network*, comp. Robert Adams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. x.
- 9 Reported in “New Age People: We Are a Political Force,” *The New Age Harmonist*, Vol. 1, No.1, p. 2.
- 10 In areas where it is strongest, like the West Coast, the Northeast, and Colorado, it has made its political presence felt, however. For example, former California Governor Jerry Brown is a true New Age politician.
- 11 Several other Eastern religions have contributed to the New Age movement, such as Zen, Tantric (Tibetan) Buddhism, and Taoism. But they all share the same monistic world view, and all but Taoism are indebted to Hinduism for it.
- 12 Mark Satin, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 14 As helpful as this new basis for ethics may seem to New Agers, it is doubtful that it could survive the test of time. There is a much stronger inclination in human nature toward evil than even the most realistic New Ager is willing to recognize, and ethical frameworks that *we* build, *we* can take apart. Furthermore, New Agers must realize in the back of their minds that, in spite of whatever good may be said for it, the world perceived in the “religious” state is still relative, while the world perceived in the “spiritual” what’s to stop a New Ager from reverting back to the “beyond good and evil” mind-set of classical Hinduism and occultism? He can always resort to the position New Age writer Paul Williams (not the song-writer) does here:
Who is God trying to kid? God is All. There is nothing that is not God. Lucifer is God. There is no distance. Dear God, The jig is up. Stop chasing your tail. Embrace your Self. Lucifer returns to Heaven! Let there be dancing in the streets. (*Das Energi* [New York: Warner Books, 1973], pp. 1–2).
- 15 Quoted in Robert Tucker, “Back to Basics: The New Age Conspiracy,” *New Age Source*, Feb. 1983, p. 10. The article Originally appeared in *PSA* magazine.
- 16 Bill Barol with Mark D. Uehling and George Raine, “Muzak for a New Age,” *Newsweek*, May 13, 1985, p. 68.
- 17 Sabine Kurjo, “Growth and Human Potential—Introduction,” *The New Times Network*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- 18 Barry McWaters, *Conscious Evolution* (Los Angeles: New Age Press, 1982), p. xiv.
- 19 Spangler, *op. cit.*, p. x.
- 20 Levi, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (Santa Monica, CA: DeVorss & Co., 1907), p. 11.
- 21 Several examples could be given of this, but space permits only one. In the state of Washington the Chinook Learning Community, a heavily New Age group similar to, and in close fellowship with, Scotland’s Findhorn community (see sidebar), receives an annual \$3,000 grant from the North Puget Sound Presbytery (of the United Presbyterian Church).
- 22 The difference between universal, unending law (like gravity) and a sovereign, transcendent God is accentuated in biblical passages like Ezek. 18: 21–22 and Ps. 32:1–2.
- 23 New Age thinker Ken Wilber suggests that the Christian clergy deviously changed Christianity from a mystical religion into a personality cult:
A religion that is merely at the mythic level—such as fundamentalist Protestantism or exoteric (nonmystical) Catholicism—then a living mystic is a real problem for you, because the mystic claims that everybody can become one with God, and that means bypassing the middleman: the priest and his collection plates.... So the exoteric Christians did a clever thing: they allowed that Christ was one with God, but nobody else! Christ got “kicked upstairs,” and from that time on, anybody who claimed to be one with God was pronounced heretical. (Rick Ingrasci, M.D., “Up From Eden: A New Age Interview with Ken Wilber,” *New Age*, April, 1982, p. 38).

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- But, Christianity has never been anything *other* than a faith focused in the person of Jesus Christ as the unique God-man (2 Cor. 4:5; 11:2–3), and the highest spiritual attainment has never been mystical identification with God, but *fellowship* with the Son of God, and through Him, with the Father (1 John 1:1–3; John 17:3; Phil. 3:8). *This* does not need any “middle-men” (1 Tim. 2:5), as Protestantism has always maintained.
- 24 Scholars agree that it was an early Gnostic attempt to separate the man Jesus from the divine Christ that provoked the apostle’s indictment. See, for example, Archibald Thomas Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol VI (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), p. 217, and Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 376–377. In its historical context, Christ” (Messiah) is *exclusively* the title of the prophesied, human king of Israel (e.g., Dan. 9:25–26).
- 25 Satin, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 292–293.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 28 While occultism is not always New Age, New Age spirituality is always occultic. The defining features of occultism (mentioned above as characteristic features of paganism) appear in all quarters of the movement.
- 29 This fact is wearisomely demonstrated by the way the spiritual ‘entitles’ that through mediums supply much of the movement’s teaching. They unfailingly make a point of attacking the unique deity of Christ, the atoning power of His death, etc.