



STATEMENT DN-078-1

## **EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM**

### **Discussing the Bible with New Agers (Part One)**

**by Elliot Miller**

Any conscientious effort to present the gospel to a New Ager eventually leads to a discussion of the Bible. Although such a debate is engaged on Christian turf, it is often the New Ager, not the Christian, who afterwards feels satisfied with the discussion. For example:

Christian: Do you believe in Jesus?

New Ager: Yes, I believe in Jesus — and in Buddha, and Ramakrishna, and my own guru, to o.

Christian: But Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me."

New Ager: That's right! *I Am* is the truth and the only way.

Christian: What?

New Ager: The *I Am Presence* or spark of divinity in each one of us!

Christian: Wait a minute. Jesus was speaking about *Himself*...

New Ager: Yes, and only when *each one of us* can say with Jesus, *I Am*, will we realize God as Jesus did.

Christian: But 1 Timothy 2:5 says *the man Christ Jesus* is the only mediator between God and men.

New Ager: Oh, that means the only mediator is our Christ Consciousness or Higher Self.

Christian: You're taking the Bible out of context.

New Ager: The problem with you fundamentalists is you hang on its every word. We're in a New Age and much of the Bible is obsolete! Yet there are also timeless truths within it, and only when you accept the Universal Wisdom in *all* religions will you recognize those truths.

Christian: Second Timothy 3:16 says *all* of Scripture is God's Word and profitable, so you can't prove what you're saying from the Bible.

New Ager: You quote the Bible to prove the Bible and then tell *me* I lack proof? Actually, my guru does prove her teachings from the Bible, because she can unlock its esoteric meaning. But you fundamentalists are so obsessed with literal meaning you don't understand your own book. [End of discussion.]

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In such a conversation the New Ager's faith in mysticism and his guru have hardly been shaken. The Christian, on the other hand, has hardly become encouraged about further witnessing to New Agers. Their words seem to miss each other as they speak from very different presuppositions. How can the Christian scale this barrier to effective evangelism? Let me suggest a basic approach.

Underlying the Christian-New Age debate is the question of how much respect one should show the Bible. For Christians the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. All of its teachings are true and in agreement. Each passage has one objective interpretation that must be sought.

To find the Bible's true meaning, careful consideration must be given to context — in the immediate passage, Scripture as a whole, and the surrounding historical situation. In this way the Bible can speak for itself.

New Agers, on the other hand, not only disregard the Bible's claim to be uniquely inspired by God — they don't even show it the respect any piece of literature deserves: to be understood objectively, on its own terms. This is because they approach it with biases derived from the authorities they *do* respect: intuition and experience.

Because they have drunk from the well of mystical and psychic experience, and because they have become immersed in the occult teachings drawn from that well, New Agers usually accept only those ideas that seem to confirm their own intuitions. For example, if a teaching denies the divine oneness of all things and the underlying harmony of the world's religions, they reject it. However, since Christianity is one of those supposedly harmonious religions, many New Agers cannot accept that its Scriptures actually deny that harmony and oneness — it must be that the "fundamentalists" are misinterpreting them.

New Agers consequently have great difficulty allowing the Bible to speak for itself. Looking for its hidden or mystical meaning, they completely miss its obvious historical meaning — that is to say, its true meaning. For biblical revelation has always been primarily exoteric (plain and public) and not esoteric (cryptic and exclusive) (Isa. 45:19; 48:16; Mark 4:22; John 18:20; Acts 26:26). The God of the Bible made Himself known *in history* through prophetic words and miraculous deeds. Biblical salvation is therefore *objective*: it is first presented to the mind from outside sources as received through the five senses.

When New Agers subjectively remold Scripture in the image of esotericism they make a mistake a seeker of truth should never make. They presuppose that their own understanding of Ultimate Reality is the only possible one without seriously looking into opposing claims to truth.

We Christians should point out to such New Agers that they, too, are guilty of the "sin" of exclusivism. But while we exclude other views by forthrightly denying them, they do so by dishonestly affirming (i.e., redefining) them.

We are not asking them to blindly accept our interpretation of the Bible, but to seek an objective understanding of its teachings. If they find that it does present a view of reality in conflict with their own, we further ask them as truth-seekers to seriously consider the evidence in support of its claims before rejecting them.

Once New Agers agree to approach the Bible objectively, we have grounds for calling them to honesty when they take the Bible out of context. And once they begin to consider the claims of the Bible in context, the power of the gospel will have an opportunity to penetrate their minds and hearts.

**Next:** Christian responses to specific New Age reinterpretations of Scripture.