

THE AGE-OLD NEW AGE MOVEMENT
by Harold Berry

Many people have never heard of the New Age Movement. Its philosophy, however, has been around for a long time, and specific groups are now aligning with it. In his 1978 book, *New Age Politics*, Mark Satin cited resources of "250 New Age Books/20 Interesting Books by Some Early American Advocates of 'New Age Politics'/50 New Age Periodicals/100 New Age Groups." In the years since, the publications and groups seem to have exploded on the scene. Various names are associated with the movement, such as Alice Bailey, Benjamin Creme, David Spangler, Levi Dowling, George Trevelyan, Fritjof Capra, Abraham Maslow, Marilyn Ferguson, Shirley MacLaine and George Lucas.

Various symbols are used by the New Agers. In *Smugglers From the East*, Don Morris -- co-pastor of First Federated Church in Des Moines, Iowa -- recites some of the most frequently used signs: "Rainbow, pyramid, triangle, eye in triangle, unicorn, yin-yang (two black and white comma shapes nestled together in a circle), goat head on pentagram, and even 666 worked into art."

Morris is quick to caution -- as are most observers -- that a person must not make the mistake, however, of assuming that the appearance of one of these symbols necessarily means that the person associated with it is part of the New Age Movement.

The New Age mind-set has touched almost every area of life: education, culture, history, religion, politics, psychology, science and health.

The Movement has no central headquarters; therefore, no leadership or membership lists are available. So we have no clear statistics that tell us how many people are followers. Some have sought to determine the number of adherents by other means, such as by finding out how many people hold to one or more of the major beliefs of the New Age.

Marilyn Ferguson, author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, cites "a Gallup poll released in February, 1978, [which] reported that ten million Americans were engaged in some aspect of Eastern religion." New Age has much in common with Eastern religions, so the number of followers of one is likely an accurate measure of the number of followers of the other. But from all the evidence, that number has taken a quantum leap in the years since that poll.

Robert J. L. Burrows, editor of publications for Spiritual Counterfeits Project (Berkley, Calif.), says, "The Christian film *Gods of the New Age*, arrived at a figure of 60 million [aligned with the New Age Movement] by using a similar poll that suggested 23 percent of Americans believe in reincarnation."

Television networks in America seek to be as up-to-date as possible on the interest of their viewers. They know about the population's fascination with New Age views. Shirley MacLaine, actress, author and promoter of New Age beliefs, wrote concerning the interest in making a film of her book, *Out on a Limb*: "They (ABC-TV) spoke of metaphysical searching being popular now and extraterrestrials and UFOs as something

the public was genuinely interested in." The network was correct in its assessment, and the miniseries *Out on a Limb* (aired Jan. 1987) greatly aided in further popularizing the beliefs of the New Age.

But what really laid the groundwork for this Movement -- a movement that emphasizes the mental and spiritual dimensions of mankind and a movement whose beliefs are contrary to biblical Christianity?

BACKGROUND

Although the words "New Age" could cause one to assume that these beliefs are new, little is new in the New Age Movement. The words "New Age" are derived from the idea that the world is about to enter a utopian age of Aquarius. Astrology -- the belief that the heavenly bodies affect the mundane matters of humanity -- gets a lot of attention from the New Agers. It is from astrology that the "age of Aquarius" is derived.

So the name "Aquarius" has become closely associated with the New Age Movement. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Marilyn Ferguson tells the story of the New Age Movement. She explains her choice of words in the title. At first she thought "conspiracy" was too strong a word. But then she said she realized that "conspire, in its literal sense, means 'to breathe together.' It is an intimate joining. To make clear the benevolent nature of this joining, I chose the word Aquarian. Although I am unacquainted with astrological lore, I was drawn to the symbolic power of the pervasive dream in our popular culture: that after a dark, violent age, the Piscean, we are entering a millennium of love and light -- in the words of the popular song, 'The Age of Aquarius,' the time of 'mind's true liberation.'"

The New Age Movement seems to be a reaction to the scientific age. During a time when everything has become so objective and particularized, the shift now is to emphasize the subjective and the whole. This shift has focused attention on the "inner" feelings and on wholistic (or holistic) health, as well as on global matters rather than nationalistic ones.

In the past, the public educational system of the United States -- from kindergarten through graduate level -- has been based on an atheistic presupposition. That is, everything must be explainable apart from a supernatural God. Even though some fine Christian teachers have counterbalanced this presupposition somewhat, nevertheless, the system itself has made no room for God.

This educational system has produced scientists who have taken the same worldview. Again, although some scientists have been outstanding Christians, the norm has been to explain everything in the experimental lab totally apart from God.

A country can rule God out of the classroom and the science lab, but it cannot rule Him out of the hearts of people. "[God] has ... set eternity in their heart," the Bible declares (Eccles. 3:11, NASB). Consequently, there is a spiritual vacuum within the heart of man that only God can fill. When people reject the true God, they begin to worship other objects. Secular humanism turned to man himself, seeing man as only a highly evolved animal with no spiritual capacity. The New

Age Movement is a reaction to this atheistic view, but it is no closer to the truth than secular humanism is. The New Age Movement has put an emphasis on the mind (as seen in its mysticism) and on the spirit (as seen in its worldview of God, matter and mankind).

BELIEFS

Douglas R. Groothuis, research associate with Probe Ministries (Seattle, Wash.), identifies six distinctives of New Age thinking:

All is One
All is God
Humanity is God
A change in consciousness
All religions are one
Cosmic evolutionary optimism
Norman L. Geisler focuses on 14 doctrines typical of New Age religions:

- 1) an impersonal god (force)
- 2) an eternal universe
- 3) an illusory nature of matter
- 4) a cyclical nature of life
- 5) the necessity of reincarnations
- 6) the evolution of man into godhood
- 7) continuing revelations from beings beyond the world
- 8) the identity of man with God
- 9) the need for meditation (or other consciousness-changing techniques)
- 10) occult practices (astrology, mediums and so forth)
- 11) vegetarianism and holistic health
- 12) pacifism (or anti-war activities)
- 13) one world (global) order
- 14) syncretism (unity of all religions)

Robert J. L. Burrows cautions: "Issues New Agers address do not necessarily come with New Age ideology attached. Nor does the terminology they use. Holistic, holographic, synergistic, unity, oneness, transformation, personal growth, human potential, awakening, networking, energy, consciousness -- such words occur with predictable regularity in New Age writings. It would, however, be erroneous to conclude that these words always indicate New Age commitment." Although there are many ways to approach an evaluation of the New Age Movement, this analysis will pursue what the Movement believes concerning source of authority, God, Jesus Christ, sin and salvation, good and evil, and future life (reincarnation).

SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

Generally, New Agers do not speak of a source of authority. If such is referred to, it is not an external authority but an internal one. In the New Age Movement, the individual is considered to be the standard of truth. New Age proponent Shirley MacLaine reveals the supposed power of the individual when commenting, "It's all my dream. I'm making all of it happen -- good and bad -- and I have the choice of how I'll relate to it and what I'll do about it."

MacLaine goes on to say, "Perhaps everyone has his own truth, and truth as an objective reality simply does not exist."

The Scriptures, on the other hand, present objective truths. They are inspired (literally, "God-breathed"); therefore, they can be fully relied on. The fact of the inspiration of the Scriptures is seen in 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." The method of inspiration is seen in 2 Peter 1:21: "No prophecy was ever

made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The extent of inspiration is seen in Matthew 5:18: "For truly I say to you," said the Lord Jesus Christ, "until heaven and earth

pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." So no individual is left to himself and his inner feelings as final authority; the Bible serves as this objective standard.

GOD

New Age thinkers show their true colours in what they believe about God. To them, God is not a Supreme Being distinct from creation -- He IS creation. In developing a worldview about the material and immaterial world, New Agers reach a faulty conclusion. To them there is only one essence in the universe, and everything and everyone is part of that essence. This is known as "monism," which comes from the Greek word monos, meaning "one".

Monism is a common view of Eastern religions, especially Hinduism. All creatures, as well as inanimate objects, are viewed as part of this divine essence. Some of the more commonly known groups in the United States that share this Hindu view with the New Agers are Transcendental Meditation (also known as the Science of Creative Intelligence), Christian Science and Unity School of Christianity. In fact, in The Aquarian Conspiracy, Marilyn Ferguson lists Unity churches under "discussion groups" of "Aquarian Conspiracy Resources." The monism of the New Age Movement is really pantheism, believing that all (pan) is

God (theos). Following this line of reasoning, whatever exists -- whether it's a person, a poodle or a pickle -- is part of God. This leads observers to say that the worldview in the United States has switched from the atheism of secular humanism (man is the measure of all things) to the pantheism of the New Age Movement (man is god).

The god of the New Age Movement is an impersonal presence, not a person with intellect, emotions and a will, as the Bible presents Him.

The God of the Bible is a personal Father, not an impersonal force. This reveals why New Agers cannot accept the teaching of the Bible. They are not able to get beyond the first five words: "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). Because they confuse God with creation, the New

Agers see God as part of creation -- not separate from it. Biblical

Christianity clearly distinguishes between God and creation.

While rejecting the Bible's distinction between God and creation, the New Agers accept and believe the lie of Satan. Eve told the Tempter that God had said they would die if Adam and she ate from the tree in the middle of the garden. But the Seducer said, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4,5).

Notice that not even Satan indicated they would "be" God -- only that they would be "like" God. And even this was in only one aspect: "knowing good and evil." After the fall of Adam and Eve, God acknowledged what had occurred: "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil" (v.22). "This knowledge, as absolute, is an attribute of God (3:5), who is omniscient," wrote Merrill F. Unger. "But man, created with only the knowledge of good, acquired the experiential knowledge of evil through pride and disobedience, and in this manner fell into a state of sin and misery."

Satan's lie -- as verified by history -- was "You surely shall not die!" (v.4). Adam and Eve immediately died spiritually, for their act of disobedience separated them from God. They later died physically as a result of their sin (see Romans 5:1 2).

Because the New Agers think all is One, this leads them to thinking they -- and everything else -- are part of this divine essence. They believe each person is "intertwined" with God. New Agers even use the Bible to support their erroneous beliefs. They are especially fond of Jesus' words "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, KJV). New Agers use these words to claim that each one has a divine spark within because he or she is part of the divine essence.

As in other instances where they use the Bible, New Agers twist the context and words to mean what they wish. Jesus Christ had come to earth to present Himself as the Messiah of Israel. The Pharisees were opposed to Him because He was ruining their established man-made rules, which they had added to Old Testament revelation. They were always trying to pose some question to disprove the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they demanded of Him an answer concerning when the kingdom of God would come (v.20), He answered, "The kingdom of God is within you" (v.21).

Jesus did not mean that these Pharisees had the kingdom of God inside of them. To the contrary, they were the enemies of everything the kingdom stood for. The word translated "within" is entos. Although it can have the meaning of "inside", it can also mean "in your midst". This latter possibility fits the context, as well as the rest of the Bible's teaching. Jesus Christ Himself was the King -- the ruler of the kingdom. When the Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom would arrive, Jesus told them that the kingdom was in their midst, because the King (whom they rejected) was standing right in their presence.

JESUS CHRIST

Many counterfeit religious groups use the same tactic when explaining who Jesus Christ is - they deny His deity by distinguishing between "Jesus" and "Christ". Those who believe that "all is One" cannot accept the teaching of the Bible concerning Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God. It teaches that He took upon Himself human form to redeem mankind from sin's penalty.

Typically, those who believe all is of one essence make "Christ" the cosmic principle, or ideal. Jesus was simply an unusual man, they say, who had this ideal within Him as we all do. Barbara Marx Hubbard says we need to recognize that the "Messiah is within."

The human potential movement among the New Agers is based on the faulty premise that each person is god and needs only to have his consciousness enlightened so he will realize that fact. And the means to this enlightenment is meditation. But the forms of meditation are many. Daniel Coleman, writing in *Psychology Today* (March, 1977), described 13 different forms of meditation. "Each of these approaches," wrote Coleman, "seeks the same basic psychological change in the meditator's awareness."

The New Age Movement is not the only group that emphasizes human potential. Biblical Christianity releases individuals to achieve their true potential in Jesus Christ by freeing them from the burden of sin and condemnation and by giving them untold optimism for this life. But biblical Christianity is also concerned about preparing people for eternity - not just preparing them to reach their maximum potential on earth.

Although the emphasis on human potential is selling well in the business world, when a person truly looks inside of himself, he finds wickedness and ugliness - not God. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick," says Jeremiah 17:9, "who can understand it?" (NASB).

David Seamands, author of *Healing of Memories*, says, "I was a missionary to India, and the massive umbrella of pantheistic and monistic Hinduism was a tremendous challenge. It made me an absolute fanatic on Jesus Christ. The one place that I'm not going to budge is on the Incarnation, because I see the tremendous importance of it. 'Whether the Krishna existed or not,' says my Hindu friend, 'that's not important. It's the Krishna ideal that matters, so therefore it's the Christ ideal that matters. Whether or not Christ existed is not important.'"

"To that I would and did say, 'No, we're not talking about the same thing. Whether Christ exists or not is not just important. It's absolutely paramount.'"

We cannot separate the human Jesus from the divine Christ, as the New Agers attempt to do. They believe that the same Christ ideal, or spirit, dwelt in "Hercules, Hermes, Rama, Mithra ... Krishna, Buddha, and the Christ."

Sound confusing? It is. The Bible, however, does not leave a person wondering about who Jesus Christ is. The name "Jesus" means "Saviour." Referring to the child who would be born to the virgin Mary, the angel told Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

The name "Christ" means "anointed one," or "Messiah." In Bible times, saying "Jesus Christ" was the same as saying "Jesus, the Messiah." After Andrew first began to follow Jesus, he went looking for his brother, Simon Peter. When he found him, Andrew announced, "We have found the Messiah." By inspiration, the Apostle John added in his record of this event: "which translated means Christ" (John 1:41).

Jesus is like no other. He was unique in His birth, life, death and resurrection. He was virgin born (see Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23); He lived a sinless life (see 1 John 3:5); He died in the place of others to pay the penalty for sin (see 2 Cor. 5:21); and He was raised from the dead on the third day and ascended to the Heavenly Father (see 1 Cor. 15:3,4; Acts 1:11).

SIN AND SALVATION

In New Age writings, we search in vain to find references to sin. Because New Agers believe that each person is god, they don't believe in sin as the Bible defines it. Any lack a person has, they say, is a lack of enlightenment. Their solution is to alter that person's consciousness so he will think properly about his oneness with the Force, or the impersonal presence. Because they explain away sin, they have no need for salvation in the biblical sense. In their minds, any salvation would simply be a more complete unification with the One.

But this is not what the Bible teaches. Genesis 3, previously referred to, reveals that mankind was separated from God when he disobeyed God in the Garden. Because of this sin, a curse was placed on both mankind and nature (see vv. 14-19). The New Testament confirms that each individual is a sinful being (see Romans 5:12). Note that the reason death passed to all of us is that we all have a sin nature. Contrary to what the New Agers tell us, each person is not god; each person is separated from God.

GOOD AND EVIL

The New Age Movement mimics Eastern religions, which distort the distinction between good and evil. Because of the New Age's monastic view that "all is One," how can it account for both good and evil? Is the one "essence," or "force" (the Hindu equivalent of God), both good and evil?

The God of the Bible stands in stark contrast to the god of Eastern religions. In the One-is-all and all-is-One view of divine essence, there ultimately is neither good nor evil. "In the philosophy of the One, ethical distinctions evaporate; supposed opposites - light and dark, good and evil, humans and God - merge and fuse," wrote Douglas Groothuis who also documents that Charles Manson was "deeply immersed in the One for all" movement when he ordered the murders of actress Sharon Tate and several others. Manson felt he had reached a state of consciousness beyond morality; therefore, he was free to kill. Although

highly unusual behaviour, Groothuis points out that such behaviour is not inconsistent with the way Hindu gods have been served in the past.

The Bible clearly distinguishes between good and evil. The two never merge. Nor does a person ever transcend in his consciousness so he goes beyond the bounds of moral distinctions.

FUTURE LIFE (REINCARNATION)

Although ultimately denying any distinction between good and evil, New Agers are concerned about a future life - but not the future life known in the Bible.

They say that the way a person lives in this life will determine the way he will be reincarnated in the next. This is not a new concept - it is as old as the Eastern religions the New Agers follow. It also shows the natural bent of man's mind - he may think he can transcend any moral boundaries, but somehow he still realizes the need to account for wrongdoing in this life.

Caryl Matrisciana of Great Britain was raised in India. In her book, *Gods of the New Age*, this former New Ager shows the miseries of those living under Hinduism. She admits that her vegetarian diet and her crusading for animal rights and ecology were motivated by her worldview when she was a New Ager. "'Purity in eating leads to a purity in being, in essence, in mind, and in emotions,' became my motto. This holistic guideline convinced me that my spiritual and physical being were one."

She continues, "The theory behind vegetarian eating as the highest form of purity led me to campaign tirelessly for animal rights. Many times I placed animals high above human priorities." Matrisciana reveals the thinking of some New Agers when she says, "After all, I believed, these poor little creatures are reincarnated".

"I didn't realize until years later," admits Matrisciana, "that I was developing an attitude toward animals that I had rejected while growing up in India. Some animals were becoming sacred in my eyes. And I was placing them well above human beings!"

This raises an important question. If New Age teachings are so helpful to mankind, why haven't these teachings helped improve life in the countries where such ideas originated? Robert J. L. Burrows is on target when he writes: "The vision [Fritj of] Capra believes will deliver us seems to thrive in cultures where misery is perpetually rampant and corruption is rife. India is a case in point. Christians know that the problem is perversity, not human perception - holiness, not holism."

In Hinduism, the teaching of reincarnation involves the doctrine of "karma" - the law of sowing and reaping. They believe that whatever a person sows in this life he will reap in the next life in his reincarnated state.

But the New Agers are not consistent at this point in borrowing from Eastern religions. As Groothuis points out, "The doctrine [of reincarnation] as conceived in Hinduism and Buddhism involves all forms

of life and is called 'transmigration.' Westerners ignore this fact and colour the idea with hopes for self-development. But according to the Eastern doctrine, one may come back as a dog, cow or gnat -something decidedly less attractive than a more fully realized 'human potential.'"

How interesting it is that Shirley MacLaine admits that in her late teens she decided "God and religion were definitely mythological.....I couldn't believe in anything that had no proof." And yet this same person is a strong believer in reincarnation. She has rejected the eyewitness reports contained in the Bible for the mysticism of Eastern religions. It is no wonder that she looks at her daughter, Sachi, with all kinds of questions: "When the doctor brought her to me in the hospital bed on that afternoon in 1956, had she already lived many times before, with other mothers? Had she, in fact, been one herself? Had she, in fact, ever been my mother? Was her one-hour-old face housing a soul perhaps millions of years old?"

New Age thinkers who have borrowed the idea of reincarnation from ancient Eastern religions also have gotten into the channelling business.

"A step up the occult ladder from mediums, channels claim their bodies are taken over by 'entities' or spirits from another dimension." One of the best-known channellers is J.Z. Knight, supposedly a channel for Ramtha, a 35,000-year-old male spirit who calls himself "The Enlightened One." Since Knight was popularized in 1985 by Shirley MacLaine, "thousands of adherents have paid up to \$400 apiece to hear Ramtha preach his blend of Christianity, Eastern mysticism and New Age self-reliance."

In his critique of the channelling fad, Brooks Alexander of Spiritual Counterfeits Project states, "The entities endlessly repeat the primal lie, the three-fold creed of error: There is no death; man is God; knowledge of self is salvation and power." Alexander alludes to the estimate that there are 1000 active channels practicing in Los Angeles alone. He concludes that channelling is the same old spiritism of the past and says, "There is irony in the fact that this spiritual relic is the latest rage of our 'secular' age, the hottest fad of the so-called New Age Movement." The answer to man's future life is not karma but Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for sin so that each person can be completely delivered from condemnation by trusting Him as personal Saviour. "There is therefore now no condemnation," says Romans 8:1, "for those who are in Christ Jesus."

CONCLUSION

The concepts of the New Age Movement are not new - they are based on ancient erroneous beliefs about God, man and the world. The Movement is to be commended for its spiritual concern, but it has turned away from the true God to gods of the spirit world. As Paul said of the Jewish leaders of his day, "They have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge" (Romans 10:2).

Any believer who is tempted to delve into the teachings of the New Age Movement needs to heed the warnings of the Bible (see Deut. 13:1-3; 18:9-12). God has given us His completed revelation, so we have no need to seek further information through the spirit world. Our need is to

know the clear teachings of the Bible better.

Believers should be concerned about world peace, the environment, humane treatment of animals and reaching our full potential in Christ. Our concern should not be based, however, on the theology of Eastern religions - believing that all these things are part of the One, or the impersonal Force. Above all, we should not be naive when we hear someone mention the terms "God" and "Christ." When the New Agers use these terms, they are not talking about the God and the Christ of the Bible.

Let us love those who have gone after other gods. Let us live before them as dynamic, caring Christians so they will see that Christianity is more than a creed; it is life - eternal life. And let us be faithful in gently, but firmly, persuading them to turn to the Christ of the Bible who has paid the penalty for their sins. Let us pray that they will trust in Him as Saviour and be delivered from the hopelessness of their man-centred, pantheistic religion.

(From an article by Harold J. Berry in the June-August 1989 issues of Confident Living.)

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