

New Age

Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements

- Name:** The New Age Movement can be described as a Westernized form of Eastern religions' beliefs combined with occultic practices, self-help, holistic medicines, and forms of astrology. The New Age Movement is not a single organization. The term "New Age Movement" refers to a large number of autonomous groups and individuals. There are hundreds of groups and religious leaders in North America that could be described as New Age.
- Nature:** The New Age Movement desires a change in society's collective consciousness. The term "new" does not refer to time but to its differences from traditional Western beliefs. New Age beliefs have been held by Eastern religions for thousands of years. The New Age Movement does not approach spirituality from a Christian perspective. Not every New Age group admits that its beliefs and practices are religious. Many depict their tenets as secular, scientific, or self-help philosophies.
- Date of Beginning:** The New Thought Movement, Spiritualism, and the Theosophical Society first introduced New Age beliefs and practices to America in the 1800s. These ideologies gained popularity during the counterculture of the mid-sixties and early seventies.
- Headquarters:** The New Age Movement has no central headquarters or leadership. The movement is an informal alliance of individuals, groups, and businesses.
- Adherents:** It is impossible to determine the number of people involved in the New Age Movement. There are hundreds of New Age groups and spokespersons. However, most of these organizations do not have formal memberships. Many who espouse New Age beliefs do not identify with a specific group. Religious surveys indicate that 20 percent of Americans accept at least some New Age beliefs but most do not consider themselves New Agers.
- Assumptions:** The New Age Movement contains great diversity. However, the following ideas characterize most New Agers. (1) Pantheism—God (god/goddess) is All and All is God (god/goddess). (2) Monism—All is One. (3) Reincarnation—After you die you will be reborn as a baby and live another life. (4) You are God, and must discover your divinity. (5) Good and evil do not exist, therefore, there are no absolutes in morality. (6) Separate the historical person of Jesus from the Christ Spirit. (7) A New Age of enlightenment and transformation is coming.

New Age groups and practices rarely identify themselves as New Age. Their beliefs and occult practices identify them. This Belief Bulletin examines these New Age beliefs and offers a Biblical response.

New Age Beliefs

Pantheism—God is All and All is God

Everything is God and God is everything. Everything that exists is God. As one New Ager has written, "For God is the All, and the Goddess is everything, and there is nothing else that is." This belief is known as panthe-

ism. Since everything is God you also are God. While New Agers sometimes talk about God in personal terms, most understand God as ultimately impersonal. God is often referred to as a force or energy. When (the impersonal) All is God, the personal God of the Bible cannot exist.

Biblical Response: New Age pantheism denies the biblical view of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"(Gen. 1:1, NIV). New Agers deny that God created something that was not God. Instead of creation, most New Agers believe that God emanated itself into what we now know as the universe. This means that everything in the universe is god.

New Agers treasure the teachings of pantheism because it means that they also are gods/goddesses. This teaching, however, loses much of its appeal when it is pointed out that the rat rummaging through the garbage is also God according to pantheism. If pantheism is true then it means that even garbage is God. It means that a slug is God. It means that a worm in an apple is God. It means that maggots are God.

Another problem with pantheism is that God ultimately must be understood as impersonal and not as a personal being. If this is true, it means that the impersonal must be greater than (or at least the same value as) the personal. But even New Agers find it very difficult to live as if this is true. They tend to value animals as having more value than an impersonal rock. They tend to value their families as having more value than a plant. When New Agers live as if the personal is of more value than the impersonal, they act as if the teachings of the Bible, and not pantheism, are true. The God of the Bible is a personal God distinct from His creation.

The Bible issues strong warnings to those who confuse God with His creation. “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:22-23, NIV).

Both our experiences of reality and the teachings of the Bible contradict the New Age belief that we are God. We encounter problems. Things do not always go our way. People do not always treat us fairly and honestly. Sorrow and trouble sometimes come our way.

The Bible teaches that while humanity was created in the image of God, mankind is not and never will be God (see Gen. 1:26-27). Isaiah 43:10 (NIV) says, “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me.’”

Monism—All is One

Everything that exists is One. All distinctions (including your sense of being distinct from everyone and everything else) are really illusions. The belief that All is One is closely related to the New Age tenet that everything is God. According to his book *Conversations with God*, Neale Donald Walsch states, “The first step in finding that we are not apart from God is finding that we are not apart from each other, and until we know and realize that all of us are One, we cannot know and realize that we and God are One.”

Biblical Response: Both our experience of reality and the teachings of the Bible contradict the belief that “all is one.”

We experience ourselves as different from others. We perceive and treat our children differently from the offspring of others. Even New Agers find it difficult to live

life as if “all is one.” They treat their mates differently than they do someone else’s spouse.

The teachings of the Bible agree with our experience of reality. The Bible indicates that the reason we do not experience life as being one is because all is not one. God has created a universe that contains objects that are both unique and precious. We experience ourselves as different from others because God has created us as unique beings distinct from other things and people. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16, NIV).

Reincarnation—After we die we will be reborn as a baby and live another life

Then we will die and be reborn again starting the process all over. These cycles of birth, life, and death are necessary in order to lose the illusion of separateness from the All. We progress toward this Oneness by acquiring positive karma. Karma is the fruit of our life and actions that are carried by the soul to its next life. Positive karma advances us toward realizing unity with the All. Negative karma prolongs the time needed to realize this unity. In traditional Hinduism, negative karma can cause us to come back as a lower life form.

Biblical Response: The Bible denies the possibility of reincarnation. “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment . . .” (Heb. 9:27, NIV). Since people will experience only one physical death, reincarnation cannot be true.

Reincarnation is a form of works salvation. The Bible rejects salvation through works (of any kind) as impossible. Romans 11:6 (NIV) says, “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” Likewise Ephesians 2:8-9 stresses that salvation from sin and its external consequences is a gift that God gives freely. Sin does not result in reincarnation but in death. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, NIV).

The Bible teaches resurrection not reincarnation. Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25, NIV).

People Are Divine

Many New Agers teach that our sensation of existing as finite creatures is an illusion. Humanity has forgotten that it is divine. As a result, people need to become enlightened about their true divinity in order to experientially become one with the All.

Exercises intended to transform consciousness can help one attain enlightenment. Techniques such as yoga, meditation, past-life regression, soul travel, and channeling spiritual guides may help one achieve enlightenment.

The New Age gospel calls not for faith in Jesus Christ, but rather for a shift in consciousness. This change of consciousness will only be achieved when you “stop seeing God as separate from you, and you as separate from each other.”³

Biblical Response: The reason even New Agers experience life as if they were finite creatures is because they are limited and not divine beings. The real illusion is the New Age teaching they are divine, not the sense of finiteness that everyone experiences.

Humanity's problem is sin, not ignorance of divinity. While human beings have been created in the image of God, they are not divine (see Gen. 1:26-27). The Bible teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV). The only solution to the human predicament is faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Many of the consciousness-altering techniques used by New Agers are occultic and forbidden by the Bible. God condemns the use of divination, sorcery, witchcraft, magical spells, mediums, and spiritualists (see Deut. 18:9-12).

Morality Is Relative

Since all is One there is no difference between good and evil, right or wrong. For the New Ager there is no such thing as evil.⁴ Some New Agers even deny that Hitler's actions were evil. “The real issue is whether Hitler's actions were ‘wrong.’ Yet I have said over and over again that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in the universe. A thing is not intrinsically right or wrong. A thing simply is.”⁵ Some New Agers would even assert that evil comes from God. As writer Benjamin Creme states, “Of course, yes, the forces of evil are part of God. They are not separate from God. Everything is God. There is nothing else in fact but God. The forces of evil on this planet receive their energy from the cosmic astral plane.”⁶

Biblical Response: The sense that there is a distinction between right and wrong is universal. New Agers try to explain evil by denying its reality. But in order to deny the existence of evil they must also deny the validity of goodness. They not only deny the Bible, which condemns certain actions as wrong, but also their own consciences.

The belief that there is no difference between right and wrong is illogical because it contradicts itself. Its adherents claim it is right to believe there is no right or wrong. But if there is no right or wrong, then how can it be right to believe that there is no right or wrong? Both the Bible and our life experiences support the Christian teaching that there is a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong. Also, the Bible clearly indicates that God is not the source of evil (see Jas. 1:13).

Separate the Man Jesus from the Christ Spirit

New Agers claim Jesus is not the only Christ. Jesus was one of several great teachers who obtained the Christ Spirit (self-actualization of one's deity). As Walsch puts

it, “Many have achieved such consciousness. Many have been Christed (sic), not just Jesus of Nazareth.”⁷

Some New Agers also claim that the church has corrupted the teachings of Jesus. They believe that Jesus traveled to India and studied Hinduism before beginning His public ministry. He was rejected and crucified because of His Hindu teachings.

Biblical Response: When New Agers use the term Christ to refer to a divine consciousness or spirit they give it a meaning not found in the Bible. Christ is a Greek term that means “anointed one.” The New Testament uses the term to designate Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus warned His followers to be on guard against false teachers who would proclaim false Christs (see Matt. 24:24-25). The New Age view of the Christ Consciousness is one of these false Christs. The Jesus of the Bible is unique. He is God's one and only Son (see John 3:16).

A New Age of Enlightenment and Transformation Is Coming

New Agers believe the universe is evolving. Our world is about to undergo a transformation to a higher level. This change will be brought about by a shift in human consciousness toward New Age paradigms.

Biblical Response: A new world is coming, not a leap to a higher level, but the second coming of Jesus Christ. “God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness”⁸ (see 1 Thess. 4:14-18). The unrighteous will be consigned to hell and the righteous will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:7).

Sharing Jesus with New Agers

1. Share about the personal relationship you have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Tell about the difference that God makes in your life.
2. Ask the New Ager what he or she believes about God and Jesus Christ. Listen to their answers. There is a lot of diversity in the New Age Movement. Not all New Agers believe the same things. Start your witness from where they are.
3. Lovingly share with New Agers some of the implications of their belief system. For example, many New Agers do not realize that one implication of pantheism is that God is impersonal. Also, one of the implications of their belief in karma and reincarnation is that there are no innocent sufferers.
4. Since the New Age belief system denies our experience of reality, it is hard for New Agers to live as if what they believe is true. Gently point out the inconsistencies between what they claim to believe and how they actually live. For example, many New

Agers take offense with the gospel message that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. They claim that there is no right or wrong way to God and that we are wrong to claim that there is. Ask: "If there is no right or wrong way to God, then how can you claim that our gospel is wrong?" Lovingly point out that their position is illogical because it contradicts itself.

5. Be loving and kind toward those in the New Age Movement. Remember that God loves them and wants them to place their faith in Jesus Christ.
6. Trust in the Holy Spirit to convict New Agers of their need for Jesus.
7. Do not get frustrated if you do not see immediate results. Most New Agers have to hear the gospel more than once before they trust in Jesus.
8. Encourage them to read the Bible, particularly the Gospels, and to make a study of the life of Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17).

Notes

1. Walsch, Neale Donald, *Conversations With God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 2* (Charlottesville, Va.: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 1997), p. 92.
2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 173.
4. Ibid., p. 31.
5. Ibid., p. 36.
6. Creme, Benjamin, *The Reappearance of the Christ and Masters of Wisdom* (Los Angeles: Tara Center, 1980), p. 103.
7. Walsch, Neale Donald, p. 22.
8. *The Baptist Faith and Message*: "Section X. Last Things." (Nashville, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), p. 15.

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