

The New Age Movement[s]: The Oldest Lie.

Suggested readings: Genesis 3:1-7; Matthew 16:13-28; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Introduction

The New Age Movement has been with us for some time and has received a lot of attention from those searching for spirituality and from those opposing me movement. Book stores are devoted solely to the sales of New Age books and related paraphernalia; and, of course, a lot of material has been written opposing the New Age ideology.

How Pervasive is the New Age?

The facts that I have are for the Americans, but Canada probably isn't all that far behind. Thirty-four million Americans are concerned with inner growth. 42% believe that they have been in contact with the dead. One quarter of the Americans believe in reincarnation, a fundamental tenet of the New Age philosophy. And paranormal experiences and belief in New Age are on the rise, making New Age "the fastest-growing alternative belief system m the country." (Chandler; 20, 21)

Television shows such as Star Wars, in which "The Force" is "'an energy field generated by living things', easily pass muster as a New Age definition of God." (Chandler, 22) Hollywood is also influenced by this new philosophy, as can be seen in movies such as: "The Exorcist", "2001", "Cocoon", and "The Last Temptation of Christ". (Chandler, 22)

Yoga, supposedly only an exercise, but which happens to share the same assumptions as the New Age worldview, is on the rise. More and more, psychics are being employed by the courts to point out lying witnesses, find suspects, and locate missing bodies. (Chandler, 24)

Further, in an article on the New Age in "In Holy Array", Rev. Kampen writes: "... [I]t is most dangerous to underestimate the enemy. As we live our lives in Canada ... we might easily be lulled into thinking that the battle is in a period of ceasefire. That is not true. Satan is busy throwing all sorts of poisoned darts at us. The influence of the New Age ideas is growing steadily."

So, what exactly is the New Age Movement?

It is easier saying what they are not. In the book Understanding the New Age, Russell Chandler (M. Div. Princeton Seminary) states (at 17) "New Age is not a sect or cult, per se. There is no organization one must join, no creed one must confess. Identifying individuals as 'full-blown' New-agers is baffling. Some subscribe to certain portions of New Age, some to others; some disassociate themselves from the movement altogether, though they embrace core aspects of its thinking.'

In order to discuss the New Age beliefs, it is necessary to become familiar with two terms: The Higher Self, and The Force.

In the book entitled The Force, Stuart Wilde provides the following information to prospective New Agers. Presently when you think of yourself, you probably think of the reflection of your bodily image in the mirror. But that isn't the real you. You are a spirit living in that particular

body. This spirit, you, came from another plane of existence to the earth plane. When you were on other planes of existence you chose your body to inhabit so that you, the spirit, could reach some sort of spiritual goal. [Wilde gives “the spiritual you” the term “Higher Self”.] Your Higher Self knew that it could not reach that goal without going through physical existence. Your Higher Self chose your present body because of certain features that would help it to develop. These include such things as your parents, the geographic area you would inhabit, and your inter-personal relationships. (Wilde, 1)

He describes your Higher Self as “a collective body of energy. It is vast and ageless; it is everything that you have been, stretching back to the age of infinity. Within it is all the knowledge that you will ever need and through it you can experience a limitless understanding of yourself and the physical plane, as well as of the unseen dimensions that lie close at hand...

“Six hundred years ago, your Higher Self might have had an experience as a cow and, bit by bit, learned to adapt its energy to the physical plane. As it learned, it became more courageous. Finally, it felt itself ready to enter the human form and did so because, humanity being the highest expression of the Force on the earth plane, this was a natural progression to make.” (Wilde, 2, 3) The first time it took on the human form, it chose a body that didn’t have a lot of responsibility, such as a member of a primitive tribe. I quote further, ‘interestingly enough, Mongoloids and the mentally deficient are two examples of Higher Selves entering the physical plane for the first time — their lives are often short, they are usually surrounded by help and love, and little is expected of them.’ (Wilde, 3, 4) “The Force, like your Higher Self, is an energy that experiences evolution. It is massive, exhilarating, and magnanimous beyond description - perhaps you might want to call it God. It is not stagnant, as some would have you believe, it is growing, dynamic, and has an inner drive or desire to become more of itself. To achieve this, it divides itself into more and more separate parts or definitions, and it does so because it knows that, by dividing and spreading out, it will have more power and having more power, it will grow. The Force is apart of each and every thing in the physical plane... By its very nature, the Force is immortal and never-ending and, because it is the inner light or ‘livingness’ in all things, we call it universal. The more life Force a thing expresses the more complicated or greater is the extent of the Force within it. Therefore, a small bird expresses more of the force than does a rock, and a human being expresses still more than a bird. But everything has the Force within it...” [Emphasis. added] (Wilde, 2) So, god is in everything, and everything is god. In this way, the Force is the sustaining power of our Higher Self while it goes through reincarnation, developing itself for a spiritual goal of inhabiting higher planes than the earth.

What is the goal of New-Agers while on Earth?

We have seen that the goal of the Higher Self is to develop itself, so that it can be promoted to other dimensions. But what is the goal of the embodied Higher Self while it is on earth, if there is a goal? New Agers, do, indeed, have a goal. One New-ager, Beverly Galyean answers: “Once we begin to see that we are all God, that we all have the attributes of God, then I think the whole purpose of human life is to re-own the Godlikeness within us; the perfect love, the perfect wisdom, the perfect understanding, perfect intelligence, and when we do that, we create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness.” (Adeney in Chandler, 154)

Wilde adds to this (at 74): "As you develop yourself spiritually, people will come to you, for the Force knows how to make use of its supporters and it will allow you, through the intrinsic value of your spiritual energy, to go further, to shine ever more brightly. And you will understand more and more deeply that what you are is God. There is nothing you can not do. There are no real limits to your capacity."

In order to "develop your spirituality" or to "re-own the Godlikeness within you", New Agers suggest meditation, using hypnosis, listening to music, or making use of crystals. Proponents of crystals say that these rocks have the power to heal, focus energy, and find soul mates because "crystals molecularly can develop shapes in harmony with the internal structure of the human body, thereby helping us amplify and balance our energies." (Chandler, 104)

The main individuals of New Age

While there is no one person who is leading the New Age Movement with a concerted effort, there are some individuals who have stood out in regards to the New Age cause. If there is such a thing as a New Age bible, it has been written by Marilyn Ferguson and is entitled Aquarian Conspiracy. In this book, Ferguson combines the New Age philosophy with a social agenda. (Chandler, 51)

If "Ferguson wrote the New Age bible then Shirley MacLaine has become its priestess." (Chandler, 51) Apparently she was "in a hot sulfur pool in the Andes, when she [felt] her conscious self drift from her body and soar high into the Peruvian sky. In her [words], her 'spirit, or mind, or soul or what ever it was' flowed out of her body - though the two were connected by a 'mm silver cord'." (Chandler, 52) She published several books about the New Age, and appeared on many talk shows, promoting this philosophy.

Financial considerations

I thought that a couple examples of the money involved in the New Age would be insightful.

Business in general is getting on the New Age band wagon by hiring companies to train their employees how to achieve their peak human performance. One of these companies has trained 3000 managers of AT&T for \$4 million. In one interview they said that they don't have any connection to the New Age. But later in that interview they say: "What we do is... allow people to retouch that spiritual foundation within themselves Much of this work is about spiritual stuff, but we don't ever say that because people start getting nervous when you talk about that. It's about that human spirit, the energy, or human spirituality that is in all of us." (Chandler, 145) This company is also known for training the American troops at Fort Hood, Texas, and then being contracted to teach all the Green Berets for \$400,000. In both cases, the morality shot up, and the sick calls plunged.

The merchandise associated with the New Age also sells well. Alan Talansky explained the therapeutic comfort he feels radiating from his 600-pound quartz that sits in the corner of his office: "When I'm in a big hassle, I turn and look at this thing that has been around for millions of years, and it makes the problems seem less." (Chandler, 105) In addition to mis there are crystal bowls for \$150, special open wire frame pyramids for \$100, etc.

Discern the signs of the times (Matt.16:3)

The most common of the New Age messages are, unmistakably, wish fulfillments.

1. You have unlimited potential;
2. You are infinitely creative;
3. You are unique;
4. You can have it all; (as an aside this is reminiscent of the devil's third temptation of Christ in the wilderness.)
5. Your problems are all under control;
6. You can tap the unlimited power of the universe.
7. You can change the world by changing yourself. (Rosen in Basil, 275)

We should be suspicious of any course, therapy, or teaching which:

- a) is explained in terms of manipulating, balancing, or polarizing energies;
- b) deprecates the value of the mind or critical thinking;
- c) is supported only by testimonial evidence;
- d) is based on "secret" esoteric knowledge revealed only to an inner elite." (Chandler, 261)

We should be aware of the fact that they have no use for absolute truth. In one interview, two channelers said that "looking for God within the self makes truth personal. What one person perceives is considered the truth, even if it conflicts with another's perception." The reporter asked them if there was any room for absolute truth, and one replied, "The absolute truth is that we are all gods in our own rights." (Chandler, 288)

Finally, we should be aware of the scripture twisting which some New Agers are involved with. In 'The Perfect Power Within You', Jack and Cornelia Addington address the issue of "Who is man?". "Man is not just a blob of matter with a little spark of God concealed within him. Man is the expression of God. Man is God expressing as man, made out of the very Essence of God, for since God is All in all. He must create by Himself, becoming that which He creates....

"Jesus admonished us 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven (within) is perfect.' Does this mean anything to you? It can mean a great deal to you as you live and express the attributes of God in your life. You can experience this divine perfection in your body and affairs - NOW." (Addington, 49-50)

The parenthetical remark in the text, intended for clarification, is used by the author to create an entirely new meaning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us be aware of the oldest lie of the Devil. "'You will surely not die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. "(Genesis 3:4-6c) [Emphasis added, JW]

Jason Wierenga

Sources:

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Wilde, S. The Force. Taos, New Mexico: White Dove International, 1984.

SUMMER

By Bernice Vandebos

Summer is as good as here, and we heave a great sigh of relief. Not only is the weather more agreeable, but now we can relax. Not so many meetings going on, a slower pace of life, and yes, the end of another "study season".

Throughout the "study season" we had approximately 22 meetings. Assuming they were about two hours long, and that we spent much time preparing for the meetings as we did at them, we clocked about 88 hours of Bible study. During this season we also had made time for multitudes of other activities: reading, sports, TV, etc.

Now that summer had arrived we will concentrate more fully on these other activities. Fathers will spend time in their gardens, mothers will work diligently on keeping their children entertained, and many will spend their long weekends away from home in various campgrounds. Hours of planning will take place to ensure maximum efficient use of our at least (or only) 2 weeks of vacation. Also during the summer routines will be diminished. We will sleep in more, go out more, and lead more haphazard lives. Most likely, our prayer and Bible reading times will also get out of routine, or perhaps even forgotten. While at the beach it's much easier to just let the kids run around than to gather them for devotions. At home most of the family is out, so the remaining ones just grab a bite and run. After all, it is holiday time.

Yet we are warned. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are told to, "be sober and watchful" because our "adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour". Satan does this also in the summer; he does not take a holiday as we do. And again in Eph. 4:27 we are told to "give no opportunity to the devil".

The study of God's Word is not just a scholastic exercise. We must live out of His Word. Together with David we must say "Make me to know Thy ways O LORD; teach me Thy paths" (Ps. 25:4)

Israel also had the Word of God, and knowledge of it was abundant. They thought they had it made; they were a people with an eternal future. But God did not necessarily agree. He sent the prophet Amos to warn them. In Amos 8:11-12 we read "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD God, when I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to ask the Word of the LORD, but they shall not find it." We too must be warned to fully appreciate what the Bible is, and to use it to its fullest capacity. Throughout the summer let us prayerfully continue to read and study God's Holy Word. Let us "... cry out for

insight and raise your voice for understanding”, “if you seek it like silver and search for it as for bidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:3-5)

1) IHA, the Bible; the Book of the Covenant, Rev. C. Bouwman, March 1985.

A LETTER

Now that Synod Abbotsford '95 is history, allow me to make a few observations. These were sparked in part by your lead article, “Synodilizing” (a new word?) in the May 27th issue. I had never attended any sessions of a general synod so did not know what to expect. But, having tried to read through a number of acts of previous synods, I did not expect any fireworks! However, considering the weightiness of many matters before synod this time, I expected that it could prove to be quite interesting. It proved to be interesting but also disappointing. Looking at it from the perspective of an observer sitting in the pew, I would not classify the proceedings as very ‘audience friendly’. The sound system was generally inadequate to best. With a goodly portion of delegates with their backs toward the audience, it was difficult at times to hear what was being said, especially if no mikes were being used. Next time around I suggest delegates adopt a U-shaped seating arrangement. Without the benefit of advisory committee reports audience members were often at a loss as to what was being discussed and the constant reference to ‘consideration such and such and point so and so, sub-paragraph this and that’ often became a fairly meaningless jumble. I must admit that matters improved somewhat later on during the sessions when the chairman would introduce the topic under discussion and even read certain motions or recommendations for the benefit of the listeners. However, I did not find the discussions about sentence construction and paragraph organization all that enlightening. Perhaps that is the purpose of plenary sessions, I’m not sure. I did admire the good humour and calm sensibility shown by the chairman, however. No doubt it was not always an easy task.

You refer to the fact that there may have been some unhappiness among delegates that ‘unofficial’ reports were being circulated via the internet (and also this paper?) Perhaps the problem could have been partly addressed by the insurance of a daily ‘press release’ highlighting decisions and discussions and appointments. Surely that would not have been too difficult to arrange. In this day and age of instant communications one cannot continue to rely on practices that were acceptable 50 or more years ago. By the next synod I expect that church members will be able to access daily bulletin about proceedings on the internet or some other electronic bulletin board. A copy of the Acts should also be accessible shortly after the conclusion of synod on disk; after all the proceedings are approved before the delegates go home! Openness in discussion and in the dissemination of information can never be harmful if matters are conducted in a proper, Christian way.

One disappointment I wish to express concerns the absence of an individual who I think should have been there as an advisory member. I’m referring to the author of *With Common Consent*, Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene. I noticed a number of delegates had well-thumbed copies of his book and references sometimes were made to it as delegates tried to come to grips with certain ‘church-orderly’ matters. While one does not always have to agree with the reverend gentleman, I think it

would have been a sign of respect for his many years of service and knowledge of church polity to have invited him to the table as an advisory member. As far as I know, this would have been procedurally correct. The same invitation should have been extended to other retired ministers in the area (perhaps it was, I 'm not certain of that).

Considering the many reports and appeals, etc that the delegates had to read through, they dealt with the proceedings in almost record time. They are to be congratulated for their diligence. Let us hope that the decisions will also be of benefit to the churches in the future.

Harold J. Ludwig (Interested synod observer)

Presuppositional Apologetics and the Light of Nature

In the April 15, 1995 issue of Reformed Polemics br. Wes Bredenhof responds to my suggestion that more weight is given to general revelation among Presbyterians than among Reformed possibly because of Van Til's Presuppositional Apologetics. Br. Bredenhof emphasizes that Dr. Van Til "consistently rejected all forms of natural theology throughout his entire career." He then goes on to explain how Dr. Van Til taught that the unregenerated man refuses to know God. This is all true, and I too can commend Dr. Van Til for how he showed from scripture that one can only come to faith by the working of the Holy Spirit.

However, according to Dr. Van Til, once a person has made the correct presuppositions, namely that God exists and that He has revealed Himself in His Word, then one also becomes capable of correct understanding of what is revealed by general revelation. The person with the correct presuppositions, he argues, works with a different "system of truth" from those who are not regenerated. Once within the correct system of truth, all things must be consistent within that system. Dr. Van Til adds that man, due to his human limitations, is not always capable of fully understanding every-thing, but in "principle" he has the truth.¹

It is interesting that Br. Bredenhof refers to Greg Bahnsen as an example of a well known consistent Van Tillian because it was especially after listening to him that I started questioning Van Til more. Dr. Bahnsen, in one of his taped lectures on Presuppositional apologetics claims in a very bold way that "I can prove creation to be true" in contrast to the theory of evolution.² Of course, he adds, that one must first accept the correct presuppositions which one can only accept via the working of the Holy Spirit, but he insists that he can prove it. His proof boils down to there being no other possible alternative for the world's existence.

Although Dr. Gordon R. Lewis falls too much into the experiential camp, his criticism of Van Til is to the point. After recognizing that "Van Til's main trend of thought, reason cannot itself discover the true meaning of sense data..." he concludes that "When all is said and done, reason must be capable of showing how Christian presuppositions are more meaningful than non-Christian suppositions".³ In other words, Dr. Lewis also finds that Dr. Van Til ends up giving too great a place to reason.

The point of the article about which Br. Bredenhof wrote was not about the interpretation of Van Til's apologetics but concern was expressed about the extent to which one uses "general revelation". The scripture only speaks about "general revelation" in the context of rendering a person without excuse for the sins he has committed.⁴ The student of Dr. Van Til, Dr. Bahnsen goes too far when he says: "I can prove creation". In Hebrews 11:3 we read "By faith (my italics) we understand that the world was created by the Word of God so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." This faith does not rest on the correct presupposition, but is itself a gift of God.

Notes

1. See Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publ. Com) 1969, especially the first section.
2. Sorry, I borrowed the tapes and do not now have them in my possession and therefore cannot tell the precise title and number.
3. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims - Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Moody Press) 1976 p, 292.
4. See Romans 1 & 2 and Article 2 of the Belgic Confession

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