

OLD HERESIES IN A NEW AGE

**A Christian consideration and appraisal of
Monism and the New Age Movement**

**Presented by: Rick Harvey
Roundtable in Ideology
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Old Heresies in a New Age
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WEST MEETS EAST

*OH, East is East, and West is West,
and never the twain shall meet...
–Rudyard Kipling–*

Rudyard Kipling’s famous lines, from his *Ballad of East and West*, are often cited to portray the remarkable and seemingly unbridgeable differences between Eastern and Western civilizations. Though such a use of Kipling’s lines may go beyond what he had in mind, they nevertheless express what many, in both worlds, have considered in the past to be a truism. In past eras, a Westerner stepping for the first time off a ship onto the docks of any city in the East, whether it be in India, China, Siam (Thailand), or elsewhere, would feel like he or she had stepped onto another planet. The differences went much further than new versus old, or contrasts in manners and customs. At the core of the differences was a deep-seated contrast in worldviews, even a divergence of the meanings of logic, truth, and reality. It was a difference between what Dr. Peter Jones, adjunct professor at Westminster Seminary California, refers to as the difference between “one-ism” and “two-ism.”¹

But, to co-opt Burl Ives, “the times, they are a changin’.” Sea travel has given way to air travel. Paper letters in yellowing envelopes with exotic stamps have given way to international calling, emails, text messages, and Skype. (A recent news report revealed that, while nearly one half of India’s population of 1.2 billion does not have access to a flushable toilet, there are an estimated one billion cell phones in that vast subcontinent.²) As a result, massive sea changes have been occurring in both East and West. Stephen Neil addresses the impact of this interaction on the Eastern world, particularly in India:

But for nearly five centuries India has, for good and ill, been in close contact with the West, and particularly with the English-speaking West. ...But the Western influence goes far beyond this highly educated élite. And, wherever it has penetrated, it has brought about tensions and

¹ <http://truthxchange.com/about/> last accessed 3/25/13.

² <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/more-people-access-cell-phones-toilets-010850961.html> last accessed 3/25/13

frustrations; resistance to change has been at times almost frenetic; yet change has taken place, at times against the will, at times almost without the consciousness, of those who have been subject to it.³

As we shall see in the ensuing pages, that change has been far from a one-way street. In many ways, the ideological sea change in the West has far outstripped that of the East. Astute observers of Western civilization and culture have noted a profound movement in the West from what was once considered to be a Western worldview to the embracing of foundational elements of an Eastern worldview.⁴

One can view this shift of West to East, or of what I have called “the journey East,” from two perspectives. The first perspective examines this shift as it has taken place over a lengthy period of time, incorporating ancient philosophies with newer and potent ideologies, laying the groundwork and leading to an almost inevitable consequence. The second perspective views a sudden tidal wave of Western infatuation with the East beginning in the middle of the last century as a result of the Beat generation of the fifties and the counterculture movement of the sixties.

For example, Os Guinness, in his book *Dust of Death*, speaks of how the “East made its first entry into the counterculture in San Francisco.”⁵ On the other side of the same coin, we have the observations of Douglas Groothuis who ties the current influence of the Eastern ideology in the West to long-running developments within Western culture, as well as to the resurgence of interest in ancient philosophies such as Gnosticism.⁶ These two perspectives are not at odds with each other, but are simply two realities that make up our current historical place.

The New Age and Monism

The most familiar designation for this acceptance and promotion of Eastern ideology in the West is the term *New Age*. However, use of the term today is fraught with ambiguity, now that we are approaching five decades since the phenomenon first caught the attention of the American public. In his book, *The Making Of The New Spirituality*,

³ Stephen Neil, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1984), 94-5

⁴ Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1994), 196-198

⁵ Ibid, 196

⁶ Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1986); and *Jesus in an Age of Controversy*, (Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996, pub. date 2002)

James Herrick documents a convergence of a disparate assortment of religious and spiritual ideas which He refers to as the *New Religious Synthesis*. Herrick's New Religious Synthesis embraces a host of religious ideas and non-traditional (to the West) spiritualities, including things such as Eastern pantheism, Wicca, astrology, Tarot, the paranormal, numerology, nature religions, holistic thinking, metaphysical and Theosophical teachings, prosperity theology, and others.⁷ Often this wide array of spiritual diversity is grouped together under the term New Age or New Spirituality.⁸ Herein lies the confusion. Whereas the term New Age once referred to only one aspect of that wide array, chiefly having to do with Eastern pantheism and monism, often it is used today to refer to the entire phenomenon.⁹ Herrick argues that the profound and diverse spiritual changes at work in the West, "...are broader than even the broadest definitions of the so-called New Age movement."¹⁰ For this reason He prefers, for the broader phenomenon, the term New Religious Synthesis.¹¹

For the purposes of this presentation, I have chosen to refer to Herrick's broader phenomenon by his own term, the New Religious Synthesis. When I use the term New Age, I am referring to a rather indistinct sub-category within that broader synthesis. It is primarily to that sub-category within the New Religious Synthesis, the New Age movement and its attendant monism, that this presentation is addressed.

However, even with that clarification, some other points need to be made. In the first place, even using New Age in the narrower sense that I do, still the term embraces a wide array of eclectic ideas among a wide range individuals, so it is difficult at times to pin down precisely what is meant by the term.¹² Secondly, in this limited usage, the term actually refers not to something that currently exists, but rather it refers to something which its widely diverse adherents hope or expect to inaugurate. Thirdly, the primary driving concepts behind the New Age are anything but new. Some of them predate the Christian era by a thousand years or more. So, I ask the reader to keep in mind that as I

⁷ James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 18, 20

⁸ Ibid., 18

⁹ Ibid., 20

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 15

¹² Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 18

refer to the New Age movement, I am not referring to a tightly coherent and fully consistent worldview, nor to something that is particularly new, except perhaps, to the Western way of thinking.

While the New Age movement, as I am discussing it, has deep roots in Eastern philosophy and religions, it is chiefly as a phenomenon in the West that it is the concern of this presentation. As such, I will not endeavor to exhaustively explore Eastern manifestations of what is referred to as *monism* or *pantheism*, but will limit myself to how these concepts are being marketed and embraced in the West. Some discussion of Eastern expressions of monism will be necessary, but a full examination lies beyond the scope of this presentation.

<p>Monism: The belief that all that is, is one. There is no difference between God and all else.</p>

James Sire describes pantheistic monism as “distinguished from other related Eastern worldviews by its monism, the notion that only one impersonal element constitutes reality.”¹³ Key in this concept is the notion that all is one. This necessarily implies the elimination of all distinctions. The outworking of this concept is articulated by Tal Brooke, who for two years was himself a high level confidant of Sai Baba (1926-2011), a leading guru and avatar in India:

I was an ‘Advaitin’, a complete non-dualist, which is the highest Vedantic tradition. To me, Baba was an outward appearance of the Static Eternal, the supreme Overmind. And consecration to him was consecration to the highest Self, the inner self. And Baba and I understood that that was what He really was, the Universal Oversoul. And I, in my true identity, was the same—namely God. Baba was not his body, and nor was I my ego.¹⁴

Beyond all the exotic terminology in Brooke’s description of himself before He became a Christian, what is key is his reference to being a non-dualist, to seeing all things without distinction, as all things being one. This is monism.

What is the New Age? What are its primary constituent aspects? How did it come to have such popularity in Western culture? How does the New Age view Jesus, the central person of Christianity? To what degree has New Age ideology permeated and influenced Western culture? What are the consequences both individually and culturally

¹³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th Ed. (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2004), 147

¹⁴ Tal Brooke, *Riders of the Cosmic Circuit*, (Lincoln, NE, iUniverse.com, 2000), 31

of a New Age worldview? How is a Christian to view and respond to the New Age movement, its adherents, and its proponents? The purpose of this presentation is to seek to answer these very questions.

THE JOURNEY EAST

We are persuaded that gradually, in religious thought as in the sciences, a core of universal truth will form and slowly grow to be accepted by everyone. Can there be any true spiritual evolution without it?
-Pierre Teilhard De Chardin-

Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, a major shift was occurring in American culture. A culture that had been dominated primarily by two competing worldviews, Christian theism and metaphysical naturalism, was now finding itself increasingly diverse in its outlook. Nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism had followed quickly on each others' heels. But now another new, and heretofore little understood, ideology in the West was demanding attention. In the decades following World War II, the Beat generation was blossoming into what would eventually be known as the *counterculture*. The counterculture itself was being permeated by a new interest in Eastern religions and ideas. Cultural observer and critic, Os Guinness, reports that "The East made its first entry into the counterculture in San Francisco through the early Beats."¹⁵ While a clear delineation between the counterculture and the New Age is not possible, they nevertheless had distinct characteristics, perhaps the most notable being the wide acceptance of the New Age within the culture.¹⁶

Shortly, Eastern ideas would take shape in a distinctly Western form in what came to be known as the New Age movement. In later chapters we will discuss in considerable depth the ideas and beliefs that generally characterize New Age adherents. But before we do so, it would be good consider how the movement came to gain the momentum and influence that it now enjoys.

A Long Road East

James Herrick, in his book, *The Making Of The New Spirituality*, discusses the rise of what He calls the *New Religious Synthesis*. While Herrick sees this new synthesis

¹⁵ Guinness, 196

¹⁶ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 45

as including much more than the New Age phenomenon, he nevertheless recognizes the place that the New Age plays within this synthesis.¹⁷ This new spirituality, Herrick says, “...is no longer confined to the sanctuary and the synagogue, but has now moved into the lecture hall and the classroom, the movie theater and the surgical theater, the corporate office and the Oval office.”¹⁸

While the rise of the New Age in the middle of the last century appeared sudden and rapid, and while certain cultural and sociological phenomenon surely contributed to that rapid change, there was much that lay behind this remarkable “swing to the East,” as James Sire refers to it in *The Universe Next Door*.¹⁹

As we will see later, some elements in New Age ideology can be seen in the ancient Christian heresy of Gnosticism and other ancient religions. But to pick up the story closer to the present time, the seventeenth-century Jewish Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was an advocate of pantheism. Spinoza advocated for an ancient Jewish tradition of kabbalistic mysticism, in which God the knower and the objects he knows are the same essence (essentially monism). Spinoza was influential in the thinking of later religious radicals, including the Irishman John Toland (1670-1722).²⁰

Toland is credited with coining the term *pantheism*. It is said of Toland that the insinuation of pantheism into the minds of the British reading public became his ultimate literary purpose.²¹ Herrick observes of Toland’s view, “that all religious faiths share a common ancestry in primitive pantheistic and mystical spirituality—is now an important component of the New Religious Synthesis.”²²

Also tremendously influential at the time was a Swedish mystic by the name of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Swedenborg rejected Christianity and embraced instead a search for “divine consciousness.”²³

The famous German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), stressed the importance of interiority, emotion or feeling, and individual reflection. Critics

¹⁷ Herrick, 20

¹⁸ Ibid., 18

¹⁹ Sire 145

²⁰ Herrick, 154

²¹ Ibid., 155

²² Ibid., 156

²³ Ibid., 157

considered him to be a pantheist. “Sin, for Schleiermacher, was a matter of wrong belief, rather than evil, and could be overcome by increasing one’s God-consciousness.”²⁴

The promotion of Eastern-style religious thought in America was advanced in the nineteenth century by the essays, poetry, and lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Emerson, who grew up the son of a Unitarian minister in “spiritually jaded New England,”²⁵ was profoundly influenced by his mystical aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, and by the writings of men such as Spinoza and Schleiermacher. He was the leading Transcendentalist, and was the mentor of his fellow Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau.²⁶ Emerson popularized an essentially Hindu religious view in America for the first time. Herrick remarks that, “Emerson was unusually successful in this enterprise of popular persuasion. ...he was the most compelling thinker of his age—and his age lasted a very long time indeed.”²⁷

Transcendentalism:
Mid-19th century movement of social critics who believed in man’s original relation to the universe and that a new era was at hand and.

Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919) was a German scientist and philosopher, and vigorous promoter of Darwinism in Europe. Haeckel named his religious view “monism” (a concept we will explore extensively later), in opposition to the “old” religious “dualistic” view. Herrick remarks, “Monism, on the other hand, affirmed a single essence in all things. In this way the cosmos itself became the only possible god.”²⁸

At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, the most popular speaker was the Bengali self-appointed emissary of Eastern monism to the West, Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna.²⁹ While claiming that Hinduism was the “mother of all religions,” he regarded all religions to be true.³⁰ Having captivated the audience with his eloquence in the English language, as well as with the novelty of his ideas, Vivekananda traveled and spoke widely throughout the United States. One *New*

²⁴ Herrick 157

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 156 That region of the United States has been referred to as the “burned over region,” due to the extensive evangelistic efforts that had been made there, and the resultant spiritual weariness of its inhabitants.

²⁶ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism/> last accessed 4/3/13

²⁷ Herrick, 158

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 162

²⁹ Neil, 99; Guinness, 202

³⁰ Neil, 100

York Herald reporter, after hearing him speak, wrote “After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”³¹

The Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) promoted the idea that spirit and matter would eventually be seen to be the “same stuff.”³² He prophesied a coming Omega Point, “where all consciousness is fused and all become one with the One.”³³

The founding of the Theosophical Society by Madame Helen Blavatsky in 1875 was a great influence in the nineteenth century. Guinness remarks, “If Vivekenanda gave Hinduism self-consciousness, the Theosophical society gave it pride.”³⁴ Blavatsky praised Gnosticism, an element of New Age monism that we will explore later in this paper.³⁵

By the early twentieth century, pantheistic concepts were widely embraced among intellectuals.³⁶ George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), one of America’s foremost authors and playwrights, was a vigorous proponent of religious change, and held to the idea of a pantheistic presence. He promoted ideas of evolution of the human race found later in the New Age movement.³⁷

Clearly, then, as can be seen from this very brief sketch so far, while the explosive growth of interest in and devotion to Eastern spirituality beginning in the mid-twentieth century may have been unprecedented, it was not without a considerable background of preliminary groundwork by promoters of this exotic spirituality.

Prepared Soil

Major shifts in philosophical or spiritual outlook within a culture or society do not occur without reason.³⁸ There are invariably factors at work which prepare a population to be receptive to ideas that otherwise would be rejected out of hand.

³¹ Guinness, 202

³² Herrick, 151

³³ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 29

³⁴ Guinness, 202

³⁵ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 81

³⁶ Herrick, 167

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-69

³⁸ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 46

Herrick argues that the rise of what he calls the Other Spirituality “is not so much the outworking of a psychic law as the result of sustained, intentional and successful public efforts to change the Western religious mind.”³⁹ That is, of course, exactly the point of the brief sketch of history I have just detailed.

Herrick’s comment addresses the optimistic idea, held commonly among New Age advocates, of an inevitable evolutionary upward movement of mankind toward the dawning of a New Age. I will address this belief at length later. In addition to the “public efforts” which Herrick documents, there were deep realities within the culture, which tilled the soil and made it ready for the seed of Eastern spirituality.

Os Guinness contends that it is more than coincidental that the explosive interest in all things Eastern dovetails causally with a time of weakness in Christianity. He argues that the church was weak at precisely three points where it needed to be strong in order to withstand the Eastern invasion. Those points were (and he would surely argue, they remain): 1) A compromised, deficient understanding of revelation, i.e., the Bible. Without a strong view of scripture, he believes theology can only grow closer to Hinduism. 2) Modern Christians are “drastically weak in an unmediated, personal, experiential knowledge of God.” He asserts that few Christians “know God on their own.” 3) The church is frequently “pathetically feeble,” he says, in the expression of its key principle of community. All of these factors combined to leave the church unable to withstand the Eastern invasion, or to provide an alternative.⁴⁰

Guinness details three other factors that played a key role in the West’s journey to the East. First was the loss of vitality of Western thought. “Many signs show that Western thought is somewhat played out, anemic, and lifeless.”⁴¹ He quotes the Dutch theologian and missiologist, Hendrik Kraemer:

There is evident in the fields of pictorial arts, of novels, of thinking and of depth psychology, a kind of premonition. They manifest a spontaneous openness, a readiness to be invaded, to be ‘spiritually colonized’ by the Orient. There are open ‘gates’ for an Eastern invasion.⁴²

³⁹ Herrick, 35

⁴⁰ Guinness, 211-12

⁴¹ Ibid., 198

⁴² Hendrik Kraemer, *World Culture and World Religions*, (London, Lutterworth Press, 2960), 18, cited by Guinness, 198-99

As our Roundtable discussions over the past months have illustrated, Western thought was beginning to grasp, like a drowning man, for any scrap in the ocean. From naturalism born of the Enlightenment, to modernism, then scientism, then nihilism, then existentialism, and now postmodernism, every new ideology leaves the Western mind looking for satisfying answers. It is seemingly ironic that, having abandoned the Christian faith for the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Westerners now find themselves three hundred years later settling for the completely opposite Enlightenment of Eastern monistic pantheism.

Guinness' second factor contributing to the rise of Eastern mysticism in the West is the profound "stirrings" in the East. He reports, "What we have seen in the last hundred years is nothing short of a rediscovery of Eastern culture, especially in the richness of the heritage of India."⁴³ As Hinduism rediscovers its roots, it finds a connection through its spiritual ancestors, the Aryans, with pre-Christian European culture.⁴⁴ Guinness reflects:

As modern Europe loses its Christian foundations, it feels itself in danger of losing its soul. Yet as it searches for its pre-Christian roots, it is strangely finding itself closer to the origins of India than to its former Judeo-Christian tradition. It may be that this reflects the fact that the ancestors of the Aryans lived in close proximity to the ancestors of the Greeks. Scholars are becoming increasingly convinced that the impulses leading to Greek philosophy were closer to the Indian than to the Judeo-Christian worldview.⁴⁵

Stephen Neil, in his chapter on Buddhism in *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, details a similar resurgence within Buddhism. Neil explains, "The twentieth century has seen the stirrings of new life. The birth of new nations and the end of colonialism have brought about a resurgence of Buddhism, as of so many other religions of the ancient world."⁴⁶ Along with this inner resurgence came a similar resurgence of what he calls the "Buddhist sense of missionary obligation."⁴⁷ By the middle of the twentieth century

⁴³ Guinness, 199

⁴⁴ <http://suite101.com/article/hinduism-and-the-aryan-influence-a8025>, last accessed 4/3/13

⁴⁵ Guinness, 200

⁴⁶ Neil, 131

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134

Buddhist “Sunday schools” saw children bringing small offerings for the conversion of the “heathen” in Europe and America.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Hindus also were engaging in missionary activity towards Europe and America. In 1959 Maharishi Mahesh Yogi arrived in the United States, bringing with him his own version of yoga, Transcendental Meditation (TM). TM is a Westernized version of Eastern meditation that has swept America, partly due to the endorsement of the Beatles, who themselves were early devotees of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.⁴⁹ Other Eastern gurus also made their way West, such as the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, whose ashram in Poona, India, we will encounter later in this presentation. Rajneesh arrived in the United States in 1981 and established his center in Oregon, where he eventually ran at cross-points with the local population and authorities.⁵⁰

Guinness’ third factor contributing to the remarkable rise of Eastern thought in the West is the convergence of Eastern thought with post-Christian Western thought. He says, “There has been a dovetailing in so many areas, forming an almost inescapable climate.”⁵¹ Guinness’ discussion of this point is too involved for this present paper, but a couple of his observations illustrate the point. He refers to the “silence of God,” a feature of modern theology that coincides with Eastern thought in embracing mysticism. Connected with this is the “failure of language,” a concept that reminds us of the infusion of postmodernism within Christian theology.⁵²

Another aspect of coincidence is in the area of ecology and the question of the basis for the proper treatment of nature. As Guinness points out, this perceived parallel is actually mistaken. Christianity has unfortunately taken the fall for much of the West’s abuse of nature, due to the misleading accusations of Lynn White.⁵³ Nevertheless, post-Christian Westerners, unaware of the biblical mandate for the care of nature, have a heightened concern for ecology, and believe that the answer lies in pantheism.⁵⁴ This is to a degree ironic, given pantheistic India is among the world’s worst nations when it comes

⁴⁸ Neil, 134

⁴⁹ Sire, 147; Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 39; <http://www.beatlesBible.com/people/maharishi-mahesh-yogi/> last accessed 4/3/13

⁵⁰ Brooke, 155-61

⁵¹ Guinness, 203

⁵² *Ibid.*, 204-09

⁵³ Alister McGrath, *The Reenchantment Of Nature*, (New York, Doubleday, 2002), 29-30

⁵⁴ Guinness, 209

to environmental issues.⁵⁵ It also mischaracterizes both the Christian view of nature and the pantheistic one as well.⁵⁶

In addition to the three broad cultural/spiritual factors which Guinness has identified as contributing to the rise of the New Age movement, other or related factors also contributed. The same disillusionment with modernism and materialism that fostered postmodernism also fed the hunger for the exotic new spirituality of ancient Eastern pantheism.⁵⁷ The Enlightenment product of secular humanism which arose with modernism was unsustainable. It led inexorably to nihilism, which is unlivable as a worldview. This left twentieth-century young people hungering for a spiritual reality beyond secular humanism. Theodore Roszak (1933-2011), a leading proponent of monism, was sharply critical of the emptiness of the secular humanist view.⁵⁸

We could go on, surely, identifying other factors which created the environment in the West that was so conducive to Eastern mysticism, but the point is made: the ground was prepared, the seed fell, and many were those who wished to water it.

A Well-Lit Journey

The list of those who gave full effort in the twentieth century to the promotion of this New Age vision would be long, indeed. I will mention only a few. I have already mentioned Roszak, who along with William Irwin Thompson (b. 1938) introduced New Age ideology into the study of sociology and cultural history.⁵⁹

Carl Jung (1875-1961), the Swiss psychotherapist, profoundly influenced the field of psychology, incorporating his pantheistic beliefs.⁶⁰ Jung was deeply committed to the ancient Christian heresy of Gnosticism, which, as we will see, plays a role in modern New Age thinking.⁶¹ In anthropology, Carlos Castaneda (1931-1998) contributed several

⁵⁵ <http://www.gits4u.com/envo/envo4.htm>, last accessed 4/3/13

⁵⁶ Guinness, 210. In addition to demonstrating the true biblical value placed on all creation, Guinness shows that pantheism in fact has no such balance, arguing along with Francis Schaeffer, that pantheism in fact tends to lower the higher (humanity) to the level of the lower (nature).

⁵⁷ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 46-7

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-3

⁵⁹ Sire, 174

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 142

⁶¹ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 80-1

books that gained wide popularity. Sire reports that Castaneda's works "were one of the major doorways to the new consciousness."⁶²

In the field of the natural sciences we have the work of Fritjof Capra (b. 1939), an Australian-born American physicist who argues for a "oneness" of all things. In the book *The Tao of Physics* he explores parallels between the "new physics" and Eastern mysticism, setting statements by modern physicists alongside those of Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu mystics and scriptures.⁶³

In the field of health and medicine, a number of advocates promote approaches to medicine such as holistic healing, alternative medicine, acupuncture, Rolfing, psychic healing, kinesiology, and therapeutic touch. All of these have elements of New Age ideology. Among the leading proponents is the Indian physician Deepak Chopra (b. 1938), a modern advocate of New Age alternative healing.⁶⁴

At the popular level, the actress and singer, Shirley Maclaine (b. 1934), has been perhaps the most visible advocate of the New Age phenomenon,⁶⁵ writing prolifically, including a book she claims to have written with her dog, *Out on a Leash, Exploring the Nature of Reality and Love*, as well as a review of her life, *Sage-ing and Age-ing*, in which she predicted a major transformation of human consciousness on December, 21, 2012.⁶⁶ In addition, the popular writer, Jean Houston (b. 1937), from the Foundation for Mind Research, has been a proponent for decades of New Age higher consciousness. She has called for a "psychenaut program to put the first man on the earth,"⁶⁷ predicted a coming day when we "will become the gods that we have invoked," and "become creators of worlds, capable of Genesis,"⁶⁸ and achieved further notoriety as a friend of, and advisor to, First Lady Hillary Clinton.⁶⁹

In the entertainment industry, a number of creative individuals have contributed New Age literature and films. Steven Spielberg's movie *Close Encounters of the Third*

⁶² Sire, 175

⁶³ Ibid., 176; Groothuis, 97

⁶⁴ Herrick, 29; Sire, 177, 184

⁶⁵ Sire, 169

⁶⁶ Ibid. (footnote #9)

⁶⁷ Ibid., 170

⁶⁸ Jean Houston, "Toward Higher-Level Civilizations," *The Quest*, Spring 1990, p. 42, cited by Sire, 171

⁶⁹ Sire., 169, (footnote #9)

Kind, and George Lucas' overwhelmingly popular *Star Wars* movies feed the entertainment-craving public a steady diet of New Age perspectives.⁷⁰

As the picture unfolds before us, we come to understand that "the journey East" has been well laid out beforehand and, once the journey began in earnest in the mid-twentieth century, it has been well-paved and well-lit.

⁷⁰ Sire, 178

AGE OF AQUARIUS

*When the moon is in the Seventh House
And Jupiter aligns with Mars
Then peace will guide the planets
And love will steer the stars*

*This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius
Age of Aquarius
Aquarius! Aquarius!*

*Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
No more falsehoods or derisions
Golden living dreams of visions
Mystic crystal revelation
And the mind's true liberation
Aquarius! Aquarius!*

*Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In
—James Rado & Gerome Ragni—
for the musical Hair*

An Age To Come

James Sire, in his book *The Universe Next Door*, explains that the New Age movement, in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, was in its infancy. Now, however, he believes it has reached its “late adolescence,” and due to its inherently eclectic character may be as mature as it will get.⁷¹ Throughout the 1970s the media was consumed with reporting on this radical new phenomenon. By the 1990s however, media interest had waned. Sire points out the reason:

[Shirley] MacLaine had become for the 1980s the most visible proponent of New Age thought and practice. After writing a host of autobiographies and instruction on the new consciousness, she eventually dropped out as a major New Age leader. And by the mid-1990s, New Age stories disappeared from the media, not because it had vanished but because it had become no longer odd, no longer newsworthy. Still the popularity of

⁷¹ Sire, 166-67

New Age thinking continues: some twenty popular New Age journals are, for example, carried in my local Borders bookstore.⁷²

When New Agers use the term New Age, to what are they referring? During the 1960s the singing group The 5th Dimension gained increased popularity with the hit song *Aquarius/Let The Sun Shine*, originally written for the musical *Hair*. The popularity of the song was in part due to the idea it conveyed that the world was on the verge of a wonderful new age, controlled in part by the stars. In the words of the song: “Harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding. No more falsehoods or derisions, golden living dreams of visions. Mystic crystal revelation, and the mind's true liberation.” This goes to the core of the meaning of New Age. The New Age adherents anticipate a bold and wonderful new age on the earth. This idea of the dawning of a bright new age is an element of Eastern mysticism. Tal Brooke remarks: “The whole goal of the New Age has been to have a mass enlightenment. A global cosmic event that would shift the tide of human history.”⁷³ In the preface to his book he states:

For the Grand Design is to initiate humanity into the Dawn of a New Age—for which countless advocates await the advent of these masters, gods, and supermen who are to be the catalysts. The behind-the-scenes footwork in preparation for this planned global shift in consciousness has been staggering.⁷⁴

Hence, while the New Age movement is very much with us today, its goal, its ideal of a glorious utopian world achieved through “the mind’s true liberation,” though thought to be near at hand, remains yet to be realized. It is this perceived imminence of the glorious new world, expressed in the 5th Dimension’s popular song, that fuels much of the excitement and passion of the New Age movement.

What then is the New Age as I am discussing it?

Before answering this question, two things must be kept in mind. First, it is highly unusual, especially in our age of information-overload and worldwide exposure, for any adherent to a particular worldview or ideology to do so with complete consistency. Most people, though adhering to one primary worldview, tend to incorporate into their

⁷² Sire, 169

⁷³ Brooke, 79

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7

ideology aspects of other worldviews, even ones that seemingly contradict their primary worldview. Though this normally takes place unconsciously or inadvertently, it nevertheless occurs. Second, as I have already mentioned, the term New Age is a rubric which covers a wide spectrum of ideas and beliefs. Typically, the New Age movement embraces an eclectic mix of concepts from Eastern pantheistic monism, the occult, ancient Greek Gnosticism, contemporary postmodernism, modern Darwinism, pre-Christian European paganism, and astrology. As James Sire says, “The New Age worldview is highly syncretistic and eclectic. It borrows from every major worldview.”⁷⁵ Add to this the fact that New Age consciousness rejects reason as a guide to reality,⁷⁶ and trying to “nail down” what is precisely the New Age is a lot like the proverbial dilemma of attempting to nail Jell-O to the wall.

Given these two factors, it is unlikely that one will often, if ever, encounter any one individual who will meet precisely all the defining characteristics of the New Age movement which I will delineate in this presentation. My object is not to try to fit particular individuals into some New Age box, but rather to identify a number of elements that make up the New Age movement as a whole, and to address the concerns that those elements raise. With these things in mind, let us set out to get a workable picture of the New Age movement.

Primary Themes In The New Age

The New Age movement can be generally characterized as exhibiting several distinct characteristics, all of which play into its goal of achieving the new enlightened world. Following is a brief description of these traits.

1) Oneness:

The central dogma of the New Age is the idea of oneness, or monism. Douglas Groothuis explains this in his book *Unmasking The New Age*:

The idea that “all is one” is foundational for the New Age; it permeates the movement in all its various manifestations—from holistic health to the new physics, from politics to transpersonal psychology, from Eastern religions to the occult. Another name for this idea is *monism*. *Mono* means

⁷⁵ Sire, 177

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 180

“one.” Monism, then, is the belief that all that is, is one. ... Ultimately there is no difference between God, a person, a carrot or a rock. ... Any perceived differences between separate entities—between Joe and Judy or between Joe and a tree or between God and Judy—are only apparent and not real.⁷⁷

This monism is similar to that in pantheistic monism, such as in Buddhism, but with a fine distinction which is particularly Western in its outlook. As Sire explains, central to Eastern pantheistic monism is the idea that *Atman is Brahman*. Atman is the essence, the soul, of any person. Brahman, on the other hand, is the essence, the soul of the whole cosmos. In *Atman is Brahman*, then, is expressed the idea that each person is one and the same with the soul or essence of the cosmos—each person is God. However, and this however is critical, the God of Eastern pantheistic monism as well as the New Age god is not personal, but is rather the infinite, impersonal, ultimate reality.⁷⁸

Where the distinction between New Age monism and Eastern pantheistic monism lies has to do with a subtle but important shift in emphasis. Using italics to illustrate his point, Sire says:

In essence the East says, “Atman is *Brahman*,” putting the emphasis on Brahman. That is, in the East one loses one’s self in the whole... [This idea is often expressed in a drop of water falling into the ocean and becoming one with the vast ocean.⁷⁹] In the New Age the same sentence reads in reverse: “*Atman* is Brahman.” It is the single self that becomes important. Thus we see the influence of theism in which the individual is important because made in the image of God.⁸⁰ (Comment in brackets is mine.)

Thus, in Eastern monism, the emphasis is on the loss of the individuality of the person in the vast infinite reality. This is not an idea that sells well in the West, and hence Western monism retains some level of emphasis on personal individuality.

So while in the New Age, as in Eastern pantheistic monism, the idea of oneness is central, in the West such monism involves the centrality of self. Sire remarks:

Whatever the nature of being (idea or matter, energy or particle), the self is the kingpin, the prime reality. As human beings grow in their awareness

⁷⁷ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 18

⁷⁸ Sire, 149

⁷⁹ In the words of the Indian guru Rajneesh, “For the first time I was not alone, for the first time I was no more an individual, for the first time the drop had come and fallen into the ocean.” Brooke, 119

⁸⁰ Sire, 181-82

and grasp of this fact, the human race is on the verge of a radical change in human nature; even now we see harbingers of transformed humanity and prototypes of the New Age.⁸¹

Hence, in typical Western hyper-individuality, regardless of how various New Agers view exactly what the self is, they generally agree that the “self—the consciousness-center of the human being—is indeed the center of the universe.”⁸²

2) *Humanity as God:*

As we saw in the previous discussion of monism, implicit in monism is the concept that all is God, or more accurately, god—not the transcendent personal God of the Bible, but the impersonal, infinite, ultimate reality. Naturally, then, the New Age view of humanity is that each individual human is god. The failure of most humans to realize their divinity is not because they are not divine, but rather it is due to ignorance or wrong thinking. Groothuis reports:

Swami Muktananda—a great influence on Werner Erhard, founder of est and Forum—pulls no pantheistic punches when he says: “Kneel to your own self. Honor and worship your own being. God dwells within you as You!”⁸³

In his book, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy*, Groothuis cites the popular New Age author Deepak Chopra as saying, “...we are divinity in disguise, and the gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized.”⁸⁴ Groothuis goes on to observe, “This is classic New Age teaching: everything is one (monism); everything is divine (pantheism); we are divine (self-deification); and we have unlimited potential to shape our destiny apart from any Creator who stands over us as Lord.”⁸⁵ Sire remarks concerning Chopra:

Deepak Chopra, who has become one of the more active and visible New Age promoters, in his recent book *The Third Jesus*, says that the essence of each of us is a “speck of God, the soul substance of everyone that never became separated from its source.” In the state of God-consciousness a person creates his or her own reality.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Sire, 181

⁸² Ibid., 182

⁸³ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 21

⁸⁴ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 65

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Sire, 184

Concerning the idea of each individual as the creator of his or her own reality, Shirley MacLaine writes:

If I created my own reality, then—on some level and dimension I didn't understand—I had created everything I saw, heard, touched, smelled, tasted; everything I loved, hated, revered, abhorred; everything I responded to or that responded to me. Then, I created everything I knew. I was therefore responsible for all there was in my reality. ...To take responsibility for one's power would be the ultimate expression of what we called the God-force.⁸⁷

Hence, each individual person, whether or not she realizes it, is one with the ultimate reality, God. This is a primary consideration of pantheism, the belief that every soul is one with ultimate reality, that *Atman is Brahman*.

3) A change in consciousness:

If every person is God, then why don't they know it and why doesn't the world we see look like all its inhabitants are God? The reason is, as stated above, most people are either ignorant of their true nature, or plagued by wrong thinking of some sort. Most of us operate daily with no consciousness of our divinity. We live under an illusion of reality, an illusion which in Hinduism is called by its Sanskrit name, *maya*. We need to shed our illusions and discover the true reality.

What is our problem? The answer is simple; ignorance. Western culture has shaped our consciousness, trimming our experiences and taming our metaphysics. We remain content with the everyday illusions of human limitation and finitude. We need to be enlightened. We have forgotten our true identity.⁸⁸

In order to usher in the utopian New Age, millions of people need to experience a dramatic change in consciousness. Groothuis remarks,

Only through a resurrection of consciousness will the world be raised out of the modern miry pit. As the popular New Age radio program "New Dimensions" says in their introduction, "It is only through a change of consciousness that the world will be changed. This is our responsibility."⁸⁹

Foundational, then, to achieving the proper awareness of our divinity is the elimination of *maya*, of the illusions in which we are trapped. Brooke describes the

⁸⁷ Shirley MacLaine, *It's All About Playing*, 192, cited by Sire, 183

⁸⁸ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 22

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 25

difficulty with which Westerners wrestle, particularly those who have actually traveled to the East, in shedding *maya* and achieving true “enlightenment:”

The ancient surgery of self-annihilation remains superhumanly tough. And for Westerners without this tradition, it has been truly alien terrain. ...The ego—that which has caused the grand illusion of *maya*, the breaking away from the Godhead, that false sense of things-as-separate—remains the ultimate enemy to God-consciousness. The deeper reality is the oneness that the ego refuses to acknowledge.⁹⁰

What Brooke is describing here is encountered more intensely by those Westerners who have chosen to go the whole way into Eastern monistic pantheism rather than in the watered-down version of Western New Ageism. As I have already pointed out, New Age tends to allow more room for Western-style individualism than does Eastern monism, and herein lies one of the inherent contradictions of New Age thought. The ideas of all is one and individuality are inherently contradictory. Thus the New Age quest for enlightenment, for the shedding of *maya*, when pursued consistently, leads to significant challenges in the Westerner’s mind. This is most pointedly experienced by those who, in their quest for New Age enlightenment, have gone to India to study under the great monistic pantheist gurus and avatars. Brooke’s own experience is an example:

Our mind-sets evolved. We were being deculturized on a fast-track growth curve. And we knew this had a price tag. ...In our own cosmic training camp people went through many character changes as they endured, some of them dramatic. And there were casualties, from disillusionment to insanity. ...What had at first looked like the gates of Heaven, when I first entered Baba’s kingdom, had suddenly one day become the gates of Hell.⁹¹

This, then, is the peril of New Age enlightenment. Though it gives lip service to the self, to individualism, ultimately it involves the acquisition of a new consciousness of being one with the ultimate reality. Of necessity there must be the loss of personality, of the true individual.⁹²

How then is one to achieve this enlightenment, this new consciousness of one’s oneness with all, of one’s oneness with God? Where does one go to acquire this “cosmic

⁹⁰ Brooke, 33

⁹¹ Ibid., 37

⁹² Neil, 114-15

consciousness” (sometimes called an “altered state of consciousness”⁹³)? To more fully explore the idea of this deeper knowledge, in the next chapter I will consider the ancient idea of esoteric knowledge. Presently, however, I will mention briefly the use of various New Age techniques designed to usher one into this cosmic consciousness. Sire says, “Getting to oneness with the One is not a matter of finding the one true path. There are many paths from maya to reality. I may take one, you another, a friend a third, ad infinitum.”⁹⁴ This is, in part, at the root of the New Age’s professed acceptance of the validity of all religions. All religions, properly understood, lead to the one Reality.⁹⁵

But the New Age has its own techniques which it believes to be the best mechanisms for achieving the new consciousness, as diverse as they may be. Some gurus, such as the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, stressed chanting a mantra, a seemingly meaningless Sanskrit word sometimes selected by a spiritual master and given in secret to an initiate. Others recommend meditation on a mandala, a highly structured, often fascinatingly ornate and beautiful circular image, symbol of the totality of reality. Others require endless repetition of prayers or acts of obeisance.⁹⁶ Many commonly advocate the practice of yoga.⁹⁷

Particularly common in the West is the chanting of an apparently meaningless word, such as *Om*, or a phrase that includes this word, such as “*Om Mane Padme Hum*.”⁹⁸ Some meaning for these phrases has been suggested, but it is not the content of meaning that is instrumental:

It is obvious that the word *meaning* is not used in this Eastern system in the same way it is used in theism or naturalism. We are not talking about rational content but metaphysical union. We can truly “pronounce” *Om* and “understand” its meaning only when we are at one with the One, when “Atman is Brahman” is not an epistemological statement but an ontological realization, that is, a “becoming real.”⁹⁹

Part of the idea of the various techniques employed is to break the individual’s slavish bond to *maya*, to the illusion of separateness that obscures his or her oneness with

⁹³ Sire, 192

⁹⁴ Ibid., 151-52

⁹⁵ Neil, 99

⁹⁶ Sire, 152

⁹⁷ Neil, 109, 116

⁹⁸ Sire, 152

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the cosmic reality. For example, Zen Buddhism employs the practice of meditating on koans, nonsensical or paradoxical statements, intended to force the meditator to abandon reason in order to experience oneness with the One. A well-known example is the practice of meditating on the sound of one hand clapping.¹⁰⁰ What these techniques have in common is an attempt to achieve contentless meditation, to empty the mind.¹⁰¹ All of this is intended to break one's bondage to the logic of *maya* and set the seeker free to experience the enlightenment of *Atman is Brahman*.

Groothuis explains:

The One is found and experienced through a process of self-discovery, whether it be meditation, yoga or some other spiritual discipline. ... The classic Western spirituality of prayer, faith and obedience to an external God must be replaced by monistic meditation, personal experience, and the God within. Eastern meditative practices emphasize emptying the mind of the illusion of separation and dualistic thinking. ... The goal is an experience of unity with all things, the dissolution of the individual self and the discovery of the "divine within."¹⁰²

It is this central New Age goal of a change of consciousness that provides one of its most serious challenges to Christianity. Christian dogma rests squarely on rational, logical propositions of a dualism in reality. It is this highly rational dualistic view of reality that New Age consciousness seeks to overthrow.

The intellect divides and orders, defines and describes. But how would it be, if we were suddenly to apprehend all things at once and simultaneously? This is illumination, when thought ceases and something else takes its place. This is the experience which in Zen is called *satori* — 'that condition of consciousness wherein the pendulum of the Opposites has come to rest, where both sides of the coin are equally valued and immediately seen'.¹⁰³

One might assume, and many do, that to experience this cosmic consciousness, of tapping into what Aldus Huxley (1894-1963) referred to as our *Mind at Large*,¹⁰⁴ would be a euphoric experience. And indeed, many who claim to have had such experiences report just such euphoria.

¹⁰⁰ Neil, 143

¹⁰¹ Sire, 152

¹⁰² Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 142

¹⁰³ Neil, 143, with a quote of C. Humphreys, *Buddhism*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1951), 185

¹⁰⁴ Sire, 187

Central to the cosmic consciousness is the unitary experience: first, the experience of perceiving the wholeness of the cosmos; second, the experience of becoming one with the whole cosmos; and finally, the experience of going beyond even the oneness with the cosmos to recognize that the self is the generator of all reality and in that sense is both the cosmos and the cosmos-maker. “*Know that you are God; know that you are the universe,*” says MacLaine. (italics hers)¹⁰⁵

Sire lists an array of remarkable experiences of those who report to have had such experiences of the cosmic consciousness.

Whether the images in Mind at Large are otherwise ordinary objects such as chairs or desks or men and women or special beings such as ghosts or gods or spirits, luminosity is an almost universal characteristic. Lilly says, “I saw scintillating things in the air like champagne bubbles. The dirt on the floor looked like gold dust.” In eleven of sixteen separate accounts quoted by Ferguson, special mention is made of colors: “golden light,” “sparkling lights,” “intense white light,” “ultra unearthly colors.” Castaneda sees a man whose head is pure light and in the climactic event in *Journey to Ixlan* converses with a luminous coyote and sees the “lines of the world.”¹⁰⁶

This is heady and intoxicating stuff indeed. But Sire warns that all this is not without great risks. One aspect of this cosmic consciousness, this Mind at Large, is that the realm, whatever it is, appears to be populated with other special beings. Sire says, “Similarly, in account after account, personal beings, or forces with a personal dimension, keep turning up—call them what you will: demons, devils, spirits, angels.”¹⁰⁷ New Agers view these accounts from mainly three different views: 1) These beings actually exist apart from the conscious self (the occult version). 2) That these “beings” are simply projections of the conscious self (the psychedelic version). 3) The cosmic consciousness is another way of viewing reality, albeit a non-ordinary model, but no less true (the conceptual relativist version).¹⁰⁸ But there is no objective means of measuring or evaluating this encounter with “other beings,” which is, of course, a red flag to a Christian theist who believes in the actual existence of deceptive demons.

¹⁰⁵ Sire, 192

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 189

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 190

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 197

This aspect of cosmic consciousness contributes to the perilous nature of the endeavor. As Sire notes, “accounts of bad trips are readily available.”¹⁰⁹ Brooke describes the nagging questions that plagued him as he moved closer and closer to the “explosion” of ultimate enlightenment:

Why is it that every time I reach this same gate, this narrow choice of initiation, that no matter how light, airy, loving, and innocent the pathway had been, the doorway, the rite, cannot be made in any other fashion than that which is unbelievably sinister to my deepest feelings? Why does it bear total resemblance to the very horrors that I most instinctively feared as a small child, the deepest things of Satan? Why does the predominant feeling have to be evil and not good? Or why can't it be at least a gray mixture in between? Why never the bells of bliss? For at the final moment, the carpet is pulled from under you, and you still have to pass through the fire and kiss the feet of some demon god. And only then can you pass through the tunnel that you can never see the other side of.¹¹⁰

This hazardous journey into the altered state of consciousness then calls for, at least in the early stages, a “spiritual guide” to ensure that the individual does not experience tragic harm.¹¹¹ One nun, Sister Miguela, who related to Brooke her stories of ministering to the debris left by the Rajneesh ashram in Poona, India, prior to Rajneesh's departure for America, illustrate this:

“A moment comes when either you commit suicide or you become enlightened! That moment is precious, and that's where the master is needed, otherwise people WILL commit suicide.”

It was black and white. The sister asked rhetorically, “What happens if this so-called Master is not around, or is asleep, or refuses to come, or forgets you, huh?”¹¹²

This troubled nun's concerns were well-founded. Brooke reported regarding his visit to Poona to gather information on the Rajneesh ashram:

The human by-product of this could be seen at the local Poona asylum. Martyn had talked earlier to the German consulate in Bombay, and they told him that on the average they had to personally appear in Poona to repatriate fifty to sixty cases per year from the local asylum.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Sire, 194

¹¹⁰ Brooke, 168-69

¹¹¹ Sire, 194

¹¹² Brooke, 143

¹¹³ Ibid., 102

4) *Cosmic evolutionary optimism:*

As we have already seen, the New Age is all about the future. A grand utopian view provides the hope of a world where all becomes one in a blissful day of peace, love, harmony, good health, and the like. Clearly, we are not there yet. To get there will require considerable changes. The New Age believes a process of upward evolution is at work, which, when fully realized, will usher in this bold new world.

The Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) fueled this idea of the evolutionary progress of man's spiritual awareness. Herrick describes Teilhard's ideas: "Human consciousness is finally awakening to the reality and inevitability of the universe's evolutionary process, while at the same time recognizing that it—human consciousness, that is—represents the very pinnacle of the universe's spiritual evolution."¹¹⁴ Teilhard prophesied a coming Omega Point, "where all consciousness is fused and all become one with the One."¹¹⁵

It is at this point that the mysticism of New Age movement conveniently weds itself to modern science, employing naturalism's dogma of evolution to its own ends.¹¹⁶

Problematic to this view, of course, is the brutal reality that after millennia of Eastern pantheistic monism, India is hardly an example of the bold new world to which we are supposedly evolving.

What the starry-eye idealist and revolutionaries forgot to do was look, not romantically but realistically, at what its mystical model-state, India, had become. To quote the title of V. S. Naipaul's brilliant book, India was a *Wounded Civilization*. And the actual outworking of its philosophy produced dire and terrifying consequences, such that any Westerner going there went through profound culture shock. And the new challenge was to interpret India with carefully couched, higher abstractions, ever romanticized and sympathetic. ...I was one of the worst offenders: interpreting India through the mystic eye became a kind of pilgrimage and token of higher consciousness.¹¹⁷

Brooke found himself as the apologist to new-coming Westerners experiencing India for the first time. "I had a standard lecture to the newcomers wanting to follow

¹¹⁴ Herrick, 151

¹¹⁵ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 29

¹¹⁶ Sire, 169-73

¹¹⁷ Brooke, 56

Baba. One must see the beautiful [sic] hid behind every little obscenity in sight... .”¹¹⁸
Eventually, however, reality would invariably catch up with him.

Sometimes I was eloquent. And invariably after such a discourse, I would get quagmired in dung, dysentery, and dogs, which conspired to await me on the footpath home, hidden from view. A screech or a wail here or there, and by journey’s end I would be in an incoherent rage, damning the very land I had lauded. Interpreting the grotesque became a matter of will. Only in retrospect, years later, would I see my dilemma as resembling the naked king in his ‘new robes’. I was his Vedantic counterpart.¹¹⁹

Never mind, though, for those in the West wishing to follow the New Age dream. With all of the West’s problems, and they are legion, such idealists still reap the remnant benefits of a culture steeped in nearly two millennia of Western Christian ideals, morals, law, education, and scientific advancement. But even here, one would expect that if a New Ager were to simply look around, especially after four decades of New Age euphoria in the West, that the absence of concrete signs of the great cosmic evolution would be a troubling discordant note.

Thus, with little in the culture or society to demonstrate that the new era of “*harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding, no more falsehoods or derisions, golden living dreams of visions, mystic crystal revelation, and the mind's true liberation*” is unfolding, a modification of the vision is made. Sire relates:

The New Age hopefuls read modern accounts of those who claim to have made a breakthrough to another dimension. They read (or better, misread) the ancient religious teachers—Jesus, the Buddha, Zoroaster—who still have some credibility, see in them a hint of the progress that awaits all humankind, and conclude there is a New Age coming.¹²⁰

We will examine one aspect of this reinterpreting of the ancient texts in the next chapter.

5) *All religions are one:*

If all things are actually one Reality, and if we are moving inexorably towards a universal cosmic consciousness of that oneness, then certainly all religions must be just

¹¹⁸ Brooke, 57

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Sire, 172

different paths to that same end. This is, in fact, the conclusion of the New Age, taking its cue from Eastern monism.

One of the most influential Hindu minds of the modern era was Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-1886), whom modern Hindus consider to be the human being who most successfully attained union with the divine in this life.¹²¹ Beginning in 1871 Ramakrishna embarked on an immersive study of other religions, and with each one, for a time, carried out their rituals and prayers and read only their scriptures. After years of this endeavor, he concluded that “all religions in their inmost content are one—they all lead back to the truth...of the unity of all things in the supreme and universal Spirit.”¹²²

At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, the most popular speaker was the Bengali self-appointed emissary of Eastern monism to the West, Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna.¹²³ While claiming that Hinduism was the “mother of all religions,” he regarded all religions to be true.¹²⁴ Having captivated the audience with his eloquence in the English language, as well as with the novelty of his ideas, Vivekananda traveled and spoke widely throughout the United States. One *New York Herald* reporter, after hearing him speak, wrote “After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”¹²⁵

This idea of all religions being one is simply another element in the belief that there are many ways to achieve a cosmic consciousness of unity with the One. Sire observes: “Ideas are not finally important. As Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘Do not argue about doctrines and religions. There is only one. All rivers flow to the Ocean. Flow and let others flow too!’”¹²⁶ We discover here the shared view of postmodernism and Hinduism, that tolerance of all religious views (once they have been properly reinterpreted) is possible due to the relativity of all religions, and that truth is ultimately unknowable. Ramakrishna himself was known to speak not only in Hindu temples, but also in Muslim

¹²¹ Neil, 99

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Neil, 99; Guinness, 202

¹²⁴ Neil, 100

¹²⁵ Guinness, 202

¹²⁶ Sire, 151

mosques, Sikh *gurdwārās*, and Christian churches. During his time at Oxford he was known to read in the Christian chapel services.¹²⁷

To establish that all the great religious leaders were essentially teaching the same monistic view of reality requires some serious reinterpretation of what some of those leaders taught. In a later chapter we will examine one case in particular, how the New Age has reinterpreted Jesus from the Christian church's historical view of its founder.

6) *Good and evil:*

The idea of oneness can have some unexpected consequences, no less so when it comes to the matter of good and evil or morals. If all reality is One, if there are no distinctions, if there is no separation, then there can be no such things as good and evil in the sense of being distinct from one another. Groothuis writes, "In the philosophy of the One, ethical distinctions evaporate, supposed opposites—light and dark, good and evil, humans and God—merge and fuse."¹²⁸

The Hindu god Kali is an example of this. She is simultaneously represented as the goddess of motherhood and Kali the Destroyer. She is at once both kind and cruel and neither kind nor cruel.¹²⁹ Our English term *thug* originates from a class of religious assassins in northern India who were worshippers of Kali.¹³⁰ Vivekananda, to whom I referred earlier as a prominent Bengali proponent of monism in America, was a devotee of Kali. He said, "Who can say that God does not manifest Himself as Evil as well as Good? But only the Hindu dares worship him in the evil. ...How few have dared to worship death, or Kali! Let us worship Death!"¹³¹ At the popular level, this concept is represented in an entertaining way in the Star Wars movies, where the Force simultaneously has a good and dark side.

But at a deeper level within monism it is not a matter that both good and evil coexist in the One, but rather that since there is no distinction, they do not exist at all. As Guinness clarifies, "If the human dilemma is metaphysical and not moral, what is left of

¹²⁷ Neil, 108

¹²⁸ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 154

¹²⁹ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1990), 44

¹³⁰ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 154

¹³¹ Edward Rice, *Eastern Definitions*, (New York, Anchor, 1980), 398-99, Cited by Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 144

morality? Monism says that good and evil are only distinct because of *maya*. There are no moral absolutes.”¹³² He goes on to quote from the Zen master, Yun-Men.

If you want to get the plain truth,
Be not concerned with right and wrong.
The conflict between right and wrong
Is the sickness of the mind.¹³³

As Geisler and Brooks point out, this view of morality is not consistently held within pantheism. Their writings do contain exhortations to goodness and self-sacrifice. But these things are considered to be relevant only at the lower levels of spiritual achievement. As one advances towards spiritual union with the one, towards the cosmic consciousness, such matters are no longer of concern.¹³⁴

The question naturally arises, of course, where the ideas of reincarnation and karma fit into this view of good and evil. It is one thing to philosophically deny good and evil, it is quite another thing fully embrace the concept, and, thankfully, there are few who try. The moral conscience is so hard-wired into the human being, that few people try to ultimately deny morality. So, as Sire observes, this area of reincarnation and karma is “one of the softest spots in Eastern pantheism.”¹³⁵

Karma implies a strict necessity. If one does wrong, then at some future point in time, typically in a future existence, that individual will, of necessity, suffer the consequences of that wrong. This cycle of life continues until, through a process of spiritual evolution, the person ultimately achieves union with the One. This appears to the Westerner as a moral universe. But, as Sire points out, there are a couple of critical distinctions to be made:

First, the basis for doing good is not so that good will be done or so that you benefit another person. Karma demands that every soul suffer for its past “sins,” so there is no value in alleviating suffering. The soul so helped will have to suffer later. ...One does good deeds in order to attain unity

<p>Karma: One’s present state is the result of his or her past actions, especially in a former existence.</p>
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¹³² Guinness, 222

¹³³ Alan Watts, *Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen*, 10, Cited by Guinness, 223

¹³⁴ Geisler & Brooks, 44

¹³⁵ Sire, 156

with the One. Doing good is first and foremost a self-helping way of life.¹³⁶

Sire's second distinction is the fact that within Eastern pantheism all actions are merely part of the world of illusion:

The only "real" reality is ultimate reality, and that is beyond differentiation, beyond good and evil. Brahman is beyond good and evil. Like true and false, ultimately the distinction between good and evil fades away. Everything is good (which, of course, is identical to saying, "Nothing is good" or "Everything is evil").¹³⁷

Thus, when properly understood, good and evil, even when viewed in the contest of karma and reincarnation, are merely an illusion. Thus reincarnation and karma are not to be viewed primarily as a process of retribution and reward for good or evil done, but as the process by which one learns to shed his or her *maya*, and become one with ultimate reality, which is neither good nor evil.

Ultimately, this denial of good or evil yields grave consequences. Brooke relates the words of Rajneesh:

Whatever you are doing consciously, with alertness, fully aware, becomes meditation. Even if you kill someone consciously, while fully conscious, it is meditative. This is what Krishna was saying to Arjuna: "Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid! Kill, murder, fully conscious, knowing fully that no one is killed...you are only destroying forms, not that which is behind the forms. So destroy the forms." If Arjuna can be so meditatively aware, then there is no violence. No one is killed, no sin is committed.¹³⁸

Is this going too far? Are Rajneesh's words simply the ravings of one bad apple? Or is this a logical conclusion one comes to with a monistic view of morality? Groothuis gives us a brutally graphic illustration of this principle at work in the life of Charles Manson:

Few people realize that Charles Manson was deeply immersed in the One for all. His involvement in several pantheistic groups (Scientology and other), plus his reading of occult materials while in prison, led him to

¹³⁶ Sire, 157

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *The Book of the Secrets*, Vol. 1, (Harper Colophon, 1977), 399, cited by Brooke, 146

believe that he had reached a state of consciousness beyond morality. He was free to kill, since killing is part of the One.¹³⁹

Quoting from the writing of R. C. Zaehner concerning Manson:

This is a great mystery — and the eternal paradox with which Eastern religions perpetually wrestle. If the ultimate truth, or the “perennial philosophy” as Aldous Huxley called it, is that “All is One” and “One is All,” and that in this One all the opposites, including good and evil, are eternally reconciled, then have we any right to blame Charles Manson? So seen from the point of view of the eternal Now, he *did* nothing at all.¹⁴⁰

How then does one account for the fact that monists behave as though their actions can and should be considered good or evil? As I pointed out early in this presentation, inconsistency is a hallmark of most people’s adherence to their worldview. Two reasons for this are readily apparent. In the first place, often people do not think clearly and decisively about their worldview or about competing views to which they may be exposed, and often unconsciously adopt ways of acting or thinking that do not fit with their professed views. In the second place, if a person’s worldview does not fit with the real world, at some point the individual is compelled to accommodate either his worldview or his actions to the brute facts of reality. Here again, this is often done unconsciously, without realizing the inconsistency of their beliefs or actions.¹⁴¹

7) *Logic, Reason, and Truth:*

One of the paradoxes of Eastern pantheistic monism and of its imitation Western New Ageism, is how forcefully the proponents argue their case, how prolific are their writings, and yet the whole endeavor is undercut by their view of logic, reason, and truth. To arrive at the state of enlightenment, to reach cosmic consciousness, entails moving beyond knowledge. In oneness with the One, logic ceases and the principle of non-contradiction does not apply. Sire explains, “Knowledge, like personality, demands duality—a knower and a known. But the One is beyond duality, it is sheer unity. ...In other words, to *be* is not to know.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 153

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Sire, 157-58

¹⁴² Ibid.,155

Monism, then, is ultimately the rejection of reason as a guide to reality.¹⁴³ While not all New Age teachers hold such a view of reason, most do hold that the divine reality is encountered through something other than the normal thought processes.¹⁴⁴ The truth is ultimately “unknowable.”¹⁴⁵ (Note the close affinity here to postmodernism’s view of the knowability of truth.)

Neil demonstrates that Zen Buddhism is a world of paradox, with the purpose of freeing the mind from rationality. It is the “non-intellectual way” whereby the adherent penetrates to reality.¹⁴⁶ To the Zen practitioner the goal is *satori*, the experience of illumination when thought ceases and the experience takes its place.

Guinness points out the precarious paradox created by this monistic view of reality:

If the world that we know as reality is actually illusion, what then is the difference between fantasy and reality? As Lao-tse puts it, “If, when I was asleep I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake that I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a man?” ...So here is the first problem: Monism as related to reality does not give a sufficient basis on which to ground...to distinguish between fantasy and reality.¹⁴⁷

Tal Brooke writes of the goal of Eastern meditation as being “mind destruction.” He provides an illustration of this leap of faith where reason and logic are abandoned with a quote from Rajneesh:

The mind says, “First know, then go into it. Without knowing, jumping into it is dangerous...” ...But there is no way to know anything about it without going into it. That is the danger, that is the risk, the gamble. ...One has to take the risk; the danger is there. Either you will become enlightened or you will go mad—that danger is there.¹⁴⁸

On the surface, this view of reason and logic would appear to leave the rational mind completely disarmed in any attempt to evaluate monism. How can one appraise the apparently subjective experience of enlightenment that another claims to have had? At any point where one begins to present rationally-based counter claims, the monist simply

¹⁴³ Sire, 180

¹⁴⁴ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 143

¹⁴⁵ Neil, 108

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 143

¹⁴⁷ Guinness, 217

¹⁴⁸ Brooke, 104

defaults to the argument that the critic is employing reason and logic, which are not applicable in the realm of Ultimate Reality. In the final analysis the dualist is told he or she should accept monism simply on the word of the monist.

However, such an appeal to the non-rational is inherently self-defeating. To assert that Ultimate Reality is non-rational rather than rational is a propositional statement asserting that something is true. Geisler and Brooks elucidate:

The claim that reason does not apply to ultimate reality is also self-defeating. The statement, "Reason can tell us nothing about God," is either a reasonable statement (meaning it is either true or false, for that is the essence of logic) or it is not. On the face of it, it appears to be a reasonable statement that reason gives us no information about God—*except that it just did*. It just told us we can't use reason. So we have to use reason to deny the use of reason, which makes logic an inescapable reality. If the pantheist avoids this by saying it was not a reasonable statement, then we have no reason to believe it. It is simply gibberish on the order of a two-year-old's singsong.¹⁴⁹ (*italics his*)

Brooke pinpoints the dilemma faced by the one who would objectively evaluate the New Age consciousness before committing to it:

How can one who is not a Rider reach this state of consciousness while remaining human enough to smuggle back the secret? Who can pass through the ultimate initiation beyond the point of no return, where the Ride begins, to get around the paradox? No one, we are told. We are left in a seller's market—only those who know can ever know...and their claim stands alone as the final authority never to be resolved *a priori*. That's what they say...
Or, is there yet another perspective?¹⁵⁰

8) *The New Age Jesus:*

The final characteristic of New Age thought which I wish to examine has to do with the reinterpretation of Jesus and Christianity. Naturally, this is of particular concern to the Christian, and calls for a fairly involved examination, so I will devote the next chapter to this eighth element.

¹⁴⁹ Geisler/Brooks, 45-46

¹⁵⁰ Brooke, 8

THE CO-OPTED CHRIST

Who do men say that I am?

-Jesus-

One of the points about which advocates of the New Age worldview are most enthusiastic is the notion that all religions are actually one—that all religions ultimately lead to the same God. This is like music to the ears of this new “tolerant” generation. No more religious wars, no more quarrels about God. What could be more conducive to the glorious age of Aquarius, with “*harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding,*” than the realization that we all “worship” the same God, and that all religions are actually one?

The problem is, however, that this remarkable oneness of all religions is not readily apparent to the practitioners of a good many of those religions. Three cases in point are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Somehow, the vast majority of those who hold to the three classic monotheistic religions have somehow seriously misinterpreted their own scriptures, and misconstrued the teachings of their own founders.

Thankfully, we have the wisdom of the New Age gurus to inform us, to re-educate us, to let us know what our own religious teachings really mean.

I will leave it to Jewish and Muslim thinkers to answer in defense of their own respective faiths. But to illustrate how this reinterpretation, this re-education, takes place, we will examine what the New Age does with Jesus.

In his book *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, Stephen Neil writes about the impact that exposure to the West has had on Hinduism in India. Concerning the religious aspect of this exposure to Western thought, he identifies three more or less distinct reactions to Christianity among Indian Hindus. Of particular interest to us here is the third reaction, which involves the “polymorphous” nature of Hinduism. He remarks, “It

has manifested through the centuries an astonishing capacity for taking into itself the most disparate elements and yet itself remaining essentially unchanged.”¹⁵¹

It was in this vein that the highly revered Ramakrishna, of whom I spoke earlier, embraced the unity of all religions, and upon which his devotee, Vivekananda, built such a successful public relations achievement for Eastern mysticism in the United States. “It did not seem to Vivekananda paradoxical that Christians should accept the principles of Hindu Vedanta and at the same time continue to be Christians.”¹⁵²

The problem, of course, lies in the fact that, as historically understood, Christianity in general, and Jesus in particular, taught and believed things which, as I will show in my closing chapter, categorically contradict Eastern monism. If the two are to be demonstrated as actually teaching the same monistic principles, then the Christian faith, and Jesus especially, must be re-examined to discover the truth behind the outward veneer. It is this project of Hinduism to which the New Age advocates have committed themselves, and which we will now explore.

Rethinking Jesus

Given the wide diversity that constitutes the New Age movement, it would be impossible to characterize every single New Ager’s view of Jesus.¹⁵³ Yet it is possible to identify several themes which characteristically manifest themselves within the movement. Groothuis helpfully delineates eight of these.¹⁵⁴

1) Regard for Jesus:

New Agers, along with many Hindus as noted earlier, hold Jesus of Nazareth in high regard, and believe him to have been an historical person. He is believed to be an example for us of how we, like him, can spiritually evolve. “Jesus is called a master, guru, yogi, adept, avatar, shaman, and way-shower.”¹⁵⁵ Many believe his miracles to have been actual evidences of his ability to tap into the divine One.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Neil, 99

¹⁵² Ibid., 101

¹⁵³ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 70

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 70-6

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 70

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

2) Jesus versus Christ:

New Agers generally hold to a distinction between Jesus and the Christ. Jesus is believed to be a mortal man who lived in Palestine in the first century A. D. But the historical Christian understanding of the term Christ as a title for the promised personal Messiah is dismissed. The term Christ comes to mean something along the lines of the great cosmic Mind, the One of monism. The Christ is considered to be a consciousness to which Jesus achieved or ascended. Paul Ferrini, a promoter of new approaches to spirituality including shamanism, is an example of one who uses this kind of thinking. He speaks of the “Christ mind.”¹⁵⁷ As Herrick explains, to Ferrini, “...Jesus is not unique; he is simply one among many spirit voices of universal truth.”¹⁵⁸ Jesus, as the Christ, is a man who has achieved the cosmic enlightenment. He has become one with the Ultimate Reality

3) No Unique Jesus:

New Agers reject any claim that Jesus was the ultimate and final revelation of the personal infinite God. He is not viewed as the only Christ, the singular Messiah. Rather, he is viewed as one who upon his enlightenment received the Christ mind or Christ Consciousness. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, claims the Jesus and Buddha are equally enlightened.¹⁵⁹

4) Jesus' Crucifixion:

Jesus' death on the cross, if it is acknowledged at all, is considered to have no ethical significance for salvation. Hahn claims that the Christian practice of communion has nothing to do with Jesus' atoning death, but rather through the act the participant deeply touches the sun, the earth, the clouds, everything in the cosmos.¹⁶⁰

5) Jesus' Resurrection:

Rather than being viewed as an historical event with profound implications for life, Jesus' resurrection is merely spiritualized in an Eastern mystical sense. If it is acknowledged at all, it is considered a spiritual triumph not unlike that of other ascended

¹⁵⁷ Herrick, 221

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 71-2

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 72

Masters. Marcus Borg, a founding member of the Jesus Seminar, declares, “I believe in the resurrection of Jesus. But I doubt that it involved anything happening to his corpse.”¹⁶¹

6) *Jesus' Return:*

Jesus' promised second coming is not a literal, physical return, but a step in the evolution of the race. Some New Age personalities have a more complete or advanced experience of this “second coming.” Thus the second coming is not a worldwide event experienced by millions, but an experience encountered by individuals through enlightenment.¹⁶²

7) *Exotic Scriptures:*

Exotic, extra-biblical writings are accepted as authentic sources of information about Jesus, and are preferred over the canon of Scripture. The Bible, though superficially resourced, is generally eclipsed by these other exotic sources that present Jesus in a completely different light than the New Testament. Among such sources are what are referred to as the Gnostic Gospels.

Groothuis quotes the scholar of world religions, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), as he comments on a quote from the purported *Gospel of Thomas*:

Now that is exactly Buddhism. We are all manifestations of Buddha consciousness, or Christ consciousness, only we do not know it. The word “Buddha” means “the one who waked up.” We all do that—to wake up to the Christ or Buddha consciousness within us. That is blasphemy in the normal way of Christian thinking, but it is the very essence of Christian Gnosticism and of the Thomas Gospel.¹⁶³

Another purported basis for the reinterpretation of Jesus held by some New Agers is rooted in the claim that Jesus, during the “lost years” between his visit to the Jerusalem at the age of twelve and his baptism by John, and about which the New Testament is silent, traveled to India and studied Buddhism.¹⁶⁴ This claim serves as the explanation of

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Mark O'Keefe, “The Jesus Wars,” *The Sunday Oregonian*, Feb. 4, 1996, L1, , cited by Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 72

¹⁶² Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 73

¹⁶³ Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, (New York, Doubleday, 1988), 57, cited by Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 74

¹⁶⁴ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 119-51

how a Jewish rabbi in Palestine would have the understanding of Eastern mysticism Jesus is purported by these New Age advocates to have possessed. These supposed travels of Jesus were allegedly unearthed by a Russian journalist named Nicolas Notovich (1858-?) who claims to have discovered a Tibetan document establishing Jesus' time in the East. This view has been promoted by Elizabeth Claire Prophet, leader of Church Universal and Triumphant. Efforts to corroborate Notovich's assertions regarding documents he claimed to have seen have met with failure and contradiction. There is no extant evidence that Jesus ever left Palestine after his parents brought him back from Egypt as a small child.¹⁶⁵

A third tack taken by other New Agers bases their reinterpretation of Jesus on their unique interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Shirley MacLaine is an example of one who asserts, without evidence, that Jesus was a member of the Essene Brotherhood, and that he held to New Age teachings of cosmic laws and karma.¹⁶⁶

8) Esoteric Doctrines:

One might ask how it is that millions upon millions of Christians down through the millennia have all completely missed these understandings of Jesus in their reading of the New Testament, yet a handful of individuals who are typically on the margins of Christianity, if not completely estranged from it, have managed to discover these meanings. The answer lies in the concept of the esoteric nature of spiritual reality.

Esoteric: Secret, likely understood by only a few with specialized knowledge.
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Groothuis explains:

Christianity is deemed a mere rigid shell of "exoteric" (or external) religion disconnected from the inner or "esoteric" core of spiritual reality. For Christianity to be salvaged and rehabilitated for the New Age, it must be reinterpreted esoterically.¹⁶⁷

This esoteric aspect of the New Age interpretation of Jesus and Christian scripture illustrates one of the close connections between the New Age and ancient Gnosticism. The ancient Gnostics believed they had a corner on a secret knowledge of reality. In its quasi-Christian manifestation, it taught that only a select few held the true secret

¹⁶⁵ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 73, 133-51

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 74

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 75

knowledge about Jesus. A discovery in Egypt in the middle of the last century cemented that connection even further.

The Knowing Ones

In December of 1945, near the Egyptian city of Nag Hammadi, a farmer by the name of Mohammed Ali Shamman was off in search of some natural fertilizer in the mountains near his home. In the course of his digging, he came across a red earthenware jar approximately three feet tall. Initially he feared opening the jar, thinking it might contain an evil spirit. Eventually, however, his curiosity, and the prospect of discovering hidden gold, overcame his reluctance. What he discovered were a dozen books, consisting of 52 assorted manuscripts, bound in brown leather cases.¹⁶⁸

The story of those books over the next ten years is a tale worthy of Indiana Jones. But by 1955, when most were held in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, their true value was established. The Nag-Hammadi.com website reports the true nature of Shamman's find:

In his story, Mohammed Ali Shamman admitted that some pages had been lost, burnt or thrown away. Even so, he had laid his hands on a fabulous treasure with its Coptic translations, dating back to the 2nd century AC, of religious and philosophical texts that were even older, initially written in Greek and a few fragments of which had been unearthed by archaeologists some 50 years earlier!¹⁶⁹

What was of particular significance in these documents, and what makes them of interest in this present study, is that the texts represented the writings of an ancient Christian heresy called *Gnosticism*. While some of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi had been referred to and denounced in the writings of early Christian fathers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and hence were not unknown to scholars, the actual texts themselves were believed to be extinct.¹⁷⁰

The discovery of these books, which were Coptic translations of the Greek originals, fueled a renewed interest in the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism, and has

¹⁶⁸ <http://www.nag-hammadi.com/history.html>, last accessed 4/4/13

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 82

helped to encourage the New Age reinterpretation of Jesus. Groothuis discusses this enthusiasm:

Although much excitement has been generated by the Nag Hammadi discoveries, not a little misunderstanding has been mixed with the enthusiasm. The overriding assumption of many is that the treatises unearthed in upper Egypt contained “lost books of the Bible” of historical stature equal to or greater than the New Testament books. Much of this has been fueled by the titles of some of the documents themselves, particularly the so-called Gnostic Gospels: the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the *Gospel of Truth*. The connotation of a “Gospel” is that it presents the life of Jesus as a teacher, preacher, and healer and is similar in style, if not content, to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.¹⁷¹

Gnosticism refers to an ancient philosophy which gained influence in the church from the second to fourth centuries A. D. The nineteenth-century Christian theologian J. B. Lightfoot says that Gnosticism was not an offspring of Christianity, as some modern monists propose, but was rather an independent philosophy that eventually gained some traction within the Christian church.¹⁷² Modern Gnosticism was advanced by, among other things, the founding of Theosophy by Madame Helene P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) in 1875.¹⁷³ Theosophy, in common with ancient Gnosticism, holds to an emphasis on esoteric teaching, the hidden divinity of humanity, and interaction with spiritual beings called masters or adepts.¹⁷⁴ Several aspects of Gnosticism make it particularly attractive to modern day adherents of New Age or Eastern monism. I will provide here only a minimalist description of some Gnostic beliefs that pertain to monism.

As the name indicates, Gnosticism implies the possession of some superior or “esoteric” knowledge.¹⁷⁵ The word *gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnōskō* (γινώσκω), pertaining to knowledge.¹⁷⁶ Hence to be a Gnostic was to be someone with knowledge. Only certain elites were privileged to possess or attain to that knowledge.

¹⁷¹ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 102-3

¹⁷² J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, (Lynn, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2nd printing 1982), 81

¹⁷³ Groothuis, 81

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Lightfoot, 77

¹⁷⁶ Fredrick William Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd Edition, (**BDAG**), (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2000), 199-201

That knowledge had to do with how to know the otherwise unknowable God. Groothuis says:

“*Gnosticism* refers to a related body of teachings stressing the acquisition of “gnosis,” or secret inner knowledge. The knowledge sought is not strictly intellectual, but mystical; not merely a detached knowledge of or about something, but a knowing by experience or participation.¹⁷⁷

Additionally, Gnosticism taught that man’s problem was ignorance of the *gnosis*, not sin.¹⁷⁸ Hence, Jesus is not represented as the crucified and risen Lord, as the atonement for sin, but rather as a dispenser of the *gnosis*.¹⁷⁹ This aspect of Gnosticism is clearly parallel to the Eastern and New Age monistic idea of attaining a new consciousness. To the gnostic, God was unknowable in an objective sense, he must be experienced. Gnostics believed that matter/creation was evil, hence the necessity of man to free himself from the influence of matter and the body.¹⁸⁰ This has its counterpart in monism, which views our perception of reality as *maya*, from which one must free himself. Since God was so remote, his interaction with corrupt matter/creation could only be through lower divine emanations, æons, spirits, or angels.¹⁸¹ These emanations find a striking parallel with the “beings” and spiritual “guides” which New Age and Eastern practitioners report to have encountered in their meditative states. In their view of Jesus, Gnostics tended to make a distinction between Jesus and Christ.¹⁸² Jesus was merely a man, Christ was a spirit or enlightenment that Jesus achieved. The second century leading Gnostic, Valentinus, taught that the Christ spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism and departed from him before his death.¹⁸³

The Christian fathers of the early centuries took vigorous exception to Gnosticism, and wrote strongly refuting it. In addition, some see in the writings of the Apostle Paul and Saint John particularly (i.e. Colossians and I John) references to Gnosticism, though it is unlikely that any thorough-going Gnostic doctrines were

¹⁷⁷ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 78

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, *Jesus...*, 87

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86

¹⁸⁰ Curtis Vaughn, “Colossians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, Zonservan, 1978), 167

¹⁸¹ Lightfoot, 78

¹⁸² Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 70

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 90

established in the New Testament era churches.¹⁸⁴ As a force within Christianity, Gnosticism did not gain significant influence until the second century. It is believed, however, that Paul and John were responding to early or incipient elements of Gnostic thought both within the wider culture and in the church itself.¹⁸⁵

Eventually, the church established clearly that Gnosticism was not Christian, and was, in fact, a heresy.¹⁸⁶ By the fourth century its influence within the church had waned. Modern Gnostics contend that the New Testament documents do not represent true Christianity, and that the Gnostic truths had been suppressed by the church for political purposes. As Groothuis shows, modern Gnostics claim,

...since Gnosticism was suppressed and lost out historically, it must be somehow superior. This assumption, made by Elaine Pagels and others, also contends that Gnosticism was rejected because it threatened orthodoxy. It had to be suppressed for political and ecclesiastical reasons—not because it was theologically defective.¹⁸⁷

Groothuis critiques this reasoning: “The novelty of any position does nothing to logically establish its truth. ...was the church afraid of Gnosticism? Or was Gnosticism simply not credible as a record of what the actual historical Jesus said and lived?”¹⁸⁸

The significance of the Nag-Hammadi texts is that for the first time we possessed very early extant translations of the original gnostic-Christian writings. New Age adherents have latched on to the Nag-Hammadi texts in order to fortify their belief that Jesus taught a monistic spirituality and that he was not what Christians have claimed for two millennia, but was rather an enlightened man in the same class as Buddha or Krishna.¹⁸⁹

A thorough critique of the Nag-Hammadi texts, and their trustworthiness as a representation of the earliest teachings of Jesus and the Apostles lies beyond the scope of this paper. The reader who wishes to read more on the subject would benefit from reading Douglas Groothuis’ book, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy*. Let it suffice for now to say simply that scholarly research demonstrates that these so-called Gnostic gospels pale in

¹⁸⁴ Vaughan, 166

¹⁸⁵ Lightfoot, 74-5; Vaughn, 167

¹⁸⁶ Herrick, 178-79; Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 82, 117

¹⁸⁷ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 148

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 148

¹⁸⁹ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 71-2

comparison to the New Testament documents, not only in theological content, but in three key ways that call into question their historical reliability as faithful representations of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰ As Groothuis explains:

If a document is historically reliable, it is trustworthy in what it affirms and is faithful to the facts. We can gauge historical reliability by inquiring into how the text stands up to questioning in three areas: integrity, authenticity, and veracity. ...*Integrity* concerns the preservation of the writing through history. ...*Authenticity* concerns the authorship of a given writing. ...*Veracity* concerns the truthfulness of the author of the text.¹⁹¹

It is in precisely these three areas that the Gnostic writings fail to demonstrate their historical credibility when it comes to the Christian faith or the life and teachings of Jesus.¹⁹² As Groothuis says in another place: “Much modern scholarship supports the historical credibility of the canonical Gospels as reliable records of what really happened. The Gnostic Gospels, on the other hand, have little or no historical credibility.”¹⁹³

New Agers and modern Gnostics claim that Gnosticism was really the true doctrine of the early church, and that the Gnostic gospels were suppressed later by the church. Facts are stubborn things, however, and in spite of the support the Gnostic writings receive in the popular media which loves any novel idea and feeds on controversy, the Gnostic gospels fail when compared against the New Testament in precisely those three areas of integrity, authenticity, and veracity. The Christian scholar, F. F. Bruce puts it rather bluntly: “There is no reason why the student of the conflict should shrink from making a value judgment: the Gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose.”¹⁹⁴

Two closing points should be made in reference to the New Age reinterpretation of Jesus and Christianity:

First, it needs to be clearly understood that what New Agers are saying is that the Christian church does not know what its own scriptures teach. Rather, they argue, the

¹⁹⁰ Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 105-18

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 105

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 105-08

¹⁹³ Groothuis, *Unmasking...*, 148

¹⁹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1988), 277, cited by Groothuis, *Jesus...*, 101

Bible is to be read from a distinctly Eastern monistic frame of mind. This, however, contradicts a fundamental rule of understanding the meaning of any ancient text. That rule demands careful attention be paid to the cultural and temporal context of the person who wrote it and of those to whom it was originally written. Jesus was a first-century Jew. There is no credible evidence that as a young man or adult he ever traveled more than 100 miles from his place of birth in Palestine. Everything he taught, he did so as a Jew speaking primarily to other Jews within a fully Jewish culture. It is clear, as well, that he intended himself to be understood, and held his disciples and listeners accountable for understanding and acting upon his teachings.

There is nothing in the New Testament records that would lead the honest student to expect or find any Eastern pantheistic monism in anything Jesus said. It simply is not there. To read it into the text is to lift the entire New Testament story out of Palestine and place it squarely in India. This, of course, is surely the motive for finding some reason to believe that Jesus traveled to India before beginning his public ministry. But even if that were allowed, one would have to conclude that upon his return to Palestine, he amounted to a terrible failure as a teacher, because until the last fifty to one hundred years, nobody has had any clue that he was really teaching monistic pantheism. Not even his twelve closest disciples, who spread the Christian gospels throughout the known world before their deaths, including to the sub-continent of India, had any idea of his monistic pantheistic teachings.

What is striking about this reading into the text a monistic pantheism is that it is a feature of present day postmodernism that disregards the original intent of the author, and permits the reader to attach whatever meaning he or she chooses to a text. But this certainly backfires on the New Ager. If the New Age advocate wishes to assert that they are free to assign any meaning they wish to the New Testament, then, of course, so is everyone else, and the New Testament ceases to have any intrinsic meaning, and we have no basis whatsoever to claim that Jesus taught anything. The New Ager taking the postmodern approach has just pulled the rug out from under himself. He may say, "This is what this passage says *to me*." But he cannot claim that that is precisely what Jesus taught.

Finally, there is a great deal of pretension within Eastern monism and with the Western New Age of a high regard for Jesus and for Christianity as a religion. However, it is neither tolerance or respect of someone else's religion to co-opt it for yourself, reinterpreting it in order to force it into the shape of one's own religion. This is what the New Age has done. What they claim to respect is their own religion, and their own religion's questionable spin on the New Testament. They are not respecting the historic Christian faith or its adherents, and, most importantly, they are not holding in high regard the true Jesus of history.

A NEW AGE PRICE TAG

*“If you get to it,
And you cannot do it,
There you jolly-well are,
Aren't you?”
-Richard Buckley-*

Every ideology comes with a price tag. Even Christianity. Jesus said: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27) The Apostle Paul spoke of the price he paid to be a follower of Jesus: “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7,8).

But if there is a price tag for the Christian faith, what might be the price tag for New Age or Eastern monism? What are the trade-offs, the undetected implications, the intellectual ground yielded? What are the things lost that can never be regained? Consider a few.

A Closed Universe

First, let us consider a conclusion that monism shares with naturalism, that the universe is a closed system. Over the past two hundred years, many in the West have lived with this proposition, but it is fraught with difficulty nevertheless. The primary difficulty with a closed universe, that which precludes a transcendent God, is that it erases any meaningful basis for morality, for good and evil. In Sire’s words:

The New Age worldview falls prey to all the pitfalls of solipsism and egoism. Yet virtually no proponent of the system pays any attention to that problem. Why? Because, I presume, they buy the

<p>Solipsism: the view or theory that the self is all that can be known to exist.</p> <p>Egoism: an ethical theory that treats self-interest as the foundation of morality.</p>

consequences and are unconcerned. ...There is simply no place for ethical distinctions.¹⁹⁵

Of course, the closed universe still leaves us with a troubling question which stirs in the universal human mind. Instinctively, we know that nothing finite exists without a cause. So where does this universe come from, and more importantly, why? And if I cannot answer that question, then how in any way is my own life significant? To the honest monist, it isn't. Neil asks:

But would it not seem paradoxical, and contrary to everything that we know of ourselves and of the universe that we inhabit, to suppose that the most crucial thing that has yet appeared on this planet, individual awareness, is destined simply to vanish and to leave no trace in a total re-absorption into the impersonal?¹⁹⁶

We will consider more on the subject of the impersonal below.

Things That Go Bump In My Consciousness

Part of the baggage of the new consciousness, as Sire observes, is what it borrows from animism, that is a “host of demigods, demons and guardians who inhabit the separate reality or the inner spaces of the mind.”¹⁹⁷ He goes on to point out the irony that, “Modern folk have fled from Grandfather’s clockwork universe to Great-great-grandfather’s chamber of gothic horrors.”¹⁹⁸

Christianity, of course, affirms the existence of demons, angels, etc. The distinction is that in the Bible these beings are under the authority of the transcendent God. Further, humans are forbidden to serve them, worship them, or seek their aid or assistance. This is precisely one point at which Gnosticism departed from the Christian message, encouraging the worship of angels and engaging with the intermediary beings supposedly existing between man and the unknowable God.¹⁹⁹

This other spiritual world is not one to be trifled with, as Tal Brooke discovered. Recall again his terrible sense as he approached enlightenment in a cultic vision:

¹⁹⁵ Sire, 209

¹⁹⁶ Neil, 115

¹⁹⁷ Sire, 209

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 209-10

¹⁹⁹ Lightfoot, 78-9

Why is it that every time I reach this same gate, this narrow choice of initiation...does it bear total resemblance to the very horrors that I most instinctively feared as a small child, the deepest things of Satan? Why does the predominant feeling have to be evil and not good? Or why can't it be at least a gray mixture in between? Why never the bells of bliss? For at the final moment, the carpet is pulled from under you, and you still have to pass through the fire and kiss the feet of some demon god. And only then can you pass through the tunnel that you can never see the other side of.²⁰⁰

Later, as he contemplated his vision, he thought:

A very unsavory, unwelcome, 'unevolved' thought kept haunting me and would not go away. It was the matter of Demon Possession. What if on the other side of Explosion the process was not man becoming God at all? What if it was rather man being conned into emptying himself, because of his ambition to become God, and in the process hooking up with a vast demonic principality and intelligence that was masquerading as God-consciousness?²⁰¹

Unsavory thoughts, indeed!

Epistemological Nihilism

Another price tag on the new consciousness is how it views reality. The New Age adherent trades objective reality for subjective experience. All descriptions of reality are equally valid. There is no truth correspondence. Sire points out that, "Taken to its logical conclusion, this notion is a form of epistemological nihilism."²⁰²

This view of reality leaves one with no means of testing reality whatsoever. The "insane" person in the mental ward of the local hospital claiming to be a purple elephant may be as sane as anyone. They are simply constructing their own reality. Who is to say otherwise?²⁰³

Karma, Sin, and Compassion

Perhaps no cost is greater for the monist, who adheres to a circular rather than linear view of time, than the problem of sin—not the sin of others, but his own. As Neil

²⁰⁰ Brooke, 168-69

²⁰¹ Ibid., 169

²⁰² Sire, 212

²⁰³ Ibid., 212-13

remarks, “It is perhaps not surprising that the word ‘forgiveness’ is rarely found in Hindu writings. Everything is neatly tied up in the doctrine of *karma*, retribution. . . . The ordinary Hindu regards forgiveness as impossible—the iron law of *karma* cannot be broken.”²⁰⁴

The belief in *karma*, so prevalent in expressions of monism, is considered to be the retribution for “sins” done in the past. It is sometimes argued that this belief is evidence of the pantheist’s belief in the value of compassion. But Os Guinness delineates the critical distinction between pantheistic unselfishness and Christian compassion:

For the Buddhist the practice of unselfishness is simply part of the overall technique of divesting oneself of the illusion of self. Zaehner writes, ‘Compassion is recommended not as being intrinsically good, but as being empirically efficient in ridding the mind of the erroneous idea of individual personality.’ Thus karma is not technically compassion, but ‘right-mindfulness,’ a further stage on Gautama’s Noble Eightfold Path.²⁰⁵

This exposes a further cost of the doctrine of *karma*: it actually serves as a *disincentive* to acts of compassion, as Sire points out:

Karma demands that every soul suffer for its past “sins,” so there is no value in alleviating suffering. The soul so helped will have to suffer later. So there is no agape love, giving love, nor would any such love benefit the recipient. One does good deeds in order to attain to unity with the One. Doing good is first and foremost a self-helping way of life.²⁰⁶

With this in mind, it then becomes clear that the “sin” or “wrong” that requires the iron law of retribution of *karma*, has nothing to do with actions being intrinsically contrary to an absolute moral standard, but merely with mistakes made due to *maya* which hinder our progression on the upward path to *nirvana* or Oneness. Sin then is not sin, but ignorance, and salvation comes not through forgiveness, but through knowledge (in the Eastern sense of higher consciousness).

This doctrine however flies in the face of the innate human experience. Humans know, instinctively, that they have sinned. Awareness of guilt is a universal human condition. We have a term for those who possess no sense of guilt: sociopath. Monism

²⁰⁴ Neil, 122-23

²⁰⁵ Guinness, 226-7

²⁰⁶ Sire 157

offers no solution for the problem of sin, only a fatalistic expectation that they will encounter in the future the repercussions of “mistakes” made in this life.

The Christian doctrine of sin, on the other hand, may seem far more severe in its assessment of mankind, but it provides a powerful remedy in the biblical doctrine of forgiveness, and a glorious hope for the future.

Additionally, the Christian doctrine of compassion is not based on the personal acquisition of *nirvana* or Oneness, but in the intrinsic worth of every other person because they are made in God’s image and are the objects of his love and compassion.

Dissolution of the Individual

Finally, but certainly not least, consider the price paid in monism by the denial of personality or individuality. In Sire’s words, “Atman is Brahman. Brahman is one and impersonal. Therefore, Atman is impersonal.”²⁰⁷ According to monism, human beings, in their very essence, are impersonal because they are one with ultimate Reality, which is wholly impersonal.

Guinness assesses this view of humanness:

...the Eastern answer for personality is not so much solution as dissolution. ...This view of personality—in essence an excessive attachment to detachment—inevitably leads to a radically pessimistic view of the value of individuality in this life. ...Monism thus leads to the notion that a person cannot be helped as an individual because his or her individuality is the essential problem. They must be helped *from* their individuality; they must merge with the Absolute. ...Meher Baba says, ‘A real merging of the limited in the ocean of universal life involves complete surrender of separative existence in all its forms.’²⁰⁸

This is a gut-wrenching price for the would-be monist to pay. It is our sense of personality, of personal identity, even through all the changes of life, that gives the human soul its sense of significance. Neil writes:

Is this all to be lost, as we move higher in the evolutionary scale? ...But would it not seem paradoxical, and contrary to everything that we know of ourselves and of the universe that we inhabit, to suppose that the most crucial thing that has yet appeared on this planet, individual awareness, is

²⁰⁷ Sire, 154

²⁰⁸ Guinness, 219

destined simply to vanish and to leave no trace in a total re-absorption into the impersonal?²⁰⁹

Yet this is not for what man was intended. Solomon tells us that “God has set eternity in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). It is this “eternity” in the heart of a person that causes them to yearn, not for their ultimate dissolution, but for the personal experience of something far greater than they have known so far. This is intrinsic to what it means to be human. To sacrifice this enduring identity, one’s true self, created in the image of God for the pleasure of friendship with him, on the altar of cosmic oneness, to be nothing but a drop of water merged indistinguishably with the ocean, is a very high price to pay indeed.

If these are some of the costs of the monistic worldview, and those costs seem too high, what is the alternative? In the next, final, chapter, we will consider what the Christian faith offers in contrast to monism.

²⁰⁹ Neil, 115

NO DISAPPOINTMENT

*Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.
-Isaiah, Paul-*

The claim made by Eastern and New Age monists that Christianity ultimately leads to the same place and that it “worships the same God” as the monistic worldview, is one that fails completely when examined in light of the actual teachings of the Christian Scripture. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine how two religious frames of mind could be any more opposite than Christianity and monism.

As we now begin to examine the Christian answer to New Age monism, it is important to keep in mind, that all fundamental Christian beliefs are rooted not only in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament as well. Among these are the personality of God, the holiness/separateness of God, the linear nature of time, the doctrine of sin and the fall, the atonement through the sacrificial death of the Messiah, the resurrection, the Second Coming, and many others.

This is a critical point, given the New Age/Gnostic propensity to rely on exotic Gnostic texts which purport to better represent Jesus’ teaching than do the New Testament documents. However, as has already been pointed out, Jesus taught from a distinctly Jewish context, to a distinctly Jewish populace, expecting to be understood by Jews steeped in the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament). The success of Jesus’ ministry hinged completely on His ability to demonstrate that His life and message was a fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). To suggest that Jesus actually taught Gnostic or monistic principles lifts him and His words completely out of the Jewish context in which they belong, particularly the milieu of the Law and the Prophets.

A Critical Comparison

The Glory Of Separateness

It doesn’t take one long, having picked up a copy of the Bible and beginning to read, to encounter teachings which directly contradict monism. In the first verses of

Genesis we are confronted not only with a self-conscious personal God who exists separate from creation, *His* creation, but the clear teaching that the separateness and distinctness of all finite things is central to the plan and purpose of God.

The writer of Genesis tells us that, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:1, 2). The idea that God is above, apart from, and the originator of all finite things pervades all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus believed and taught creation by God as historical fact. In conversation with the Pharisees he said: “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4). The Psalmist records the words of God as he summons all mankind to judgment, “You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes” (Psalm 50:21). The idea that all is God is absolutely foreign to the Psalmist, and incurs the judgment of Yahweh.

In the second verse of Genesis, quoted above, it is said that immediately after creation the earth was “formless and empty.” It had none of the features it would soon come to possess with the exception of water covering the surface of the earth. Throughout the following verses we find God acting repeatedly to bring separations and distinctions out of this formlessness. This is fundamental to a Christian view of nature. God separated the waters. He separated the land from the water. He separated the night and day. He separated the lights in the heavens. He created a variety of vegetation, causing each kind of vegetation to bear fruit only after its own kind. He went on to create various kinds of birds, crawling creatures, beasts, etc., each one being given the capacity to procreate “after its kind.” Finally, he created mankind, with a distinction between man and woman, as Jesus pointed out. What is abundantly clear before we ever get out of the first chapter of the Bible is that God did not want the Jews thinking in terms of the “oneness” of all things, but rather viewing the vast diversity of creation as a glorious and splendid expression of the goodness and purpose of God. The Apostle Paul tells the Greek speculators on Mars Hill that the God he preached was the one who “made the world and all things in it” (Acts 17:24). This is hardly the monistic view of the oneness of all things and the “illusion” of separateness.

The First Heresy

Monists claim that they are one in essence with the One, that they are God. The inclination of man or woman to view themselves on a level with God, or to be one in essence with God, goes to the very core of the first lie which brought about the fallen nature of man. Satan, who had already chosen to exalt himself to equality with God (Isaiah 14:12-14), came to Eve in the Garden, enticing her with the prospect that she could be “like God” in His divine attributes (Genesis 3:5). The enticement of monism to come to the consciousness of oneness with the One is simply a contemporary expression of the oldest heresy, the one to which Adam and Eve fell prey in the Garden, the belief that man could be equal to God. It is, as Paul says, the worship of the creature rather than the creator (Romans 1:25). It is the terrible error into which the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar fell, demanding that all His subjects worship him rather than the living God (Daniel 3:1-7). Eventually, God humbled him through seven years of madness (Daniel 4:28-33). Nebuchadnezzar’s tribute to God at the end of this period is hardly the testimony of a monist: “For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:34, 35).

A New Mind

To the Eastern or New Age monist, the key to realization of what one truly is, His or her oneness with ultimate Reality, is to achieve a new or altered consciousness that lifts one from the *maya* of this life into the realization of oneness with God. Salvation then, to the monist, is not to be delivered from sin, but is rather to be delivered from the ignorance of *maya*. As we have seen, this new consciousness leads ultimately to the loss of personality, of the true individual.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that the root problem is sin and calls men and women to repentance (Grk: μετανοεω), which means a change of mind.²¹⁰ Paul says that God is calling all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Jesus teaches that the

²¹⁰ BDAG, 640

problem with men is not their ignorance, but rather their sinful will. “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:43, 44). In another place he says, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17).

The change of consciousness the New Ager seeks is to be realized through any of a number of techniques, common among them are yoga and meditation which are intended to empty one’s mind of ordinary thoughts in the hopes of escaping from *maya*. In contrast, meditation in the Bible refers to content directed thoughts, typically on God, His works, and His revelation: “I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalm 63:6). “I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds” (Psalm 72:12). “And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Your statutes” (Psalm 119:48). The Apostle Paul speaks of how Christ cleanses His people through the “washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:26), and talks of having our minds renewed in accordance with God’s will (Romans 12:2). He also speaks of having the mind of Christ, which is not some empty or contentless mind, but rather a specific way of thinking—not thinking of ourselves as higher than others, but thinking of ourselves as the servants of others (Philippians 2:3-7). The “new mind” of the believer is neither a loss of personality or individuality in experiencing the universal Oneness, but is rather the fulfillment of our personhood by having our minds filled with the things about which God thinks.

The Christian Hope

The Christian anticipation of the future stands in stark contrast to that of the New Age. The New Age vision is one of a grand utopian world where humankind has finally awakened to its divinity. It is achieved through a slow process of evolutionary consciousness-raising. Flying in the face of this optimistic vision is the reality of those places where monism has been most prevalent for over two millennia, such as India.

By contrast, the biblical view of the future is dualistic. Jesus speaks repeatedly of a judgment in which there is a separation: “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left” (Matthew 25:31,

32). He goes on to speak of the “sheep” entering into His kingdom, one in which, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). For those, however, who have refused His offer of salvation, the “goats,” Jesus teaches there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 18:28). The inauguration of the new kingdom of God will come not through the progressive improvement of mankind: “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). Rather, it will be accomplished by the arrival of Jesus Christ in majestic glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 22:20).

Only By Me

The New Age belief that all religions are essentially the same contradicts the words of Jesus. He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, saying, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers”(John 4:22, 23). Clearly, Jesus taught that not all religions lead to the same place and that there are true, and by implication, false, worshippers. To His disciples he said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). In Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill, he declares that God is calling all worshipers of other religions to repentance and worship of the God revealed in Jesus (Acts 17:22-31).

The Problem of Evil

As we have seen, New Age ideology tends to erase any distinction between good and evil. If all is One, then good and evil are also one with the One. In contrast, both the Old and New Testaments could not be any clearer in affirming the absolute goodness of God without any shade of evil. The apostle John reports: “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). They also affirm the real existence of both good and evil within the

created order.²¹¹ God says repeatedly things like, “For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45), and “For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:3). The account of the fall of man into sin is recorded at the conclusion of the creation narrative (Genesis 3), and the rest of the story of the Bible is one of explaining what God is doing about man’s sin predicament. Jesus claimed that he was God’s provision for the forgiveness of sins: “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Matthew 9:6).

Within New Age monism, the chief cause of man’s predicament is one of ignorance or illusion (*maya*). The answer to the problem is knowledge, or the new consciousness. From the opening pages of the Bible, man’s predicament is clearly defined as having rejected his Creator and betrayed His holy standard. Though the consequence of this rebellion includes faulty faculties of reason, the solution to the problem lies not in knowledge, but in atonement for sin and forgiveness (Romans 1:18-32, 3:23-4).

“What Is Truth?”

Monism, as we have seen, rejects all duality, and in doing so it rejects the duality of the knower and the known. Thus, truth is ultimately unknowable, and logic and reason are of no value in the new consciousness. Earlier, we examined the uncomfortable paradox in which this places the monist.

In distinction, the Bible presents truth as both existing and knowable, and presents its case with exacting logic. To the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah God says, “Come now, and let us reason together...” (Isaiah 1:18). In Jesus’ confrontations with His opponents he repeatedly relied upon the strongest logic. His logical reasoning from the Old Testament scriptures was so powerful that it eventually silenced His challengers (Matthew 22:41-46).

Jesus was recognized by His disciples to be the embodiment of truth: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only

²¹¹ For a substantial study of the “problem of evil” from a biblical perspective, see my paper: Rick Harvey, *As Sparks Fly Upward*, (unpublished paper, 2012). <http://www.hearbibleteaching.org/Resources/assets/SparksFlyUpward.pdf>, last accessed 4/9/13

begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)—a point which he made about himself: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Additionally, Jesus told Pilate that he had been sent into the world in order to testify to the truth, and that those who were “of the truth” would hear His voice (John 18:37). The Apostle Paul’s writings and teachings are filled with the strongest logic, as are those of the rest of the New Testament writers. The book of Hebrews, in particular, is relentless in reasoning logically, showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, a point that escapes those who attempt to lift the life and teachings of Jesus from their Jewish context.

“Who Do Men Say That I Am?”

No teachings of New Age monism are more at odds with the Bible than their reinterpretation of Jesus. The New Testament records, which we have seen in earlier presentations by Kyle and Doug, have the strongest credibility of any ancient documents. The historical record they afford demonstrates that Jesus was a Jew, born of a Jewess of the House of David, and adopted by her husband, himself a Jew of the House of David. Except for the first two years of His life, when he was kept in Egypt to protect him from the murderous King Herod, the records give no hint of him spending any part of His life anywhere but within one hundred miles of His hometown of Nazareth.

The Apostle Matthew, in his gospel, prefaces his account of the birth of Jesus with these words: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows...” (Matthew 1:18). According to Matthew, Jesus was Christ at the time of His birth. The word “Christ,” (Grk: Χριστος) was not the name or designation of some spirit or consciousness to which Jesus later attained (some New Agers think at the time of His baptism). Rather, Christ is the Greek word to designate the man whom God had promised to send. The promise that God would send such a man was first made in Genesis to Adam and Eve, referring to him to as the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15). The word Christ means “anointed one,”²¹² and as such was a reference to the one who would ascend to the throne of David. The kings of Israel were typically anointed with oil to designate that they had been chosen of God for that responsibility (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:12), hence to the Jews the Christ, the

²¹² BDAG, 1091

“Anointed One,” was the promised one who would sit on the throne of David, not some expansive Christ-consciousness. Among Gentile Christians the term Christ became essentially another name for the man Jesus.²¹³

In the Jewish milieu in which Jesus lived and taught, he made what were clearly unambiguous claims to be God in the terms of the transcendent personal God of Israel. It must be remembered that he made these claims in a context in which it was considered blasphemy for any man to do so. The Jews knew that only God could forgive sins, and Jesus used this very point to demonstrate His divinity (Luke 5:21-24). Jesus claimed oneness with the Father, not the god of an Indian guru, but the God worshipped by the Jews, Yahweh of Sinai. The Jews understood clearly His claim, and picked up stones to kill him (John 10:31-33). Using the Jewish name of God, *I Am*, reserved only for Yahweh since the days of Moses, Jesus claimed to be the pre-existent God of Israel: “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him...” (John 8:58).

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are represented in the New Testament as fully historical facts, complete with hundreds of eyewitnesses (Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 15:6). Further, they are attributed throughout the New Testament documents as having the ultimate spiritual significance for the satisfaction of God’s holy demands for the punishment of mankind’s sin (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2), a point which Jesus himself clearly made about His death on the evening prior to His crucifixion: “And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:27, 28).

Jesus’ physical ascension into heaven is represented as the prototype of precisely how he will return at the end of the age (Acts 1:11). In the meantime, Jesus instructed His disciples to be about the task of taking His teachings to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

²¹³ BDAG, 1091

The Ultimate Lie

With only this brief sketch, we see how diametrically opposed are the teachings of the Bible to those of Eastern pantheistic and New Age monism. But what is also striking is the close connection the monistic beliefs hold to that fatal day at the dawn of time in the Garden, when Satan sought to fulfill his own lust to overthrow God and exalt himself by enticing Adam and Eve into the delusion that they, too, could be equal with God.

Of course, it was the ultimate deception—the promise that becoming divine could be achieved in asserting one’s independence from God. Satan knew that Adam and Eve would never find freedom in disobedience, but would, in fact, become slaves in Satan’s domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

The deceptive lure of pantheistic monism is the contemporary version of the original plan and purpose of Satan, deceiving men and women into delusion that they are truly god, and that the God revealed in the Bible is only a sad illusion. To the attractiveness of freedom from the demands of a holy God is added the intoxicating liquor of pride, that one can join the elite few who have attained to the secret knowledge, the new consciousness of oneness with the One.

As Sire asks, “Is the New Age a step beyond Nihilism? Does it deliver what it promises—a new life, a new person, a new age? One thing is clear: it hasn’t yet, and the *mañana* argument is not reassuring.”²¹⁴

What is particularly sobering is the fact that in order to experience oneness with the One, the individual must abandon reason, logic, truth, and moral judgment, believing that all they currently know is only illusion, releasing themselves blindly into an unknown spiritual Oneness. It is the ultimate leap of faith. Disillusioned with the world one knows, the New Ager abandons hope of a verifiable reality, and plunges head first into an abyss that offers no reason, no morality, and no evidence that it is what it claims to be.

But if the biblical account of reality is true, then that other spiritual reality that awaits the “cosmic rider” is not oneness with ultimate Reality, but is rather an introduction into a world of demonic evil. Once someone is there, is there any hope for

²¹⁴ Sire, 208

return? In the words of Os Guinness, “A sign should be blazoned across the pathway of our times—The East, No Exit!”²¹⁵

In contrast, Jesus of Nazareth, the Anointed of God, stands as he has for two millennia, with the invitation for all the spiritually weary—an invitation which has echoed across the centuries and around the world, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). For those who are spiritually hungry he says, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger...” (John 6:35). And to the spiritually thirsty he promises, “...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

This is the Jesus of Scripture. He is the unique revelation of the personal God. He is the atonement for our sins. He is the resurrection and the life! Since He first walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, many millions upon millions have responded to His invitation, and discovered the truth of the ancient promise: “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed” (Romans 10:11).

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God...
And the Word became flesh,
and dwelt among us,
and we saw His glory,
glory as of the only begotten from the Father,
full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1, 14)*

²¹⁵ Guinness, 227

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