

**The Postmodern Phenomena of New
Age Spirituality:
Examples in Popular Literature
by Mark Bair***

This paper is an attempt to better understand the new brand of spirituality that is being written about on a popular level today. My concern is that we better understand it so that we can both avoid deception in the church and communicate the Christian gospel more clearly in the present context. I believe we need updated *apologetics* rather than update *theology* for the 1990's, as some have suggested. The first step in improving our apologetics is trying to decipher what form the "fortresses raised up against the knowledge of God" are presently taking. As Francis Shaeffer said before there even was a term "New Age:"

If a man goes overseas for any length of time we would expect him to learn the language of the country to which he is going. More than this is needed, however, if he is really going to communicate with the people among whom he is living. He must learn about another language--that of the thought forms of the people to whom he speaks. Only so will he have real communication with them. So it is with the Christian church. Its responsibility is not only to hold to the basic, scriptural principals of the Christian faith, but to communicate these unchanging truths 'into' the generation in which it is living.

Every generation of Christians has the problem of learning how to speak meaningfully to its own age. It cannot be solved without an understanding of the changing existential situation which it faces. If we are to communicate the Christian faith effectively, therefore, we must know and understand the thought-forms of our own generation.¹

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In order to aid the reader in the task of understanding our generation, this paper will examine contemporary authors who represent spiritual ideas that are counterfeits of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reader I have in mind is the concerned Christian worker who has a general awareness of the so-called New Age Movement, but is perhaps unaware of actual proponents of these ideas and how they are introducing them. Before I get to those specific ideas, I want to look at some introductory and background issues.

First of all, how should we categorize? While the term "New Age Movement" can be helpful for generalizing about a *broad set of trends*, it can also be misleading. For one thing, the term "movement" implies a somewhat monolithic ideology and organization. For some it may conjure up the image of a political movement. But that would miss its subtlety. However we understand the New Age Movement, it is certainly neither a monolithic ideology nor a centrally organized entity. As a *Time* article noted in December 1987, it is a shifting kaleidoscope of "beliefs, fads, and rituals." For these reasons, it can be hard to generalize about. Russell Chandler observes:

By and large, New Age is a modern revival of ancient religious traditions, along with a potpourri of influences: Eastern mysticism, modern philosophy and psychology, science and science fiction, and the counterculture of the '50s and '60s...Also contributing to the New Age way of thinking is Chinese Taoism, which believes that there is a single principal underlying everything (the Tao), Ancient Gnosticism and its doctrine of enlightenment is also an influence, as well as strands of Neoplatonism, medieval witchcraft, Greek mythology, and Native American thought.²

While I believe this observation is true, it in no way describes any one person. All these elements have their adherents, but most people would not hold to all of them. For the mainstream American, a lot of items on that list would be considered weird. So the problem with the term "New Age" is that it tends to bring to mind people like Shirley MacLaine and "gurus" like Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Elizebeth Clare Prophet, and Maharaj Ji. One might also think of Krishna, TM, Scientology, EST, Unification Church, and

Christian Science. And of course all these are dangerous. Undoubtedly they have a combined total of millions.

However, I think that perhaps far more people are coming under a more subtle but equally deceptive set of ideas I will refer to as the "New Spirituality." The people who come under its influence would probably think of the people and gurus mentioned above as extremists. I see both the larger New Age Movement with its bizarre expressions, as well as the New Spirituality as inevitable outgrowths of the loss of objectivity and cultural authority on Western culture. If any one statement expresses my observation it is: *if nothing is true, then everything is true*. In other words, if nothing is true in the *objective* sense, then anything is possible in the *subjective* sense. Anything can be *true for me*. Os Guinness observed that "America is moving fast from the old idea that everything means something to the new idea that nothing means anything."³ What he means is nothing means anything to *everybody*. There is no perceived universal truth that applies to all people. In his monumental work Dust of Death, Guinness illustrates what happens when real objective truth is lost:

Early hunters on safari in Africa used to build their fires high at night to keep away wild animals. But when the fires burned low in the early hours of the morning, the hunters would see all around them the approaching outlined shapes of animals and a ring of encircling eyes in the darkness.

As we have witnessed the erosion and breakdown of the Christian culture of the west, so we have seen the vacuum filled by an upsurge of ideas that would have been unthinkable when the fires of Christian culture were high.⁴

The effect of modernity and secularization has not been to rid society of religion, but actually to spawn a *more* religious and superstitious culture. How did this development take place? Let's take a look at the historical background to *Postmodernism*.

The Shift from Modern to Postmodern

Increasingly, authors both secular and Christian are referring to our

times as *Postmodern*. Not all agree on what it means or if it is an entirely positive or negative development. Yet, few would argue that a fundamental change in outlook is not impacting the culture at large, including the church. Some theologians are even suggesting that the concept of God be changed to fit the Postmodern outlook. Let's look at a couple of assessments.

John Polkinghorne calls the intellectual setting today the "Post-Enlightenment World." He describes the course of intellectual history since the Enlightenment:

The thinkers of the Enlightenment sought by cold clear reason to comprehend an objective world to determinate order. They saw themselves as self-sufficient and were confident of their powers and human perfectibility...The Enlightenment attitude had done its acid work and many people's faith dissolved away. By a curious irony, as the nineteenth century came to a close, the method and view of the Enlightenment were themselves beginning to dissolve in their turn. We now live in a post-Enlightenment age. The essential character of Enlightenment thinking was to allow the clear light of reason to play upon an objective and determinate world. Scarcely a feature of that description now survives intact.

At the same time as the human psyche has revealed its shadowy and elusive depths, the physical world has denied determinate objectivity at its basic roots. Heisenberg tells us concerning electrons and other elementary particles that if we know what they are doing we do not know where they are, and if we know where they are we do not know what they are doing. His uncertainty principle proclaims the unpicturability of the quantum world...The world known to the twentieth century is a good deal curiouser and more shadowy than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could have conceived.⁵

Polkinghorne is critical of the wholesale abandonment of reason that so many are displaying these days: "Our century has seen a recurrent cult of

the absurd which is destructive of true reasoning. To acknowledge the limits of rationality, objectivity, and determinism is not to relinquish a belief in reason, a respect for reality or a search for order."⁶

Frederick Burnham notes the results on the certainty of our knowledge:

Revelations in twentieth century physics have totally undermined the epistemological pride of Victorian science and brought the old era to a close. In the post-modern world of quantum phenomena, the foundation of reality is elusive and indeterminate. Scientific language can no longer be viewed as a set of universal, objective facts, but rather as a set of research traditions, which, like religious language, is born out of a particular community of inquirers. *The cultural hegemony of science has ended. The fundamental characteristic of the new postmodern era is epistemological relativism.*⁷

I believe that this kind of relativism about what can be known is the perfect soil for New Age Spirituality, as it appears among the radical fringe as well as in the more mainstream expressions. Once certainty is lost, anything is thinkable. To be shocked by New Age thought is to not understand that it flows directly from this void of authority and meaning. Furthermore, the barren desert of atheistic materialism that prevailed for the first half of this century was hard to live with. Gene Edward Veith describes the revolt against materialism:

The twentieth century saw a new worldview, one which accepted the bleak facts of materialism, while offering meaning for the individual. This worldview is existentialism. According to existentialism, there is no inherent meaning or purpose in life. The objective real is absurd, void of any human significance. Meaning is not to be discovered in the objective world; rather meaning is a purely human phenomena. While there is no readymade meaning in life, individuals can create meaning for themselves. This meaning, however, has no validity for

anyone else. No one can provide a meaning for anyone else. Everyone must create their own meaning, but it must remain private, personal, and unconnected to any sort of objective truth ...Existentialism, then provides the rationale for contemporary relativism. Religion becomes a purely private affair, which cannot be "imposed." The content of one's meaning makes no difference, only the personal commitment.

Today, existentialism is no longer the province of the *avante garde* French novelists in cafes. It is entered popular culture. It has become the philosophy of soap operas and talk shows. Its tenants shape political discourse and are transforming the legal system. Existentialism is the philosophical basis for Post-modernism.⁸

There are many existentialists today who have never heard of the term. They just live it out. Lesslie Newbigin shares Peter Berger's astute observation about the social outcome of existentialism in contemporary life:

...the distinctive fact about the Modern West from all pre-modern cultures is that there is no generally acknowledged "plausibility structure," the acceptance of which is taken for granted without argument, and dissent from which is regarded as heresy. A "plausibility structure" is a social structure of ideas and practices which creates the conditions which determine whether a belief is plausible. To hold beliefs outside this plausibility structure is to be a heretic in the original sense of the word *haeresis*, that is to say, one who makes his own decisions.

In pre-modern cultures there is a stable plausibility structure and only the rare individual questions it. It is just "how things are and have always been." In modern societies, by contrast, we are required to make our own decisions, for there is no accepted plausibility structure. Each one has to have faith of his own. We are all *required*, in the original

sense, to be heretics.⁹

It is in a real sense then, that everyone is "in their own world." At least their own intellectual world. Postmodern spirituality then is a spirituality without truth. Like a cafeteria with its array of "choices" the New Spirituality is chosen on aesthetic grounds. Veith notes the contrast between a modern and a postmodern outlook, with its resulting spiritual consequences:

Modernists did not believe the bible is true. Postmodernists have cast out the category of truth altogether. In doing so, they have opened up a Pandora's box of New Age religions, syncretism, and moral chaos.¹⁰

Thinking Broadly

Before we look at examples of the New Spirituality, I want to paint the big picture of the larger New Age phenomena. Most of what we will see is rooted in a pantheistic¹¹ framework. However, as James Sire perceives, New Age thought shares in at least three world views:

"*like naturalism*, New Age thought denies the existence of a transcendent God. There is no Lord of the Universe unless it be each of us...It also borrows from naturalism the hope of evolutionary change. We are poised on the brink of a new being...Like both *theism* and *naturalism*, and unlike *Eastern pantheistic monism*, the New Age places great value on the individual person...¹²

Yet the New Age shares with the East in its mystical experience orientation, which rejects reason as a guide to ultimate reality. Sire also sees in New Age thinking some *animistic* strands.¹³ *Animism* is the orientation of the so-called "primal" or pagan religions, which see the universe as inhabited by countless spiritual beings. These spirits range from vicious to kind. To get by, people have to placate the evil spirits and woo the good spirits. To our aid come the witch doctors and shamans who attempt to control the spirit world. I would not be surprised if, in the coming years, animism becomes the dominant way of thought in the New Age Movement. I say so because

pantheism is too abstract for the average person. In addition, human beings are incurably religious, preferring ritual's concreteness to the abstractions of philosophy. So, New Age thought is a loose worldview with roots in three other worldviews--Naturalism, Pantheism, Animism. The vocabulary of Christian theism is often borrowed and reinterpreted. Groothuis gives us a broad conceptual framework for understanding much of the New Spirituality. His chart will help us navigate our way through the mist of the New Spirituality without wrecking our boat on the shoals.

As is evident from the chart on the following pages, the New Age concept of God is essentially pantheistic. While borrowing heavily from Christian vocabulary, "God" tends to be portrayed as an impersonal force or energy. "But," as Chandler notes, "the God of the New Age is nobody special. He--or rather, it--is *everything*. There is nothing that *isn't* God."¹⁴ To give it all the feel of a "hip" Christianity, Jesus can be fit in this scenario. Chandler says, "He is one of the enlightened masters who was conscious of his divinity. Not that he was unique, he just saw what was true of *all* of us. Humanity's problem is that problem is that we lack the perception of ourselves as God."¹⁵ Let's turn to some of today's popular spiritual writers, the prophets and priestesses of the present darkness.

Popular Spokesperson

The authors here represent the "diffuse sentiment" we could call the New Spirituality. What they teach is appealing to many people because it says what we want to hear. Veith says of postmodern spirituality:

Today religion is not seen as a set of beliefs about what is real and what is not. Rather, religion is a preference, a choice. We believe in what we like. We believe in what we want.¹⁶

The people I chose as representatives of the New Spirituality are fairly mainstream. They are all best-selling authors and I found their books *outside* the New Age section of the bookstore and the Public Library. Unlike Shirley MacLaine, who is snickered at by many, these authors command respect by many in the medical and scientific communities.

Comparison chart of Humanist, New Age and Christian World View¹⁷

	Naturalism/Humanism	New Age	Christian Theism
Nature of God	Universe is self-existent; God is superstition	God is the world; pantheism; God is impersonal/amoral	Creator/creation distinction; God is personal/moral
Nature of the World	Matter/energy	Spirit/consciousness	Matter & Spirit
Basic for Knowledge	Reason & science; Observable phenomena	The truth is within; Intuition	God's Revelation
Ethics	Autonomous & Situational (relative)	Autonomous & Situational (relative)	Based on God's character (absolute)
Nature of Humans	Evolved animal	Spiritual being, a sleeping god	Made in the image of God, but now fallen

Human Problem	Superstition, ignorance	Ignorance of true potential	Alienated or separated from God, a moral problem
The Answer to Problems	Reason & technology	Change in consciousness	Faith in Christ's work on our behalf
Death	End of existence	Illusion; entrance to next life	Entrance to either eternal heaven or hell
View of Religion	Superstition with some good moral teaching	All point to the one; (syncretism)	Not all from God; teach different things
View of Jesus Christ	Moral teacher	One of many avatars (periodic manifestations of God-guru)	The unique God-Man, only Lord & Savior

M. Scott Peck, M.D.

Peck is a Harvard-educated psychotherapist whose book, The Road Less Traveled, has been on the New York Times best-seller list for over ten years. It was holding #2 on the paperback list as of May 8, 1994. More than a few people I have talked to were confused as to whether Peck was writing from a Christian position. Some assumed that he was because his books are sold in some Christian bookstores. For this reason, I will quote somewhat extensively from Peck. What emerges from a careful reading is *not* Biblical theology.

In the introduction to A Road Less Traveled, Peck says he makes "no distinction between the mind and the spirit, and therefore no distinction between the process of achieving spiritual growth and mental growth." To Peck, "They are one and the same."¹⁸ While from a Biblical perspective we would expect spiritual growth to produce mental growth, mental growth could take place without anything positively spiritual resulting. As Paul said to Timothy, some people are "always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). The human mind is not God's Spirit. The sinful mind is hostile to God and does not submit to the law of God (Rom. 8:7).

Peck believes that most people suffer from a tendency 'to define religion too narrowly.' What he means by that is people who would criticize non-Christian religions like Buddhism or Unitarianism. We should not, according to Peck view religion as "something monolithic." His path of spiritual growth is described:

We begin by distrusting what we already believe, by actively seeking the threatening and the unfamiliar, by deliberately challenging the validity of what we have previously been taught and hold dear. The path of holiness lies through questioning *everything* [italics his]... We begin by replacing the religion of our parents with the religion of science. We must rebel against and reject the religion of our parents, for inevitably their world view will be narrower than that which we are capable, if we take full advantage of our personal experience, including our adult experience and the experience of an additional generation of human history. There is no such thing as hand-me-down

religion. To be vital, our religion must be a wholly personal one, forged entirely through the fire of questioning and doubting in the crucible of our own experience of reality.¹⁹

While it certainly is true that each person has to come to their own conclusion about the truth and they must internalize their own convictions, this process builds on certain sources of information and traditions that are external to the person (religious writings, human authorities, peer pressures, etc.). Some presuppositions or "givens" must be chosen. Even Peck's idea of questioning everything is a presupposition namely that *not* questioning everything is a weakness or barrier to truth. Peck seems to think we can perform demolition on all traditional sources to truth (which would include the Bible) and still have something left to build with. He also assumes that one's parent's religious views are "inevitably narrower." This idea assumes that each generation improves in its insight, which is part of Peck's evolutionary optimism.

In Scripture, this is simply not the case. In 2 Tim. 1:5, Paul says, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded, now lives in you also." In 3:14, 15 he is further told, "continue in what you learned, *knowing from who you have learned it*, and how from infancy you have known *the holy scriptures*, which are able to make you wise unto salvation..." Timothy did not have to go out and find a different religion than his parents or his parents' parents. To be sure, a parent's faith is not passed on automatically, but it can be *explained*. A son or daughter can be *persuaded* of the truthfulness of his/her parents' worldview. It seems to me that Peck is advocating the kind of deconstruction of authority that made the counterculture of the sixties so tumultuous. All we have left after this demolition is "truth in one's own head."

As we go beyond the religion of our parents and then beyond the religion of science, we come to own our fresh idea of God:

The God that comes before skepticism may bear little resemblance to the God that comes after. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, there is no single monolithic religion. There are many religions, and perhaps many

levels to belief. Some religions may be unhealthy for some people; others may be healthy.²⁰

That it "bears little resemblance" is an understatement. What a tragic description of what happens to a naive Christian who becomes "captured by philosophy and empty deception" (Col. 2:8). If Peck's denial of a "single monolithic religion" is not a direct swipe at Christianity, I don't know what is. It seems that Peck has a pragmatic criteria of truth. If it "works," i.e. if it is "healthy", that's what matters.

The God that comes after skepticism for Peck is a pantheistic "deity." He packages his version of pantheism as a bold idea for the inner directed man:

Why does God want us to grow? What is it that God wants of us?...For no matter how much we may like to pussyfoot around it, all of us who postulate a loving God and really think about it, eventually come to a single terrifying idea: God wants us to become Himself (or Herself or Itself). We are growing toward godhood. God is the goal of evolution. It is God who is the source of the evolutionary force and God who is the destination ...It is the single most demanding idea in the history of mankind...It is one thing to believe in a nice old God who will take good care of us from a lofty position of power which we ourselves could never attain. It is quite another to believe in a God who has it in mind for us precisely that we should attain His position, His power, His wisdom, His identity.²¹

Peck tries to make the world's oldest and easiest form of spirituality sound difficult and challenging, while painting the surrender of our proud autonomy as childish dependence. Our problem, according to Peck, is that we shy away from becoming God. Most people are too lazy and passive to seek godhood. He goes on to say:

Were we to believe it possible for man to become God, this belief by its very nature would place upon us an obligation to attain the possible. But we don't want this obligation, we

don't want to have to work that hard. We don't want God's responsibility. As long as we can believe that godhood is an impossible attainment for ourselves, we don't have to worry about our spiritual growth; we don't have to push ourselves to higher and higher levels of consciousness and loving activity, we can just relax and be human.²²

Only a lazy wimp would not want to be God! So it will have to be the few and the proud who are willing to take on this noble task of sacrifice. The "hard work" that Peck says we are too lazy to do is to *listen to the god within*:

In debating the wisdom of a proposed course of action, human beings routinely fail to obtain God's side of the issue. They fail to consult the God within them, the knowledge of rightness which inherently resides in the minds of all mankind. We make this failure because we are lazy.²³

Lest we be still unconvinced of Peck's pantheism, note how he explains the evolution of consciousness:

I know of no hypothesis as satisfactory as the postulation of a God who is intimately associated with us--so intimately that He is part of us. If you want to know the closet place to look for grace, it is within your self. If you desire wisdom greater than you own, you can find it inside you. What this suggests is that the interface between man and God is at least in part the interface between our unconscious and our conscious. To put it plainly, our unconscious is God. God within us. We were part of God all the time. God has been with us all along, is now, and always with be.²⁴

When all is said and done, Peck's version of spirituality is a rehash of eastern pantheism with a Western individualistic flavor. He does not paint the image of absorption into God. Rather, *God is absorbed into you*. The

human individual retains herself. Much of the book preaches a "pick yourself up from your own bootstraps" mentality with the ear-tickling "psycho-spiritual" theology that was cited above.

Deepak Chopra

If Peck is the therapeutic high priest of the new spirituality, Deepak Chopra is the "surgeon general" of alternative healing. Chopra is also a best-selling author (he has written fourteen books) and physician. He was born and raised in India, but now lives and works in the Boston area. He established the American Association of Ayurvedic (a branch of Hinduism) Medicine. In 1992 he was appointed to the National Institutes of Health and hoc panel on alternative medicine. Chopra is truly a modern guru, combining most skillfully the ideas of the East and the West--Hinduism and science, materialism and spiritualism. He has been written about in Money, People Weekly, and Psychology Today, as well as having had articles published by The Journal of American Medical Association. Money called Chopra a "financial spiritualist."²⁵ While Hare Krishnas and the Guru Maharaj Ji may frighten off most westerners, Chopra appeals directly to what we want most in America: health and wealth. His book *Creating Affluence* is a daily reader on how to get rich by changing your perception of reality. Chopra advises that its contents be "metabolized" in the consciousness of the reader by reading it over and over. He holds out a bold promise:

All of material creation, everything that we can see, hear, taste, or smell is made from the same stuff and comes from the same source. Experiential knowledge of this fact gives us the ability to fulfill any desire we have, acquire any material object we want, and experience happiness to any extent we aspire.

Before we go into these principals, I would like to discuss what science, and particularly physics, has to say about the nature of the universe we live in...According to quantum field theorists, all material things--whether they are automobiles, human bodies, or dollar bills--are made up of atoms. These atoms are made up of subatomic particles

which, in turn, are fluctuations of energy and information in huge void of energy and information...the basic conclusion of quantum field theorists is that the raw material of the world is non-material; the essential stuff of the universe is non-stuff...And this is the overthrow of the superstition of materialism.²⁶

Like many of the proponents of the new spirituality, Chopra wants to ground his views in science. The highly disputed field of quantum physics is a favorite "proof" for pantheism by many today. This is a big change from some of the earlier pantheistic prophets who were anti-science. Chopra shows great cleverness as he smuggles in ancient *Hindu* pantheism in the guise of science and economic strategy. Not only can we be wealthy with a change of perception, but we can also be healthy--even immortal if we learn how to think right. In his very popular Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old, Chopra avoids subtlety altogether. He immediately sets out to break our confidence in conventional reason, the western way of perceiving reality:

I would like you to join me on a journey of discovery. We will explore a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply. These rules explicitly state that to grow old, become frail, and die is the ultimate destiny of all...However, I want you to suspend your assumptions about what we call reality so that we can become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal, joy, fulfillment and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist and are not even entertained as a possibility.

If there is such a place, what is preventing us from going there? It is our conditioning, our current collective worldview that we were taught by our parents, teachers, and society. This way of seeing things--the old paradigm--has been aptly called "the hypnosis of social conditioning," an induced fiction in which we have collectively agreed to participate.²⁷

Like most pantheisms, Chopra's claims that what our senses tell us is inadequate and often deceptive. Chopra goes on to ask us to discard conventional western assumptions in favor of a "new paradigm." I have included his assumptions verbatim because they so capture the essence of New Age pantheism.

...In order to create the experience of ageless body and timeless mind, which is the promise of this book, you must discard ten assumptions about who you are and what the true nature of body and mind is. These assumptions are the bedrock of our shared worldview. They are:

OLD PARADIGM	NEW PARADIGM
1. There is an objective world independent of the observer, & our bodies are an aspect of this objective world.	1. The physical world, including our bodies, is a response of the observer. We create our bodies as we create the experience of our world.
2. The body is composed of clumps of matter separated from one another in time & space.	2. In their essential state, our bodies are composed of energy & information, not solid matter. This energy & information is an out-cropping of infinite fields of energy & information spanning the universe.
3. Mind & body are independent from each other.	3. The mind & body are inseparably one.
4. Materialism is primary, consciousness is secondary. In other words, we are physical machines that learned to think.	4. The bio-chemistry of the body; is a product of awareness. Beliefs, thoughts & emotions create the chemical reactions that uphold life in every cell.

<p>5. Human awareness can be completely explained as a product of bio-chemistry.</p>	<p>5. Perception appears to be automatic, but is in fact learned. The world you live in, including the experience of your body, is completely dictated by how you learned to perceive it. If you change your perception, you change the experience of your body & your world.</p>
<p>6. As individuals, we are disconnected, self contained entities.</p>	<p>6. Impulses of intelligence create your body in new forms every second.</p>
<p>7. Our perception of the world is automatic & gives us an accurate picture of the way things really are.</p>	<p>7. Although each person seems separate & independent, all of us are connected to patterns of intelligence that govern the whole cosmos. Our bodies are part of a universal body, our minds an aspect of a universal mind.</p>
<p>8. Our true nature is totally defined by the body, ego, & personality. We are wisps of memories & desires enclosed in flesh & bones.</p>	<p>8. Time does not exist as an absolute, but only eternity. What we call linear time is a reflection of how we perceive change. If we could perceive the changeless, time would cease to exist as we know it. We can learn to start metabolizing non-change, eternity, the absolute. By doing that, we will be ready to create the physiology of immortality.</p>
<p>9. Time exists as an absolute, & we are captives of that absolute. No one escapes the ravages of time.</p>	<p>9. Each of us inhabits a reality lying beyond all change.</p>

<p>10. Suffering is necessary--it is part of reality. We are inevitable victims of sickness, aging and death.</p>	<p>10. We are not victims of aging, sickness & death. These are part of the scenery, not the seer, who is immune to any form of change. The seer is the spirit, the expression of eternal being.</p>
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Now that's a heavy assault! And he does it, not in an appendix buried at the end of the book, but right at the beginning! Apparently that is not scaring readers off. Notice how Chopra has said the same things that eastern religion has taught without it sounding religious. The word "god" is not used at all in this chart.

No wonder Chandler views the area of holistic health as perhaps the major carrier of the New Age: "The market for the products, as well as the techniques of chiropractic and massage, is likely to endure and grow as more and more Americans become concerned about self-care, wellness, and ever-rising costs of professional health systems."²⁸

Marianne Williamson

Another avenue of expose to the new spirituality is the recovery movement. Marianne Williamson's experience mirrors that of many other baby-boomers who grew up with a sense of estrangement from their parents' traditional values and religion. Her book A Return to Love reached #1 on the best-seller list in 1993. This title is stocked not in the New Age section, but in psychology/self improvement. Through her lectures and writing, Williamson has popularized the ultra New Age A Course in Miracles, a kind of pantheistic "bible," which Opra Winfrey has praised on her show.

Like many who teach concepts of New Spirituality, Williamson believes we need a higher form of "consciousness or knowledge" that is different from cognitive understanding:

"Love isn't seen with the physical eyes or heard with the physical ears. The physical senses don't perceive it; it's perceived through a different kind of vision...Regardless of what it's called, love requires a different kind of "seeing"

than we are used to--a different kind of knowing or thinking. Love is the intuitive knowledge of our hearts..²⁹

Like Chopra, Williamson wants to bypass the limits of logic and linear thinking. For her, God is defined as "the love within us..He is the energy, the thought of unconditional love. He cannot think with anger or judgment."³⁰ This is one of the features of the New Spirituality--an impersonal god with the *personal* characteristic of love. It is hard to see how a "being" that is not distinct from yourself can love you. Yet, the comforting thing for so many is that the "God" of the new spirituality has no wrath and does not punish. All of such negative thoughts are seen as human projections. As for negative or hostile human emotions, they are simply *explained away* rather being explained by her system:

Anything that isn't love is an illusion...When we think with love we are literally co-creating with God. And when we are not thinking with love--since only love is real--then we're actually not thinking at all. We're hallucinating...sin is defined as 'loveless perception'...Love in your mind produces love in your life. This is the meaning of Heaven. Fear in your mind produces fear in your life. This is the meaning of Hell.³¹

Like all pantheistic notions, this one has no way to explain why there is evil and suffering in the world. Simply passing it off as a problem of perception only implicates God as a lousy creator, since there is no Fall to explain how this problem began in the first place. For Williamson, our real problem is not sin in the sense of evil or depravity, but *fear*. Here we have one more version of "we're basically good people who are sad and hurt." Or as someone said, "Hurt people hurt people." It is no doubt true that unresolved pain is usually taken out on others. However, that does not have explanatory power concerning the cause of all evil behavior.

Williamson tries to align herself with Jesus:

The concept of a divine, or 'Christ' mind, is the idea that, at our core, we are not just identical, but actually the same being. 'There is only one begotten Son' doesn't mean that

someone else was it, and we're not. It means we're all it. There is only one of us here...The word Christ is a psychological term ...Christ refers to the common thread of divine love that is the core and essence of every human mind.³²

Williamson's pantheism and syncretism show themselves most strongly here. The exclusive claim for Jesus is turned into a basis of a universally inclusive pluralism. I find it hard to shake off the question, "why do so many people who have love at their core seem to bear the fruit of hatred and violence?" What is the source of human problems? It is amazing how many books get published that are simply expanding on the Beatles' song, *All You Need is Love*. It is a great idea, but in the twenty-seven years since that song hit the airwaves, no one has been able to make it work apart from Jesus Christ.

Betty Jean Eadie

Eadie's book, Embraced by the Light was at #1 for the week of May 8. She makes no attempt to be scientific, but the book is representative of what many Americans are willing to believe. As I read the book, it became obvious why this book is so popular. It affirms virtually everything the average American would want to hear, while having not a shred of material that would offend. If ever there was a book that could be the spiritual undergirding for political correctness, this is it. What is the basis of its legitimacy? The experience of being temporarily dead, of course. Eadie claims to have had an encounter with angels and Jesus himself while her physical body lay dead in a hospital room. She describes her experience in vivid imagery:

I felt a surge of energy...and my spirit was suddenly drawn out through my chest and pulled upward, as if by a giant magnet... I was above the bed, hovering near the ceiling...My new body was weightless and extremely mobile...Before I could move, three men suddenly appeared at my side...A kind of glow emanated from them...I sensed in them great spirituality, knowledge, and wisdom...I began

to think of them as monks—mostly because of the robes--and *I knew I could trust them...*They had been with me for "eternities", they said... The fact of pre-earth life crystallized in my mind...³³

Notice that Eadie perceived things non-cognitively. Like others we have seen, she places a premium on this "higher mode" of understanding. The implication is that if something is really important or true it will have to come to you by bypassing your mind. Notice also her basis for trusting the spirit beings. She "sensed" it. It was not by evaluating the content of their claims. I shiver as I recall Paul's warning to the Galatians, "if we or even *an angel from heaven* proclaims a gospel contrary let them be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). The beauty of their being tells us nothing about whether they are benevolent or malevolent spirits (2 Cor. 11:14). Eadie's Mormon leanings stand out as well with her claim to have an eternal spirit that had known these beings from before her entrance into her mortal body ("pre-earth life"). she goes on to describe some more non-verbal intuitive communication:

They somehow communicated a *feeling of peace* and told me not to worry, that everything would be all right. As this feeling came in me, I sensed their deep love and concern. These feelings and other thoughts were communicated to me from spirit to spirit--from intelligence to intelligence. At first, I thought they were using their mouths, but this was because I was used to people "speaking." They communicated much more rapidly and completely, in a manner they referred to as "pure knowledge." The closest word we have in English to define it is *telepathy*, but even that does not describe the full process. I felt their emotions and intents. *I felt* their love. *I experienced their feelings*.³⁴
[emphasis mine]

Eadie displays the frightening faith in the authority of feelings that has so engulfed our culture. If you feel love, how could it be questioned? Like Deepak Chopra, Eadie also has her own version of creating your own reality. She believes that "Simply by thinking positive thoughts and speaking positive words we attract positive energy...We can create our own

surroundings by the thoughts we think..." Then, in an incredible example of reality turned on its head she says, "I understood that life is lived most fully in the imagination--that, ironically, *imagination is the key to reality*."³⁵ One may wonder, was her near death experience imagination or reality? In another example of her distrust of reason she shares her interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:7:

We are to live by faith, not by sight. Sight is involved with the cognitive, the analytical mind. It rationalizes and justifies. Faith is governed by the spirit. The spirit is emotional, accepting, and internalizes... the spirit is mystery to most people. I saw that it functions, generally, without the mind even being aware of it.³⁶

As she goes on describing her experience, Eadie reveals a pantheistic flavor:

As I approached it [the light], I saw the figure of a man standing in it...I felt his light blending in to mine, literally, and I felt my light being drawn to his...It is hard to tell where one light ends and the other begins; they just become one light...As our lights merged, I felt as if I had stepped into his countenance, and I felt an utter explosion of love.³⁷

In an even more disturbing example of contentless, experience-centered religion, she recounts:

As I approached the water, I noticed a rose near me that seemed to stand out from the other flowers...It was gently swaying to faint music, and singing praises to the Lord with sweet tones of its own. I realized I could actually see it growing...I wanted to experience its life, to step into it and feel its spirit. As this thought came to me, I seemed to be able to see down into it...But it was much more than a visual experience. I felt the rose's presence around me, as if I were actually inside the flower. I experienced it as if I

were the flower...My joy was absolutely full again! I felt God in the plant, in me, his love pouring into us. We were all one! I will never forget the rose that I was.³⁸

Eadie even was "informed" in heaven about the abortion issue. Notice how it attempts to placate both sides of the battle:

I learned that spirits can choose to enter their mother's body at any stage of her pregnancy. Once there, they immediately begin experiencing mortality. Abortion, I was told, is *contrary to that which is natural*. The *spirit coming into the body* feels a sense of rejection and sorrow... But the spirit also feels compassion for its mother, knowing that she made a decision based on the knowledge she had.³⁹

The popularity of Eadie's book is a chilling example of the epistemological relativism discussed earlier. If nothing is true, then everything is true. At the end of the book, Eadie says she feels no need to give evidence for the tale. The authority is in the experience. If Eadie is believable, who will be branded a heretic?

A Christian response to the New Spirituality is desperately needed in our day. People are naively falling prey to the promises of these false prophets. A strategy for discipleship and apologetics for the 1990's is beyond the scope of this writing. My desire here was simply to acquaint the Christian reader with the various "roach hotels" of the New Spirituality so that s/he would be moved to be a better herald of the truth and shepherd of the flock. Sire captures the insidious nature of New Age deception:

The danger of self deception, the certainty of self deception is the great weakness. No theist or naturalist--no one at all--can deny the "experience" of perceiving oneself to be a god, a spirit, a devil or a cockroach. For many people give such reports. But as long as self is king, so long as imagination is presupposed to be reality, so long as seeing is being, the imagining, seeing self remains securely locked in its private universe--the only one there is. So long as the self likes what it imagines and is truly in control of what it

imagines, others on the "outside" have nothing to offer.⁴⁰

My plea to the reader is not to shrink from the challenge of bringing these deeply deceived men and women of our day to the kingdom the living God. We cannot afford to let laughter, contempt or fear be our apologetic.

ENDNOTES

¹Francis A. Shaeffer, Escape from Reason,(Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1968) 7.

²Russell Chandler, Understanding the New Age (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991, 1993) 43,45.

³Os Guinness, The American Hour (New York: Free Press, 1993) 70.

⁴Ibid., The Dust of Death (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) 276.

⁵John Polkinghorne, One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) p. 4,5.

⁶Ibid., 5

⁷Frederick B. Burnham, ed., Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) ix, x.

⁸Gene Edward Veith, Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994) 37, 38.

⁹Lesslie Newbigin, "Can the West be Converted?" International Bulletin of Missionary Research January 1987, 2.

¹⁰Gene Edward Veith, Postmodern Times, 193.

¹¹Geisler and Clark say this about pantheism: "*Pantheism* etymologically means 'All is God.' The word was first used by John Toland, an Irish deist, in 1705. The world view is based on key idea that all of reality is one. (This is called 'monism'.) Anything real is interrelated with everything else that is real. There may be forms or levels of reality, but in the final analysis, all reality is unified ontologically, that is, in its being. No qualitative distinctions can differentiate real things. There is no definite contrast between an eternal Creator and a temporal creature. The ultimate reality, God, alone is real. Insofar as you and I are real, you and I are part of God." Norman L. Geisler and David C. Clark, *Apologetics in the New Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990) 8. The authors go on to discuss *five* different variations of pantheism. It is important to keep in mind that, while pantheism can be generalized about, it has quite diverse expressions around the world. There is not one simple form of "eastern thought."

¹²James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988) 165, 166.

¹³*Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age*, 29.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 193.

¹⁶Adapted from Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986) 167.

¹⁸M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1978) 11.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 194.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 224.

²¹*Ibid.*, 269, 270.

²²Ibid., 270.

²³Ibid., 273.

²⁴Ibid., 281.

²⁵Elizabeth MacDonald, Money Newline, Money December 1993, 20.

²⁶Deepak Chopra, Creating Affluence: Wealth Consciousness in the Field of All Possibilities (San Rafael, CA: New World Library, 1993) 18, 19.

²⁷Deepak Chopra, Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old (New York: Harmony Books, 1993) 3.

²⁸Russell Chandler, Understanding the New Age (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991, 1993) 158.

²⁹Marianne Williamson, A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principals of A COURSE IN MIRACLES (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) xix.

³⁰Ibid., 17, 18.

³¹Ibid., 21.

³²Ibid., 29.

³³Betty J. Eadie, Embraced by the Light (Placerville, CA: Gold Leaf Press, 1992) 29-31.

³⁴Ibid., 32.

³⁵Ibid., 58, 59.

³⁶Ibid., 65, 66.

³⁷Ibid., 41.

³⁸Ibid., 80, 81.

³⁹Ibid., 95.

⁴⁰James Sire, The Universe Next Door, 171.

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