

Understanding the New Age Movement

Glastonbury - the very name conjures up mystery and legend. King Arthur, Avalon, intersection of ley lines, cosmic power-centre. Not surprisingly therefore it has become a centre for the New Age Movement. This movement must be examined and criticised theologically. But we shall not really understand it unless we appreciate the sincere spiritual quest by many of its adherents and the compelling mystical impact the Movement has on them.

Some years ago I spoke alongside other Christian and some New Age speakers at a Seminar on the New Age at the London School of Economics. A video, made by New Agers about the "Harmonic Convergence" at Glastonbury and various other sacred sites throughout the world in August 1987 was shown. It was very professionally and, frankly, very beautiful, with breathtaking dawn scenes, inspiring music and a quite poetic commentary. They were celebrating the "birth of unity, the end of conflict"; "a new evolutionary phase" foretold in ancient Indian prophecies. On this day the "World Healing Festival" began as "the sun rose and greeted the earth - Gaia herself" (Gaia is, of course, the ancient earth goddess). "The heart of the world is calling us together and saying come together, celebrate my awakening."

"Nothing like this has ever happened before," continued the commentary, "they listened, they meditated and radiated love, peace, harmony to others and to the Earth." And they did. Their faces showed a depth of joy one associates with charismatic celebrations. They hugged one another and sang songs which included hallelujahs.

The previous year I had gone to Glastonbury the day before the summer solstice. The town is overloaded with New Age shops selling books on every conceivable occult, mystical and legendary subject. One majored on crystals - a key factor in New Age healing, divination and magic. There were occult pentagrams (for "psychic self-defence") and other occult jewellery. In one shop the weird combination of occult symbolism, incense, New Age music and a heavy atmosphere made me glad to leave.

That night I slept in the car until 3.30am, then set out for the Tor for the summer solstice sunrise celebration. I reached the summit at 4.00am and approached the old tower which was silhouetted against the lightening sky. It was filled with people; many others were on the slope behind it.

As I reached the tower I could see the new moon through its archways. And I heard the eerie sound of a single low, resonant note. A young man was playing a didgeridoo. Behind him a single oil lamp flickered.

Someone was burning incense. A kilted Scotsman was beating a small drum with a persistent rapid rhythm. A group arrived led by a man in a long blue robe. On his head were antlers still rooted in a patch of fur which formed a veil. He carried a staff and a small drum His companion wore a blue robe and cowl, and carried a staff with a (mystical) crystal on top of it.

Eventually a beautiful sunrise occurred. Several drums beat rapidly. Pipes were blown. Antler-man blew a ram's horn. People danced - Red Indian style. Others got worked up chanting mantras. Another blue-robed man and white-robed woman performed a ritual with a chalice and wine.

Then it was all over, leaving behind it a great emptiness. As I descended the Tor alone I felt deeply saddened that these people didn't know Jesus.

1. A brief definition of the New Age Movement

The New Age Movement is a loose network of groups and individuals working for wholeness, unity, peace and harmony with nature on the basis of eastern religion, superstition, spiritism and witchcraft. Millions of people have been drawn into it, often unwittingly.

We are now in the post-Christian Age of Aquarius: a new age has dawned. Or so we are told. All over the world a loose network of groups is working for global unity, peace and harmony with nature on the

basis of religious views and experiences founded on Hinduism and related eastern religions and occultism. This is the New Age Movement.

Marilyn Ferguson, a leading new ager, describes it as 'the sense of an impending transition in the human story: an evolution of consciousness as significant as any step in the long chain of our biological evolution . . . the death of one world and the birth of a new'.¹ It is 'the greatest period of change the world has ever known'.²

2. Why people get involved in the New Age Movement

1. A post-Christian Spiritual Vacuum

Zbigniew Brzezinski, chairman of the U.S. Security Council spoke of an 'increasing yearning for something spiritual' in advanced Western societies where materialism has proven unsatisfying . . . Traditional religion . . . does not provide a substitute: This is why there is a search of personal religion, for direct connection with the spiritual."³

This leads many people into mysticism. In our post-Christian society there are no biblical restraints to protect people from vulnerability to negative experiences of the supernatural.

2. Influence of Oriental Religions

We live in a global village where instant communication, jet travel and immigration expose us to such influences. The Beatles popularised them in the 1960s.

3. Concern for World Peace

There is a strong call for global co-operation in politics through the United Nations and other agencies. Recently the potential of religious differences to divide the world or religious co-operation to unite the world has been recognised. The powerful inter-faith movement has grown out of this.

Its influence in the Church is leading many to compromise the uniqueness of Christ as the only Saviour for the sake of world peace and harmony. This is to fall prey to new age thinking.

4. Concern for Conservation

There is now a very powerful conservation lobby and green issues are a major political concern. The interdependence and unity of the cosmos is being stressed and this opens many people to the earth mysticism and pantheism of the new age movement. (Pantheism identifies God with the universe.)

5. The New Physics and Biology

Marilyn Ferguson describes such atomic physics as revealing a world 'like Shiva's dance in Hindu mythology. In place of a real and solid world, theoretical physics offers us a flickering web of events, relationships, potentialities. Particles make sudden transitions, "quantum leaps", behaving at times like units, yet mysteriously wavelike on other occasions."⁴

In effect, new agers claim that physics is on the borders of mysticism. It is discovering the world which psychedelic drugs and oriental meditation have 'revealed' to people for years. Some biologists seem to be heading in a pantheistic direction to explain the sudden leaps which they claim have taken place in organic evolution.

6. Dissatisfaction with Orthodox Medicine

¹M. Ferguson 'The Aquarian Conspiracy', Paladin, 1982, p.423

² Ibid, p.52

³ Ibid., pp.399-400

⁴ Ibid., p. 185

Patients are aware of the limits of modern medicine. Many have an aversion to drug therapy and all too often medical practitioners show a lack of attention to emotional factors. So many turn to alternative medicine, much of which is based on oriental religions and mystical methods. Hence, as Marilyn Ferguson says, 'The proliferating holistic health centres and networks have drawn many into the consciousness movement.'⁵

7. Desire for Community

In our atomistic, mobile society people seek community. Often they do not find it in the Church so they look to new age communities and groups.

8. Emphasis on Freedom of Religious Expression

This gives the occult practitioners free rein to influence society.

9. A Church influenced by liberalism

There is an embarrassment with the supernatural. Yet modern man often yearns for the supernatural and for spiritual experiences e.g. through meditation. Liberalism also undermines theological and moral absolutes. In both of these ways liberalism paves the way for people to embrace the new age movement.

10. Fascination with the paranormal

There is a growing fascination with extra-sensory perception, science fiction, fantasy, role-play and the occult. This encourages people to seek hidden powers within themselves, which is a major aim of the new age.

11. The Counter-culture and Drug Culture of the 1960's

Many people experienced 'altered consciousness' through mind expanding drugs. Such 'altered consciousness' is fundamental to the new age movement.

12. Evolutionary Philosophy

On the one hand this, having devalued the human individual, has produced a reaction where the individual looks within himself for self-worth. On the other hand it has encouraged a yearning for 'spiritual evolution'. All of this is central to new age thinking.

13. An experience-based, un-theological 'Christianity'

As we shall see this tendency, especially amongst charismatics, makes the Church vulnerable to new age influences.

3. What the New Age offers

The implied criticisms of the church have not infrequently been true but would not be valid for many churches. The New Age offers:

1. A post-modern spirituality

A more "holistic" approach including the emotions, contrasted with arid Christian intellectualism or fundamentalism.

2. A world-affirming globalism

⁵ Ibid., p.282

An affirmation of spirituality around the globe contrasted with a narrow Christian exclusivism.

3. A creation-affirming theology

An affirmation and enjoyment of creation as part of spirituality, contrasted with a Hellenistic dualism (where the spiritual and the material set in opposition to each other, e.g. old-fashioned church attitudes to sex).

4. A mystical spirituality

An emphasis on meditation and immediate spiritual experience contrasted with a prosaic stiff-upper-lip British religion.

5. An aesthetic appreciation

An exulting in beauty contrasted with a puritanical Christian drabness.

6. An ability to network

This networking takes place without necessarily expecting people to sign up to a set of beliefs or rituals.

4. The dangers of the New Age Movement

1. It spreads occult deceit

The New Age Movement is not infrequently Old Fashioned Occult, sometimes dressed up in new, innocuous terminology. For example it speaks of channelling, which means mediumship. It is instructive that one very significant influence in the history of the New Age Movement is the occult Theosophical Society founded over one hundred years ago. A prominent leader in it was Alice Bailey, a clergyman's wife who became virulently anti-Christian. She founded the Lucifer Publishing Co.

Jesus warned people in Matthew 24:4-5, 11 "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, and will deceive many and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. In the New Age Movement there are both false prophets (see below) and false "signs and wonders."

The New Age Movement encourages people to seek personal transformation or to "alter their consciousness." Some such personal transformation may be simply good psychology or self-help techniques. But the Movement also advocates using occult means which include yoga (in its religious aspects), transcendental meditation, extra-sensory perception and tuning into "earth mysteries" (at Stonehenge etc.). New Agers believe they discover hidden "divine" powers they didn't know they had. The question is, though, what these powers are and where they come from. Opening oneself up to supernatural powers (other than to God through Jesus Christ) is fraught with dangers and can lead to spiritual and emotional problems and even to people being demonised.

The New Age Movement also promises healing. But it is very advisable only to seek divine healing through an orthodox Christian source. There appear to be natural healing gifts but some are related to occult powers and demonic spirits.

2. It facilitates a dangerous form of global unity

The ideal of global peace and unity is a noble one which should actively concern us all. But there are dangers. The world is now a global village with modern travel and communications. The United Nations to a significant degree fulfils a uniting role, especially through the Security Council. The horror of war and political oppression is no longer hidden in remote parts, but is brought into everyone's living room through television. The global threat of terrorism and the increasing interdependence of the global economy (especially when threatened by recession) call for more global control.

However, as Lord Acton said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The big question is whether imperfect human beings can cope with global power without lapsing into dictatorship and oppression. The Bible foretells such evils and those prophecies seem more credible than ever.

Equally the Bible speaks of God bringing global unity under Christ. “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment— to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Eph 1:9-10).

It is my conviction that, desirable though global peace, justice and unity are, there are serious dangers in a movement towards full global unity and world government if it is not under the Lordship of Christ. The New Age Movement is pressing for a global unity and world government that is not under his lordship.

3. It encourages erroneous religious views

The New Age prophets promise Utopia but actually lead people into wishful thinking or, worse, into dabbling in the occult with its attendant spiritual dangers. More serious aspects of the New Age Movement can lead people into demon-possession.

A. The New Age Movement promotes:

a) Pantheism

Basically this identifies God with the cosmos. God is everything: Everything is God. God is pure consciousness - an impersonal force pervading the cosmos. This makes good and evil part of God. Pantheism is totally alien to the Christian (and the Muslim and Jewish) concept of God.

Based on this pantheism, the New Age Movement is very much into realising one’s “divinity.” Sin is defined as a lack of awareness of one’s divinity (i.e. that one is an emanation from God) and a lack of awareness that individuality is a dangerous illusion leading to alienation, anxiety, hostility, conflict.

So New Agers call upon us to discover our divinity and our infinite potential as an emanation of God and to remove the illusion of individuality (all ideas of self, family, nation, race).

In order to do this, they say, we need to use various psychotechnologies to release the “right brain” – the holistic, mystical, feminine, 'goddess' side of brain. These techniques include:

- (Non-Christian) Meditation: centring, Transcendental Meditation (TM)
- Yoga, rebirthing, chanting and breath control
- Guided imagery (very vivid identification with imaginary guide)
- Hypnosis, New Age music, horoscopes
- Visualisation (manipulation by mind power)

It must be remembered that New Age techniques blend with occult methods. The occult is a manipulation of paranormal and supernatural powers to achieve personal benefits or control over other people. So the New Age can include spiritualism, seances, ouija, circle dancing, drumming, trances and even witchcraft and Satanism.

For the New Ager salvation is ultimately absorption into God through these psychotechnologies or death.

b) Syncretism

This means the amalgamation of religions: the search for the great global religion of the 21st century. To the uninformed this can seem a marvellous ideal. But such a movement has to suppress the religious "exclusivism" of the monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam). Christians cannot support such a global religion because it would marginalise or even exclude Jesus Christ who claimed to be the only way to God, the only way of salvation. This will increasingly be a battle ground in the future.

c) Mysticism

The New Age movement has a laudable concern for conservation but it goes way beyond this into earth mysticism (even the worship of Gaia, the earth goddess). New Age thinking is often littered with ley-lines, power-centres and even sometimes with the god Pan, devas and the nature spirits. One is reminded of St Paul's statement, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator- who is forever praised. Amen." (Rom 1:25)

d) (Extreme) feminism

This goes well beyond the laudable concern for women to be treated with respect as equal to men, and with justice. It can so overstress "woman power" that it merges with witchcraft.

B. The New Age Movement contrasts with biblical theology

The New Age Movement must be criticised theologically and I shall seek briefly to contrast it with Biblical theology.

a) Theology of God.

The New Age Movement is based on Pantheism which depersonalises God and makes both good and evil part of God.

By contrast the Bible teaches that God is transcendent (exalted, "other," holy) and immanent (completely and dynamically present at every point in the universe). God is other than the universe but active at every point in it. Created things and secondary causes have a real existence exterior to God, but they are not self-sufficient. "In him we live and move and have our being."

As we have seen, the New Age Movement stresses the "god within" and encourages manipulation of the "divine" through meditation and other techniques, rather than worship of a transcendent immanent God.

b) Christology

For New Agers Jesus is merely one of those specially enlightened by the Christ spirit (as were Buddha and other religious leaders). They are expecting the imminent coming, not of Jesus, but of the "Christ-spirit," the head of a hierarchy of supernatural "spiritual masters."

Alice Bailey, a leader in the Theosophical Society, which is vitally important in the New Age Movement, wrote much about "the Christ" and often seems to be describing Jesus. But then she says, "The Christ used the body of the initiate Jesus, taking possession of it at the time of the Baptism."⁶

This adoptionist position, typical of New Age thinking, separates "the Christ" (a superior spiritual being) from Jesus. In fact the description of the Christ sounds uncannily like the NT descriptions of Antichrist. True, the NT speaks of the cosmic aspect of Christology, but this is always referring to Jesus, the only incarnation of God.

Bailey also wants "a recognition of the claims of Christ (no matter by what name he may be called) in the East or West."⁷ He will not be the messiah of the Jews. "He will not come to convert the 'heathen' world, for in the eyes of the Christ and of His true disciples, no such world exists...The major effects of His appearance will surely be to demonstrate in every land the effects of a spirit of inclusiveness - an inclusiveness which will be channelled or expressed through Him. All who seek right human relations will be gathered automatically to Him whether they are one of the great world religions or not: all who see no true or basic difference between religion and religion, or between man and man or nation and nation will rally to Him. Those who embody the spirit of exclusiveness and separativeness will stand automatically and equally revealed and all men will know them for what they are."⁸

⁶ Alice A Bailey, "Serving Humanity" (Lucis Publishing Co., New York, 1972), p.399.

⁷ Ibid., p.378.

⁸ Ibid., p.75.

The last sentence of the Bailey quote sounds ominous and could suggest a threat of persecution against those holding an “exclusivist” position like traditional biblical Christology.

c) Atonement.

There really is no place for atonement in most New Age thought because the movement devalues sin. Marilyn Ferguson, a leading New Ager, writes, “Human nature is neither good nor bad, but open to continuous transformation and transference.”⁹

d) Demonology

The New Age encourages centring (letting one's mind go blank) and channelling (a new word for mediumship). But it also commends Wicca (witchcraft) which has a new respectability today, and even Luciferianism. The Findhorn Community (a key New Age foundation in Scotland) professes communication with nature spirits and the god Pan.

All of this is seen as wholesome. And it “works.” But why? Traditional biblical theology sees these activities as laying a person open to demonic influence or possession. Satan can, after all, transform himself into an angel of light. We should not condemn New Agers for being unaware of the dangers. The church needs compassionately to warn and deliver them.

| NEW AGE | BIBLICAL THEOLOGY |
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| 1. ABOUT GOD | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impersonal • Pantheistic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God is love • God is a holy judge |
| 2. ABOUT HUMANITY | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emanations from God | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinful and so separated from God the source of life |
| 3. ABOUT SALVATION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realizing our divinity and absorption into God • Transforming our consciousness through meditation • Reincarnation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to God’s justice sin requires the death penalty. • But, in his love, God longs to reconcile us to himself • So he decides to take humanity’s death penalty upon himself and opens the way to eternal life. |
| 4. ABOUT JESUS | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A man enlightened by the Christ spirit (as were others) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God had to become incarnate (in Jesus) in order to bear our death penalty. |
| 5. ABOUT THE WAY OF SALVATION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using psychotechnologies to discover “the god within” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repentance • Faith in Jesus Christ • Reception of the Holy Spirit |

⁹ M.Ferguson, "The Aquarian Conspiracy" (Paladin Grafton Books, London, 1988) p.30

4. It infiltrates Christianity

New Age thinking can easily infiltrate Christian circles without people being aware of its real nature. This shows itself is:

a) Sentimental "ecumenism"

There is a laudable Christian concern to see the divisions in Christ's Church – his body on earth – healed. But there is always a danger of compromising important beliefs for the sake of a cosy unity. Ecumenism must be carried out prayerfully in conscious submission to Christ and the basic principles of the New Testament.

b) Unbiblical meditation and mysticism

There is a long and honourable tradition of Christian meditation and mysticism. However Christians (and Christian organisations) can lapse into New Age meditation techniques without realising they are doing so. Meditation should be consciously under the lordship of Christ and related to or centring upon him and the basic principles of the New Testament.

c) Purely pragmatic assessment of healing

We need to be properly critical about healing. As said above, there appear to be natural healing gifts but some are related to occult powers and demonic spirits. It is advisable only to seek healing from those who minister in the name of Jesus and who trust in him.

d) Over-emphasis on self-fulfilment

There are, of course, many benefits from faith in Christ, including such things as healing of the personality and release of gifts and talents. But it is not a biblical attitude to be in Christianity simply for what one can get out of it. Jesus said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26). Self-denial is an important Christian discipline.

e) An unbalanced approach to "positive confession"

"Positive confession" is a strong affirmation of belief that God is going to provide some blessing or benefit. It can be good but it can also be excessive. People have been known to affirm dogmatically and persistently that God was going to give them some material benefit to the extent that they are attempting to "twist God's arm." This is unhelpful and it should be remembered that the occult is an attempt to manipulate the supernatural for some personal motive. This contrasts with the Christian ideal of submitting to an infinitely loving heavenly Father and asking for what, after prayerful thought, seems to be in his will.

f) An uncritical, experience-based Christianity

Some Christians are experience junkies: they mainline on the latest high experience. First it might have been Charismatic Renewal, then it was the Toronto Blessing and so on. It is not that these movements were wrong (although they might have been mixed blessings!) but this constant hunger for excitement and emotional trips is unhealthy and unhelpful. It can make people uncritical about the origin and nature of such experiences.

g. Creation-centred theology

One of the most effective ways in which New Age thinking has infiltrated the church is through the work of Matthew Fox, a Dominican theologian from California. His Creation-Centred Theology caused the Vatican to silence him for a year. He has lectured in various countries and numerous Christians, including clergy and ministers, have been won over to his radical views.

Fox's works has various good aspects:

- It stresses the cosmic work of Christ
- It has a positive view of art and creativity
- It has a positive view of sexuality
- It has a positive view of youth
- It has a positive view of suffering
- It encourage a desire for awe in worship
- It has a positive view of enjoying the world etc.

However, it has some unbiblical aspects:

- It does not seem to teach transcendence as well as immanence in spite of the fact that it is a major aspect of dialectic - a concept of which he is fond. So he says, "C. Jung has written that there are two ways to lose your soul. One of these is to worship a god outside you. If he is correct then a lot of churchgoers in the West have been losing their souls for generations, to the extent that they have attended religious events where prayer is addressed to a god outside. The idea that god is 'out there' is probably the ultimate dualism, divorcing as it does God and humanity and reducing religion to a childish state of pleasing or pleading with a God 'out there.'"¹⁰ This is reminiscent of the "Christian Buddhism" of Don Cupitt. Fox writes, "Pantheism, which is a declared heresy because it robs God of transcendence, states that 'everything is God and God is everything.' Panentheism, on the other hand, is altogether orthodox and very fit for orthopraxis as well, for it slips in the little Greek word 'en' and this means, 'God is in everything and everything is in God.'"¹¹
- It rejects "Fall/redemption" theology, i.e. that Jesus death was a vicarious sacrifice dealing with the fact and effects of human sin. He says it is profoundly introspective, preoccupied with personal salvation and creating fear. Fox writes, "Until we understand the very shaky biblical grounds on which original sin doctrine is based we will never let go of it as our starting point for belief enough to let the true biblical starting point -that of...original blessing into our lives."¹² Genesis does, of course, teach "original blessing". But to denigrate the doctrine of the Fall, as Fox does, is to be untrue to the NT and to undermine the gospel. Fox's determination to affirm and exult in God's creation leads him to this position. Hence "creation-centred theology".
- It regards creation, rather than Jesus and Scripture, as the primary revelation of God.
- It uncritically emphasises mysticism.
- It favours extreme feminism (see below).
- It has an interfaith rather than biblical Christology (Doctrine of the Nature of Christ).
- It has a New Age view of salvation. Fox writes, "One meaning of salvation...is the awakening to our divinity. To recover our divinity and the doctrine of our deification and divinisation is itself salvific...ours is a created divinity."¹³ He maintains our divinity is shown in creativity.

6. Extreme feminism

One overseas Anglican diocese (with Presbyterians and Methodists) sponsored a Women's Ministries and Spirituality Conference in 1988. It was completely 'ecumenical" including pagans as well as Christians. The

¹⁰ Ibid., p.89.

¹¹ Matthew Fox, "Original Blessing" (Bear & Co., Santa Fe, 1983), p.90.

¹² Fox, Op.cit., p.47.

¹³ Fox, Op.cit., p.235.

participants shared in various New Age rituals: Tai Chi; the OM mantra; singing to the Earth Mother; divining with pendulums and seeking the Goddess within. The conference not only spoke of shared feminine spirituality but also shared in a blood ritual which was a celebration of sexuality and menstruation. They also included circle dancing to "raise power."

One woman minister who lectures at an overseas Anglican theological college wrote: "There is a real sense in which only a reclaiming of the power and politics of witchcraft can save the world."

A similar conference in 1994 claimed "The circle of these simple dances embodies the spirit of peace and love, and the longing in the heart of our Mother Earth that all Her Children be one. Danced to sacred healing chants, ancient and from the Spirit of this manifesting age, we live the beginnings of the birth of the light that is dawning on the whole universe..."

Sometimes there are explicit references to Wicca (witchcraft) and "Goddess Theology." So a 1991 event in St James Church, Piccadilly claimed, "As we re-establish our links with the Divine Feminine, we are tending to ignore the Goddesses of our native tradition..."

5. Guidelines to avoid the deceit of the New Age Movement

1. Stress the transcendence of God over creation as well as his immanence.

God is transcendent i.e. distinct from and higher than creation. But he is also intimately present throughout the universe. This biblical balance must be maintained in order to avoid the pantheism of the new age movement. Pantheism identifies God with the universe.

2. Stress the reality of human sinfulness and the need of redemption through the Cross, and new birth by the Holy Spirit.

The new age movement has an idealistic view of human nature and its potential. Redemption is unnecessary, they say, all that is needed is enlightenment to the powers and potential we all have within us.

3. Stress that obedience to God (based on the truth of Scripture) has priority over unity.

Consequently all unity must be based on the teaching of Scripture.

4. Demonstrate the reality of the Body of Christ as a loving community in the local church.

Then people will not need to look for fellowship, acceptance and support from involvement in some new age network or community.

5. Demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in accordance with biblical teaching.

The renewal movement has rediscovered this. The Church should be offering healing and other biblical experiences of the supernatural (i.e. the power of Christ) so that people don't have to seek for healing in a new age context. People have a thirst for the supernatural. They need to be offered and to find the answer in the Church rather than in some new age techniques.

The Church must bear some responsibility for people getting involved in the New Age Movement. If we are not functioning as the Body of Christ as a loving community; if we're not demonstrating the power of the Holy Spirit as the Bible teaches, then we are encouraging people to seek answers elsewhere. And there's no lack of new age practitioners to fit the bill.

6. Avoid either spiritual superstition or lack of belief in the reality of demons.

Some Christians see demons everywhere! They live in superstitious fear that if they once step out of line with biblical teaching the demons will get them. God did not intend us to live in such fear. But there are evil angels just as there are good angels. (Some Christians do not think about these evil angels - demons

- and put everything down to natural causes. They are vulnerable to fruitlessly seeking to combat a supernatural attack with merely natural methods, rather than with powerful and authoritative prayer).

7. Avoid dualism

By dualism, I mean implying that there are two gods: one good – God and the other evil – Satan. This dualism implies that Satan is so powerful that God has difficulty protecting us from him! We must never forget that Satan is a created being, not divine. He is supernatural but not semi-divine. He is on the level of a senior angel.

8. Avoid judgmentalism

Associated with the spiritual superstition and paranoia, is a tendency to judgmentalism. Those who fall into judgmentalism easily “write off” fellow Christians who are (mistakenly) deemed to be into New Age or occult activities. I can illustrate this from my own experience. In one of my churches we held “Healing Experiences” which were deliberately planned to counteract New Age ideas with wholesome Christian alternatives. As part of this I produced a card bearing the words of Revelation 21 about the New Jerusalem (Heaven) which has beautiful semi-precious stones (crystals) in its walls and foundations. To illustrate I put these various semi-precious stones (crystals) on the card adjacent to the Biblical text. This was mentioned in the media and, despite my very high-profile stand for biblical doctrine and morality, a good number of Christians judgmentally concluded that I was into crystal healing! So they wrote me off. Actually, all I was doing was vividly interpreting a biblical passage! We should adopt the principle that someone is innocent until proved guilty and not draw negative conclusions until we know all the facts.

9. Know your Bible and assess doubtful things by it

The way to avoid spiritual deceit is to become familiar with the teaching of Scripture and especially the New Testament. Knowing the truth enables us to detect error, even subtle error, when we come across it. We need to ask:

- What biblical justification is there for a particular practice, effect or experience?
- (Where there is no specifically relevant Biblical reference) can a case be made out that this practice, effect or experience is in harmony with Scripture?

However, we need to ensure we are interpreting Scripture properly by:

- Being wide open to the disturbing work of the Spirit which may lead us out of our comfort zones.
- Being open to others and their interpretations of Scripture (ensure we receive good Bible teaching).
- Being aware of cultural and traditional influences upon us because our denominational background and social context can influence the way we interpret Scripture.

10. Do not despise biblical theology or the witness and experience of the Church

Listen to what the theologians say. Respect the experience, wisdom and tradition of the Church. They are not infallible, but God can and does use them as a means of communicating with and protecting us.

APPENDIX: How to avoid new age influence in counselling and healing

1. Regard biblical teaching as fundamental

Apply the above-mentioned criteria to counselling and healing techniques For example:

- a. What biblical justification is there for a particular practice, effect or experience?
- b. If there is no specific biblical justification, can a definite case be made for saying this practice, effect or experience is in harmony with Scripture?

2. See self-fulfilment as a by product of worship and obedience, not an end in

itself

The Lord is concerned that we should experience the fulness of joy and 'the peace of God which transcends all understanding.' But that is not our aim in the Christian life.

We are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ in his sacrificial life. As we do that we shall experience self-fulfilment as a by-product. Ironically, the Christians who seek such fulfilment are likely to become increasingly frustrated for it is in giving that we receive.

3. Before encouraging any 'positive confession', ensure the content is:

- a. Specifically biblical, or**
- b. Clearly in harmony with Scripture**

And listen to God to ascertain if the content is his present purpose for you. Briefly, we hear God by pausing to worship; confessing known sin; laying down our desires and submitting to God's will; resisting the devil and asking the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of truth — to guide us. The prayerful advice of other Christians is very important too.

God may speak through a passage of Scripture (which must be correctly interpreted), a prophetic word, word of knowledge or wisdom or a prophetic mental picture. All such experiences must be weighed to ensure they are biblical.

When we have the conviction God is confirming that he does want to give us what we have requested, then we can do our positive confession. Then it is in faith rather than in presumption; it is in submission to God, rather than an attempt to 'twist God's arm' and manipulate reality.

4. Ensure that counselling is in the Spirit and

- a. avoids psychological manipulation**

i.e. encourage biblical activities like praise, confession, thanksgiving, petition, assurance of forgiveness, affirmation of biblical faith etc. But leave the Holy Spirit to lead into any other experience spontaneously (See (I) above). Focus on the historic, biblical Jesus not some mystical, imaginary Jesus of experience.

- b. subjects the use of imagination to biblical truth.**

It is wrong to encourage a person to imagine Jesus doing, saying or being anything which is not clearly justified by biblical teaching.

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