

Lecture 26 – Overview of New Age: Back to Spirituality

“*The First Insight* –

*A reconsideration of the inherent mystery that surrounds our individual lives on this planet.

*We experience mysterious coincidences which show us that there is another side of life we have yet to discover—some other process operating behind the scenes.

*A world transformation is taking place now because the number of individuals conscious of such coincidences is growing dramatically.

*Once we reach a “critical mass” of such individuals, the culture will begin to take these coincidental experiences seriously, and we will wonder, in mass, what mysterious process underlies human life on this planet.”

The Celestine Prophecy, James Redfield, as outlined by Laura Bryannan,
homstar.org/bryannan/celestine.html. 1999

Key Terms

Age of Aquarius, rationalism, objective truth, Eastern religions, paganism, mysticism, meditation, oneness, reincarnation

Objectives

- *Identify the major themes and characteristics of New Age spirituality.
- *Recognize and describe built in difficulties with the New Age worldview.
- *Identify potential bridges with the New Age worldview.
- *Recognize and explore the impact of New Age spirituality on the church.

Introduction

Please note: Professor Barrs does not touch on all of the points in the following outline; nevertheless, they are included for your benefit. The Humanism and Existentialism outlines mentioned at the beginning of this class are incorporated in this study guide as an appendix.

Recommended Reading on New Age:

Mangalwadi, Vishal. *When the New Age Gets Old*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992.

Mangalwadi, Vishal. *The World of Gurus*. New Delhi, India: Vikas, 1977.

Clark, David K. and Norman L. Geisler. *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990.

Groothuis, Douglas. *Revealing the New Age Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990.

Redfield, James. *The Celestine Prophecy*. New York: Warner Books, 1993.

Redfield, James. *The Tenth Insight*. New York: Warner Books, 1996.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Overview of New Age

A. Mistakes Christians make regarding New Age

1. Guilt by association
2. Conspiracy theories
3. Assumption of deep commitment

B. A brief history:

1. The term ‘New Age’
 - a. Age of Aquarius beginning; the old age of Pisces ending
2. Schopenhauer desired to eradicate Jewish monotheism, and then Christianity could be seduced.
 - a. Influenced Wagner and Nietzsche.

3. Madame Helena Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society
 - a. wrote *Isis Unveiled* (1877) & *The Secret Doctrine* (1878).
 4. Blavatsky influenced Rudolph Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy.
 5. Annie Besant, disciple of Helena Blavatsky
 - a. introduced Hindu teachers to the West, including Krishnamurti
 6. First World Parliament of Religions, 1893
 - a. Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, taught similarity of all religions, established Vedanta Societies in America.
 7. Swami Yogananda started Self Realization Fellowship in the 1920s.
 8. Immigration restrictions lifted in 1965; many gurus came to teach; movements begun
 - a. Maharaj Ji (The Divine Light Mission), Hari Krishna, Sri Rajneesh, Sai Baba
 9. Today these ideas part of mainstream American life; millions reading New Age books, attending seminars, joining organizations
- C. What attracts our contemporaries to this 'castle spiritual'?
1. Lack of faith in the orthodoxies of rationalism
 2. Despair of finding objective truth
 3. Coming to terms with the contradictions built into materialism/humanism
 4. A new spirituality blending –
 - a. Eastern religions
 - b. Paganism
 - c. Mystical Christianity
 - d. Western materialism
 5. A holistic view of life
 6. No strict moral demands, rather moral relativism and a personal path to peace
- D. Beliefs first encountered around 'castle spiritual'
1. Belief in the self, or 'going within'
 - a. Self realization is the path to spirituality
 - b. De-emphasis of reason and affirmation of 'feminine' functions of intuition and the feelings of the body
 2. Belief in the techniques of meditation
 - a. To know oneself
 - b. To control body and mind
 - c. To change consciousness
 - d. To put one in touch with the divine within
 3. Belief that spiritual energy can control matter
 4. Belief that we live in a world of spiritual power available to all
 - a. This is universal and eternal
- E. New Age worldview: within the castle walls
1. The oneness of all things
 - a. Everything in the universe is an expression of the Ultimate.
 - b. Not a God, but the ground of all being
 - c. This is beyond definition
 - d. The Christian view of God is limiting and out of date.
 2. We are this one - we are not personally distinct from it.
 - a. We are the universe.
 - b. We are one with others.
 - c. We are God. If we descend into the depths of our being we will find that we are one with God.
 3. What is the human problem?
 - a. Rejection of the Christian view that we have lost fellowship with God because of sin

- 1) No reverence for an authority outside myself
- 2) The doctrine of sin is undignifying and limiting
- b. We are God, but we have forgotten that we are God. So salvation is waking up to our divinity.
- c. Rejection of Christian view of the fall of nature
 - 1) It forgets the divinity of nature.
 - 2) It leads to the abuse of nature. (But consider effects of New Age: “Our religions in thousands of years have never motivated anyone to plough a field, to dam a stream, to drain a swamp.” Pandit Nehru)
- 4. Belief in reincarnation
 - a. The soul is immortal.
 - b. The soul has been and will be embodied many times.
 - c. There is no continuity of personality.
 - d. Ultimate complete unity with the One, and detachment from the field of space/time
- 5. The doctrine of karma: the law of cosmic justice
 - a. The law of cause and effect applied to human choices and actions in an absolute way
 - b. You reap what you sow. What you experience is your reaping from a previous life embodiment.
 - c. Karma is the expression of ultimate harmony in the universe between light and darkness, good and evil, pain and pleasure, life and death.
- F. Where will this lead? The heart of darkness
 - 1. Know yourself for you are divine. “Everyone’s perception of reality is valid.” “Follow your bliss.”
 - a. The only real truth is your own truth.
 - 2. Be patient for time does not matter.
 - 3. Be at peace for everything is harmonious ultimately.
 - 4. Look to spiritual guides for help - those who are further along the path of enlightenment than you.
 - a. Some are alive - swamis, gurus, spiritual masters, avatars
 - b. Some are in between incarnations, and can bring wisdom from beyond the grave
 - c. Some are powerful spirits who desire to speak through the individual
 - 1) Openness to the occult
- G. The evidence used to support these beliefs
 - 1. What feels right to me - a mystical rather than a rational basis for knowledge
 - 2. The widespread occurrence of experiences such as:
 - a. ‘Déjà vu’
 - b. Out of body experiences
 - c. Near death experiences
 - 3. Information from mediums, spirit channels and others who claim knowledge not normally accessible to humanity
 - 4. The widespread currency of similar teaching
 - 5. The insistence that life must be more than material
- H. What are some of the problems with these ideas?
 - 1. How can we know what is truth if everyone’s perception of reality is valid?
 - 2. Is there any value to the body, or to the material world?
 - 3. Confusion about immortality - reincarnation is not the same as the eternal life of an individual.
 - 4. Is there any place to value the personality of an individual?
 - 5. Can we make any distinction between good and evil?
 - a. In the end both good and evil are embraced.
 - b. Compassion for those who suffer is undermined.
 - 6. Rejection of authority of God, yet acceptance of authority