

The New Age Movement, the Devil, and Modern Culture

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In America, New Age influence continues unabated. According to popular New Age leader Marilyn Ferguson in the February 16, 1992 *Los Angeles Times*, sociologists at UC Santa Barbara estimated that “as many as 12 million Americans could be considered active participants [in the New Age movement], and another 30 million are avidly interested. If all of these people were brought together in a church-like organization, it would be the third-largest religious denomination in America.” Ferguson was reviewing a book by Michael D’Antonio, *Heaven on Earth*, which discusses the influence of the New Age movement. To further illustrate, according to Dr. J. Gordon Melton’s *New Age Almanac*, there are literally hundreds of American educational institutions that now offer degrees or programs on New Age subjects.

Our *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), which evaluates a variety of New Age practices and philosophies from a biblical, philosophical, scientific and/or occult perspective also illustrates New Age influence.

New Age teachings and practices are characteristically spiritistic (See the chart “A Contrast Between Biblical Christianity and New Age/Spiritistic Theology and Philosophy” elsewhere on this site). Unfortunately, these are opposed to men’s best interests, especially as those interests are divinely revealed in the Bible. As we documented in *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception* (Harvest House, 1993), involvement in spiritism and other forms of the occult is hazardous on an individual level (physically, psychologically, spiritually) and on a social level (ethically, economically, criminally).

Thus, the New Age movement is certainly not without serious cultural implications. As Dr. Carl Raschke (Ph.D. Harvard), Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver, points out, even in subtle ways, New Age influence is consequential:

Lurking in back of New Age semantics, which become compressed into such flagrant, pseudo-religious word mysteries as “empowerment,” “wholeness,” or “planetary awareness,” are verbal subliminal incendiary devices that can be used towards just about all the benchmarks of moral authority, logical inference, and critical scrutiny that distinguish a culture.¹

Brooks Alexander, co-founder of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley, California and one of the modern authorities on the New Age movement, was correct when he discussed why the biblical ban on New Age and other forms of spiritism is so uncompromising:

[Spiritism] is ultimately poisonous to our souls, regardless of how sweet it tastes or how innocent it seems. The dominant theme of the Old Testament’s ban on spiritism is defilement. The spirits are *evil* spirits—though, needless to say, they do not appear with fangs bared,... and hidden agendas displayed.... Interestingly, the Bible levies its judgment against spiritism at two levels. It treats spiritism as a symptom of social decline as well as an act of personal culpability. All sin provokes God’s judgment. Advanced or

developed sin provokes it more directly and immediately. As a social symptom, spiritism represents the final stage of a long process of spiritual decay. It is the terminal phase of our flight from God. It is terminal because God's judgment on spiritism is not meant to admonish or correct, but to cleanse and extirpate.

On an individual scale, the practice of spiritism is terminal because it represents an ultimate confusion of values. It trades humanity's privilege of intimacy with God for sheer fascination with a liar who secretly hates all that is human and all that humans hold dear....

For all these reasons, and then some, God rejects spiritism: it is a substitute, a counterfeit, a poison, and a ticket to condemnation. It has no place in eternity and no place in the life of a Christian.²

Indeed, this is precisely why New Age and related practices must not be ignored by anyone. But further, consider the following points which underscore the connection between New Age religion and even more hazardous spirituality illustrated by shamanism, Gnosticism, witchcraft, and Satanism.

1. New Age religions and cults are frequently founded upon or undergirded by dangerous shamanistic motifs. New religions authority, Dr. Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., at the University of Southern California remarks that this "cult phenomena could almost be called a modern resurgence of shamanism."³
2. New Age philosophy and practice is characteristically undergirded by a spiritually menacing gnosticism and related pagan ideologies.⁴
3. Yet the similarities between the culturally more acceptable Gnosticism and shamanism on the one hand, and the more overtly evil witchcraft and Satanism on the other, underscore the long-term social and individual consequences of New Age practice generally.

The late New Age Hindu guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, actively endorsed witchcraft to his followers as constituting "one of the greatest possibilities of human growth."⁵ Further, according to the late comparative religions scholar and authority on shamanism, Mircea Eliade, "All the features associated with European witches are... claimed also by Indo-Tibetan yogis and magicians."⁶ Satanist high priest, Dr. Michael Aquino of the Church of Set, also described his brand of Satanism as a more refined and concentrated version of New Age philosophy and practice.⁷

All this helps explain why former Spiritual Counterfeits Project researcher, Dr. Robert Burroughs, remarks, "The new religions are not always among the land's most upright citizens. There is a dimension of decadence and criminality among them that cannot be dismissed."⁸ Dr. Raschke cogently argues that,

The upsurge of Satanist practices... must be interpreted not as some kind of odd wrinkle in the present-day texture of religious change, but as a culminating phase of the "New Age" movement, for which the so-called "new religions" of the past two decades have provided a fertile environment in which to flourish.

Satanism... represents the core tendencies of the new religions project.⁹

Common elements in all four categories (shamanism, Gnosticism, witchcraft, and Satanism) include the acceptance of spiritism; the portrayal of biblical Christianity as a spiritual evil, whether philosophically or practically; the rejection of absolute morality in favor of relativism, amoralism, or the deliberate acceptance and use of acts of evil for "higher" spiritual purposes; pagan, idolatrous practice as in nature religions; a highly consequential animistic or monistic philosophy—and not the least, the probability of demon-possession for the spiritual leaders and not infrequently the followers of these occult practices. When certain New Age leaders say "morality is degrading"; "Good and evil are one and the same"; "The murderer, too, is God"; that God and Satan and good and evil should *both* be used for purposes of spiritual growth, one can, perhaps, sense the larger social implications.¹⁰

On a happier note, the secular world has begun to critique these areas as indicated by, e.g., *The Skeptical Inquirer* and other journals which evaluate these subjects critically from a rationalistic or scientific perspective. Unfortunately, having a largely materialistic and/or rationalistic approach, they are generally weak when it comes to a spiritual analysis. This is where the Christian Church must step in.

However, this raises another issue. For secularists or religionists who do not share our Christian world view, why should they logically consider a Christian analysis of current spiritual trends as given in our *Encyclopedia*? There are many reasons, of which we mention three.

The first reason secularists should listen to a Christian perspective is because of the traditional acclaim given to Christian philosophy and values generally. Christianity is not just intellectually credible, whether considered philosophically, historically, scientifically, ethically, culturally, etc., but from an evidential perspective, actually superior to other world views, secular or religious.¹¹ If Christianity were obviously false, as some critics charge, how could such esteemed intellectuals as those we quoted in earlier issues logically make their declarations concerning the truth of Christianity?¹²

The second reason secularists and those of other religious persuasions should listen to a Christian evaluation is because such individuals themselves are viable targets for New Age conversion and because of the potential dangers inherent in New Age practices generally.

In other words, it is their life and future that is also at risk. After all, the New Age movement is comprised almost exclusively of non-Christians. Secular humanists and modern psychologists, agnostic and atheists, materialists and rationalists, liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics, those in the counter culture, even many scientists and other prominent intellectuals have all been converted to the New Age, often in large numbers. Indeed, otherwise rational intellectuals in virtually all areas of the natural and social sciences are among those who have easily been converted to New Age belief, as we have indicated throughout our *Encyclopedia*. It is they who have become the occultists of today.

We noted elsewhere that potent occult experiences can convert even the most hardened rationalist and that: "There is a great deal of research that shows that all people, but especially highly intelligent people, are easily taken in by all kinds of illusions, hallucinations, self-deceptions, and outright bamboozles—all the more so when they have a high investment in the illusion being true."¹³

Because non-Christian, pragmatic, relative, existential and materialistic world views have less moral, intellectual, theological and/or experiential vigor by which to combat attempts at conversion, proponents of deficient world views may themselves become the easier targets. Therefore, because it is not just Christians who are quarry for New Age conversion, but principally non-Christians of any persuasion, secular or religious, such individuals should listen to what Christian philosophy and theology has to say concerning the personal (and social) consequences of New Age spirituality.

The third reason non-Christians should listen to what Christians say about the New Age is because the evidence for the reality of the evil spirits described in the Bible truly is convincing to the unbiased observer. A large amount of documentation exists for the biblical/Christian view that the spirits who are so dominant in the New Age movement are not, as commonly perceived, either good angels or other benign entities, psychological dynamics, myths, etc., but rather intelligent, deceiving and evil spiritual beings, biblically termed demons.

Like most religions and cultures throughout history, the Bible also teaches the reality of a

world of evil spirits. There are at least nine persuasive reasons for believing in their reality:

- 1) the consensus of history and religion;
- 2) the testimony of practicing occultists;
- 3) the confessions of former occultists;
- 4) the well-documented experience of demon-possession;
- 5) the mass of evidence for additional damage and destruction that spiritism has caused in people's lives;
- 6) the spirits' universal opposition to biblical teaching;
- 7) the testimony of the Word of God, the Bible;
- 8) the testimony of Jesus Christ, who, as God incarnate, is an infallible authority; and
- 9) the testimony of hundreds of qualified scholars whose logical arguments cannot be ignored.

Consider Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, an initial skeptic of Christianity, who graduated from Cornell University with distinction in philosophy, Phi Beta Kappa. Then he went on to earn the Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, a second doctorate (in theology) from the University of Strasborg, France, plus seven additional graduate degrees in theology, law, library science and other fields. He has written over 125 scholarly journal articles, plus 40 books, many of them defending Christian faith against well-reasoned skeptical views. He has also debated some of America's leading skeptics and held numerous prestigious appointments. He is a founding member of the World Association of Law Professors, a member of the American Society of International Law and is honored in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in American Law*, *The Directory of American Scholars*, *International Scholars Directory*, and the prestigious *Who's Who in the World*. Men with the kind of skeptical background and philosophical acumen as Dr. Montgomery simply do not believe in Christianity and its view of demons apart from the necessary evidence.

Dr. Montgomery points out, "there is overwhelming extra-biblical data and empirical confirmation" documenting scriptural claims for the existence of a personal devil and demons¹⁴ and, that "The problem involved in determining whether demon-possession occurs and whether witchcraft works is absurdly simple. The documentation is overwhelming."¹⁵

He also offers some good advice for skeptics generally:

We must "suspend disbelief," check out the evidence with the care demanded for events in general, attempt to formulate explanatory constructs that best "fit the facts" and at the same time be willing always to accept facts even if our best attempts to explain them prove inadequate.¹⁶

But what the majority of Americans have perhaps not sufficiently considered is the *extent* of the influence of the devil and his demons. As theologian Helmut Thielicke once noted, "Anyone who would understand history must be in possession of the category of the demonic."

So what does the Scripture declare about Satan's power? If we examine only a few Scriptures that speak of the devil's power, character and methodology, it becomes evident that humanity faces a more formidable foe than it may conceive is possible. First, Scripture teaches that Satan is the god or ruler of this world: "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Second, Scripture declares that the entire world lies in the control of the devil: "We know that...the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Even Jesus Christ Himself did not deny the devil's ability to give Him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for His

worship: “Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give to you,’ he said, ‘If you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matthew 4:8-10). Jesus Himself also taught the world was “under the dominion of Satan” (Acts 26:18).

In addition, there are several Scriptures in the book of Revelation that teach that Satan has already deceived and, after the Millennium, will again deceive, the nations of the world: “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Revelation 12:9). In fact, at some point in the future, the devil will be bound for a thousand years “to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time” (Revelation 20:3).

Third, the Bible teaches that the devil has apparently had some impact in everyone’s life, whether directly or indirectly. Prior to the believer’s own spiritual regeneration, the devil was influential in his or her life as well, even “energizing” us: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work [*energeo*; to be strongly active within] in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

The above are only some of the Scriptures that indicate the power of the devil. Unfortunately, the majority of men, and even many Christians, simply aren’t ready to grant the devil this kind of power or to grasp the magnitude of such a being or the possibility of his having considerable influence in the affairs of this planet—or even in their own lives.

Perhaps a spiritual being of this kind is incomprehensible to most people who assume their lives are lived apart from any outside spiritual alliances. Yet consider again the influence this being exerts over men—he “blinds the minds” of men, he “works within” them, and has “dominion” over them (cf., Acts 26:18; Ephesians 2:1-2). Note the control he exerts over the nations—he “deceives the nations” and “deceives the whole world” (cf., Revelation 20:2-3). He is “the god of this world” in whose power “the whole world lies,” a statement not even Jesus disputed (Matthew 4:8-10). Note the moral character and temperament of this being. He has “great wrath” against men (Revelation 12:12), is “a liar and a murderer” (John 8:44), “schemes” against men and is full of “wickedness” (Ephesians 6:11-12) and yet, contrary to all expectations, he “*ap- pears* as an angel of light and a minister of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

One reason many Americans cannot bring themselves to accept this biblical portrait of the devil is due to secularist, e.g., materialist, assumptions which hold that this world is all there is. The devil doesn’t exist because skeptics say he doesn’t exist. But, again, the evidence of biblical teaching, occultism, comparative religion, missiology, anthropology, and human history suggests otherwise.

New Agers themselves have a difficult time with the biblical view of the spirit world because the spirits who often contact them appear as good, friendly and helpful entities. Therefore, they trust the spirits’ claims about themselves. In return, New Agers receive blessings from the spirits in the form of exciting spiritual revelations, blissful experiences, loving encounters, help and encouragement with problems, and protection from dangers—not to mention personal assurance of their lack of need for repentance and faith in the biblical Jesus Christ, and endless congratulations about their own divinity.

What do the spirits get in return for giving all manner of blessing? The spirits achieve their

principal goal: the opportunity to, on the basis of trust, provide men with carefully engineered forms of spiritual deception.

We think it couldn't be clearer. If the Bible is the revealed Word of God to men—and all the available evidence logically requires such a conclusion—these spirits can be none other than the biblical demons.

But how many New Agers or secularists today think demons may be active in New Age practices and philosophy? Unfortunately, most of the subjects we discuss in our *Encyclopedia* are inaccurately perceived by the general public primarily because they have been deceptively promoted and/or inadequately critiqued. For example, yoga and meditation are viewed as beneficial forms of physical health and relaxation. Astrology is seen as a harmless pastime or perhaps a legitimate form of divination. Hypnosis is generally conceded as something innocuous, a useful therapeutic tool; or to be used for fun and entertainment; or something to be employed individually for personal spiritual growth and problem solving. Water dowsing is also characteristically interpreted as an innocent or helpful practice. Even so lofty and divine a subject as angels is woefully misunderstood today.

All this underscores the fundamental problem of the New Age movement. For millions of people, it appears to be a genuine spiritual movement, even a godly one—that is, concerned with the things of God.

On the other hand, we think it is good to remember that many things in life initially seem good (even “godly”)—until we, often unexpectedly, discover their true nature. Hopefully, on the individual level this discovery will not occur too late. One only need consider the tragedies of Jonestown and Waco, Texas or the recent exposes of fraudulent TV preachers and the misery they brought to millions of people to realize that all that glitters with gold is certainly not heaven.

Notes:

- ¹ Carl Raschke, “Business as Usual: The New Age Rage and Corporate America,” *SCP [Spiritual Counterfeits Project] Journal*, Vol. 9., no. 1, 1989, p. 22.
- ² Brooks Alexander, “What Is Spiritism and Why Are They Saying Those Awful Things About It?”, *SCP Journal*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 1987, p. 7.
- ³ Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Religious & Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 12.
- ⁴ Carl Raschke, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1980), passim.
- ⁵ Swami Anand Yarti, (compiler), *The Sound of Running Water, a Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work, 1974-1978* (Poona, India: Rajneesh Foundation, 1980), p. 364.
- ⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 71.
- ⁷ As stated on the Oprah Winfrey Show, February 17, 1988.
- ⁸ Robert Burroughs, introduction to Carl A. Raschke, “Satanism and the Devolution of the ‘New Religions,’” *SCP Newsletter*, Fall 1985, p. 23.
- ⁹ Raschke, “Satanism and the Devolution of the ‘New Religions,’” p. 24; cf., Carl Raschke, *Painted Black: From Drug Killers to Heavy Metal—The Alarming True Story of How Satanism is Terrorizing Our Communities*, 1991.
- ¹⁰ For documentation, see the chapter on Eastern Gurus in our *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*; cf., John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Cultwatch: What You Need to Know About Spiritual Deception* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), pp. 137, 290.
- ¹¹ See e.g., John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999).
- ¹² Mortimer Adler cited in an interview in *Christianity Today*, November 19, 1990, p. 34; John W. Montgomery (ed.), *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question* (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 9; Alvin Plantinga, “A Christian Life Partly Lived,” in Kelly James-Clark (ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), p. 69; L.

Neff, "Christianity Today Talks to George Gilder," *Christianity Today*, March 6, 1987, p. 35 cited in David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), p. 13; The Chattanooga Free Press, July 23, 1995, p. A-11. For testimony of skeptics' conversion to Christianity based on the evidence for the resurrection of Christ, see *Do the Resurrection Accounts Conflict? and What Proof Is There That Jesus Rose From the Dead?* (Chattanooga, TN: The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1990). Also see the articles in *The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute News Magazine*, Vol. 2, no. 3, March 1995, Chattanooga, TN and Vol. 2, no. 4, April 1995.

¹³ Maureen O'Hara, "Science, Pseudo-Science, and Myth Mongering," in Robert Basil (ed.), *Not Necessarily the New Age: Critical Essays* (NY: Prometheus, 1988), p. 148.

¹⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, "Commentary on Hysteria and Demons, Depression and Oppression, Good and Evil" in John Warwick Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession: A Medical, Historical, Anthropological and Theological Symposium* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1976), p. 232.

¹⁵ John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1973), p. 146.

¹⁶ Ibid.