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The New Age

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

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Every once in a while I do something that I do not have to do. This includes taking time to travel and see some of the world that I have not seen. I had visited most of the US except for southern Utah, so when my office manager was to be away for a week, I asked my wife if there was any place in the country that she would like to visit. After much discussion we decided to go to the Southwest and visit some of the national parks that we missed on earlier trips to that part of our country. We decided to start in Phoenix since it was warm there, and go back to the Grand Canyon where I was alleged to have just driven by the first time we were there. We were to follow that up with Zion and Bryce Canyons and Canyon de Chelly. We were advised by our travel agent and some friends to also visit Sedona and see the red cliffs, so we included it in our itinerary. I am glad we did because we were able to see things and have experiences that were not related to the red cliffs.

First, we had trouble getting accommodations. I was surprised that such would be the case at this time of the year although we finally were able to get a room at the Hilton Inn there. It was rather pricey, but not more than some of the ones we were to stay at later. After registering we went to explore the town, that is to say the least, touristy. We had been advised to take the Pink Jeep ride, so as soon as we could get to town we checked it out and found that there was a tour that left in 30 minutes. On our tour we had a driver who was quite witty, but in addition was knowledgeable about the geological formations in the red cliffs. When we had driven into town I noted that there were a lot of rock shops that sold crystals, so while we were on our tour I asked him about them. He told us that the town was a "vortex" where New Agers came to soak up the cosmic power that was focused there. They were absorbed by crystals. These would have vibrations that have healing power when placed close to one's heart. Later, back at the hotel, we found the lobby full of persons attending some kind of services there. I noticed a man with a tom-tom and any number of women dressed in Saris. Some of the men had on something like Nehru jackets and had their heads shaved. Their presence piqued my interest, but I did not have time to investigate their activities further. I did, though, decide to investigate this religion further when I got back home. We do not have any obvious evidence of New Agers in our area except for a school in a nearby university town with about 200 students. They keep so quiet that they get little publicity. I only found out about them through a patient of mine who had worked as a teacher's aide there. It seems obvious that the children's parents are New Age believers or they would not send their children there to be indoctrinated into this religion.

It was not that I had not had some interest in the subject before, because several years ago I bought several books that described the New Age religion. At the time I simply thought I needed to know more about it. I have to admit that I did not remember much of what I read, so when we got home I decided to review the subject. These are some of the things I learned. One resource that is not directed toward the New Age religion was most illuminating. This is a book I reviewed in one of my past newsletters entitled *Called to be Holy* by John Oswalt. In this book he points out that there are 15 characteristics that are common to the ancient religions of the Near East and to Hinduism and the New Age today. They are as follows:

1. Everything that exists is continuous with everything else that exists. The universe is a seamless garment. Thus all psycho-socio-physical phenomena are identified with the divine, and there are as many gods and goddesses as there are phenomena.
2. Good is understood as that which is supportive of the cosmic order and evil is that which is destructive of that order. Good and evil are cosmic principles which are in endless conflict.
3. The formation of the visible world is the result of the cosmic conflict between these constructive and destructive principles.
4. Matter in the form of watery chaos has always existed.
5. The gods emerged from this material, primarily by sexual means.
6. The character of the gods is identical with that of humans, only on a grander scale. They are strong, but weak; faithful, but deceptive; loving, but hateful; dependable, but fickle.
7. The gods are bound by no code of honor. That is they need not be supportive of their worshipers if they choose not to be. However, each god is bound by his or her fate. They cannot escape what is decreed for them. So many of them endlessly die, often tragically, and are reborn.
8. This fate is not determined by the gods, but is independent of them. Thus it may be said that if there is an absolute in this understanding of reality, that absolute is impersonal power.
9. Because of the identity between the human, natural and divine realms, what is done in one realm must infallibly produce the same results in the other realms, unless some destructive force has disrupted the identity in some other way. Thus the means of disrupting nature and the gods is always through sympathetic magic.

10. Since the gods are identical with humans, the fundamental life force is sexual. Sex is a profoundly religious activity whereby the continued life of the cosmos is assured.

11. If the human and natural worlds are reflections of invisible reality then reality has no purpose except survival, and it has no goal except continued existence. In other words reality is circular coming from nowhere and going nowhere.

13. There is no such thing as absolute ethics. Obviously that is an impossibility in a polytheistic environment where all the gods adhere to differing ethical standards. Furthermore ethics have no bearing on one's relationship with the gods. Ethical standards are the province of the king, because they are a practical necessity for human society to exist. Typically the king claims to have gotten the standards from a god, but adhering to them has no real connection with religious behavior.

14. Religion has its purpose the maintenance of the great cycles of existence with a minimum of disruption. It does so by magically strengthening the hand of the constructive forces and weakening the hands of the destructive forces. One aspect of this process is to act out stories of the gods in which these results are achieved.

15. In such an understanding humanity is of very low value, and individual humans and their experiences are of no value at all. They are of value only in that they conform to the ideal. Unique events and persons are valueless because they are not seen to contribute to the recurring cycle of nature and existence.

I have quoted Oswalt because he has succinctly summarized not only the prevailing religious world in which the Israelis had their faith revealed to them, but his observations apply to the belief system that is Hinduism and what we call New Age today. It would be wrong to simply enumerate these characteristics without pointing out how Christianity differs so dramatically from the New Age belief system.

First, we have to say that our God is not part of the cosmos. He created it and is outside it. Since it was his handiwork there is only one God.

Second, good is in agreement with His creative will. Evil is that which is outside it. They are well defined and eternally since they are part of Him.

Third, the cosmos came into existence because God willed it.

Fourth, God is a personal spirit.

Fifth, God spoke matter into existence.

Sixth, God's character is radically different from humans.

Seventh, God is endlessly free and creative. He can still do things that have not happened before.

Eighth, there is nothing beyond God.

Ninth, since God is not part of the cosmos, magic and sorcery are radically prohibited.

Tenth, God is expressed in male terms, he is suprasexual. God created sexuality so sexual activity is forbidden in religious practices.

Eleventh, the world is profoundly real. Decisions and actions taken here are of profound significance.

Twelfth, there is a goal and purpose to this creation. Existence is not to be viewed in a circular fashion.

Thirteenth, there is a standard of ethics for all of the world that is unchanging.

Fourteenth, religion is a means of expressing trust in God's promises and surrender to his will.

Fifteenth, humans are to be understood as the highest order of God's creation and are therefore of infinite worth.

Having listed Oswald's comments on ancient religions, Hinduism and the New Age, it behooves us to look at the practices of the New Agers and see how they contrast to Christianity.

According to K. D. McRoberts who wrote a book entitled *New Age or Old Lie*, the New Age religion is really a mixture of various religious beliefs. Their fundamental beliefs come from Hinduism, but include bits and pieces of astrology, shamanism, humanism, the occult, Sufism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Theosophy, and Jewish Cabalism. There are more, but I have not attempted to identify them since they do not influence the common dogma subscribed to by most New Agers.

The name "New Age" was given to the movement by Alice Bailey in the 1930s. She was a follower of H. P. Blavatsky, a Russian born occultist who created the Theosophical Society. It was later linked to the astrological coming of the Age of Aquarius, that began on March 21, 2000. We are now in the Age of Reason and the world is to be perfected. War will be abolished and all mankind will live in peace and harmony. In this age, man will be "completed" and all will be gods.

There is no question that the New Agers have bought the old lie that Satan propagated in the Garden of Eden.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.

"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

New Agers believe that all of existence is a seamless garment. If that is so, we already are gods and can rule our own destiny. In contrast to our God their gods are made in the image of men and, therefore, have many faces. It logically follows that if we are gods we can determine our own ethical standards (see item 13). It is no wonder that the motto of many youth of this generation operate on the hedonistic principle that "if it feels good do it." You will remember that our thirteenth Christian principle is that there is an absolute code of ethics that arises outside of ourselves and is unchanging. As you know, ethics are moral principles that distinguish good from bad. Today we wonder why our society has become so decadent, why crime and sexual perversion are so rampant. You also wonder why divorce is so common; why 1,310,000 abortions were done in the year 2000; why infanticide euphemistically called "partial birth abortion" was done so often; why there is a cry to legalize euthanasia; why drug usage is so common; why there is so much child abuse and why there is so little respect for life. The only answer is that members of our society have become their own gods and have no absolute values on which they can establish ethics.

A second belief of the New Age religion is that there is an endless cycle of existence. This belief leads to a belief in reincarnation. The necessity of having to relive life over and again to gain enough merit to be perfect enough to be one with the impersonal god of pantheism is chilling.

New Agers make contact with "ancient masters" by a technique called channeling. There are only three possible explanations for this activity. First they may really be consulting the spirits of the dead tapping into a higher consciousness. Second the spirits that possess them are minions of Satan. Finally the channeler is a fraud, feigning possession for financial gain. It is likely that the last two are the best explanations. This phenomenon called necromancy in the Bible or divination is strictly forbidden. To consult the spirits of the dead called for death by stoning (Lev. 20:27 NKJV). Yet the New Agers continue their

activities unaware of the potential consequences. It is interesting that the Bible dictionary defines necromancy as consulting with familiar spirits or the spirits of the dead. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines it primarily as witchcraft.

Astrology is another common practice of New Agers. They, like all who believe in astrology, believe that the position of the stars and planets at the time of a person's birth influence their destiny. I once had the seriousness of these beliefs emphasized when I went into the "Witches Warehouse" in New Orleans. My wife did not want to go in, but I wanted to know what the enemy was doing so we prayed that God would put a shield around us and stepped inside. The proprietor was talking earnestly to a young woman about her horoscope, and amazingly did not notice us. We first perused cabinets that had bat wings, toad skins, various herbs and other ingredients for witches' brews. We then went over to the book shelves where we inspected the Satanic Bible and the various cookbooks for witches' brews, as well as other books that gave instructions on how to cast spells. The proprietor continued his conversation with the young woman and although he acknowledged the entrance of others into his store he never once behaved as if he had seen us.

Millions of people believe in their horoscopes. They read the daily horoscopes in the newspapers and put great stock in them even though they know that they are of dubious value. Perhaps it is true as G. K. Chesterton said that if people do not believe in God they will believe in anything.

Then there is Shamanism. McRoberts notes that after inhaling the drug peyote a shaman enters into an incorporeal primeval world where he walks a path of remembrance where many past lives are recalled. The drug induced state of mind of the shaman becomes the isthmus between two estranged worlds, the natural world of phenomena and the primeval universe next door. Perfect unity is experienced and the axis of eternity is entered. It is interesting that the peyote cults infecting the Navajo nation are of shamanistic origin. A former member of a peyote cult I know is very much opposed to the common practice of use of the drug among his people. Certainly segments of the New Age religion practices shamanism enthusiastically. "The new realities encountered through shamanistic journeys are seen as primal confirmation to the world view of the New Age. Promising health, power, knowledge and the ability to solve personal problems through a mystical awareness of the self as the center of the universe, they provide an impetus to the seeker of the New Age." (Quoted from K. D. McRoberts New Age or Old Lie.)

Gnosticism is also part of the New Age belief system. In Gnosticism it was believed that there was a preexistence of the human soul in a higher state. They were at home in the heavenlies. A tragic event took place where they fell from their heavenly estate to the earth where they were imprisoned in earthly bodies. In these bodies they forgot that they had enjoyed a heavenly estate. To correct this God sent a redeemer to bring revelation of their former heavenly state. This

knowledge was special and not ordinary human knowledge. New Age is basically a neo-Gnosticism. To gain this special knowledge the believer uses the spiritual helpers, guides, channelers or other spiritual intermediaries. It is true that in the third century Jesus was considered one of the intermediaries who came to earth to assist man in his return to God. For the Gnostic Jesus was not a savior, he was a revealer. The secret that He revealed to the elite was that they too were Christs. This did away with the uniqueness of Jesus.

Paganism is another aspect of the New Age. A plethora of new gods and goddesses have arisen but for them the two most important are Gaia or the earth mother, and Sophia the goddess of wisdom. The eco-feminists have latched onto the former and radical lesbian feminists have embraced the latter. Those who have worshiped the earth mother have found sites of harmonic convergence (vortices) where they are able to tap into the power that they find there. Sedona is one of those places so it is not surprising that they gather there. They seek to merge their consciousness with the energy emanating at the power point, or vortex. They do this in a variety of ways but one way is humming or vibrational toning. They first gathered at the various power points in 1987 hoping to awaken others to the coming day of global tranquility. Apparently that did not happen so they continue to gather at the power points annually. Interestingly, Brevard, NC has been added as one of the power points. Also included are the Black Hills of South Dakota, Central Park in Manhattan, Mt. Shasta in California, Machu Pichu in Peru, the Pyramids in Egypt, and Mt. Ranier in Washington. I am sure that there are others.

Recently a young woman consulted me about a problem that had existed for many years. She spent ten years of her life in the New Age. In time she came to know Jesus, but the effects of her experiences in New Age left deep and abiding scars on her soul that have been hard to heal. She is extremely bitter about the experiences she had with various practitioners who attempted to do holistic healing with her. Holistic practitioners use a number of psycho-diagnostic techniques in their practice. These include acupuncture, chiropractic techniques, massage, creative visualization, meditation, yoga, hypnosis, Rolfing and other body techniques. Although my patient did not mention the use of specific techniques except creative visualization, she told me that they used a number of others that were of no help to her. Sadly the National Institutes of Health now have a division that funds research in what is called alternative medicine. Some of their funding goes to Christian research, but the bulk of it is for holistic medicine.

Crystals also play a role in New Age healing. There are a variety of crystals that are said to have healing power. Amethyst, diamond, beryl, and aquamarine, carnelian, coral, emerald, jade, lapis, quartz, ruby and sapphire all have healing power. Each one is specific for a large number of ailments. They have to be worn on the person in a pouch near the heart center. During the first week they make adjustments to the person's energy field. This matches them to outer energy field

(such as are found in the vortices) that will be used in healing. The second step is the process of harmonizing and integrating the changes into the persons' whole being. This takes place around the fourth week after the crystal or gemstone has been worn for four weeks. It is important that the crystal is worn for 24 hours a day. The third step is achieving stability. This may take four or five months of continuous wearing of the stones. When the wearer feels that stability has been reached they may be able to take them off for brief periods of time to ascertain the degree of stability that they have reached. From time to time the crystals also have to be exposed to the sun to renew their power according to some practitioners. The purpose of all of this is healing of a variety of physical, psychological and spiritual problems..

It is important that the person be committed to the crystal and its power. Users are advised to not wear more than one crystal at a time in the beginning.

New Age has also impacted education. They propose to use so called transpersonal education. This is a psychological term that emphasizes the transcendent capacities of the human being. The concept of self as an autonomous entity is the core of their belief system. In transpersonal education the individual is encouraged to be awake and autonomous, to question, explore all the crevices and corners of conscious experience to seek meaning, to test outer limits, to check out frontiers and depths of self. This philosophy has permeated our educational system. It teaches selfishness rather than the selflessness of Christianity.

Although I have not investigated it there is now transpersonal psychotherapy practiced by some New Age therapists.

Finally it has also influenced our government. Whereas in the past we based our laws on those absolute laws revealed by God, we now base them on the autonomy of self. It is my opinion that the Supreme Court has based its decisions about abortion on New Age thought. You remember that Oswalt observed that individual humanity is of very low value. It is not surprising then that abortion can be considered of little consequence and freely available. Do not be surprised if there is a decision that allows euthanasia, although I have to admit that the Justices are all old and it may be too threatening to them to approve it.

What shall we say then? Is New Age new? The answer is no. It is the same old lie that was perpetrated in the Garden of Eden. God has told us that we are self oriented and that we have free will. As a result we want to be our own god and control our lives. The New Age is designed by Satan to make us believe that we are our own god. If we accept his teaching then we will be worshiping other gods contrary to God's admonition that we have no other gods before him. One has to recognize that the New Age is an amalgam of many belief systems that have their origins independent of one another. Even so they all have the commonality of the old lie that you can be like God or you can be your own god. It is not right

to say that it poses a threat to Christianity. I do not believe we live in the "post Christian" era and that it can take over. Jesus was emphatic that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against his church. We have to remember that dedicated Christians have always been a minority and always will be. We do, though, have to have a passion for souls. As I stood in the lobby of the Hilton at Sedona and looked at the lost persons there, I felt compassion for them. They are blithely and merrily dancing off to hell in total ignorance. This is exactly what the Hebrews did in spite of the warning of the prophets. Our job is to be the instrument of salvation for those who will listen to us as we proclaim the Good News. If we have a message that is anointed by the Holy Spirit some of them will come to know the truth. Just last week I had the privilege of presenting the Gospel to a young drug addict and his mate. They were not married, but had their two month old son with them. They both were eager to accept Christ and did so. They prayed separately with the woman going last. Just as she asked Jesus into her life the baby went Goo, Goo, Goo. This was the only sound he made in the entire 30 minutes we were together. I wondered if the Spirit touched his soul when he installed himself in his parents' souls.