

# The New Age Movement

By Craig Branch

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**Founder:** Being an eclectic blend of many ancient and modern religions and philosophies, there is no single human founder.

**Founding Date:** Many attribute the rise of the current New Age Movement (NAM) to evolving occult movements, such as New Thought and Theosophy in the late 1800's, and the counter-culture movement of the 1960's. Its root forms, however, actually are expressed in Satan's temptation of man in Genesis 3, and in the beliefs of many pagan and eastern religions, thousands of years old.

**Official Publications:** Due to the lack of a central organization and the diversity of emphasis adhered to by the various New Age groups there are literally hundreds of publications. Some popular publications and journals are *New Age Journal*, *Body Mind Spirit*, *Yoga Journal*, *Gnosis*, *East West*, *Noetic Sciences*, and *Omega*.

**Other Names:** Higher Consciousness Movement, Occultism, Eastern Mysticism, Eastern Spirituality, Ancient or Perennial Wisdom, Age of Aquarius, Holistic Health Movement.

## INTRODUCTION

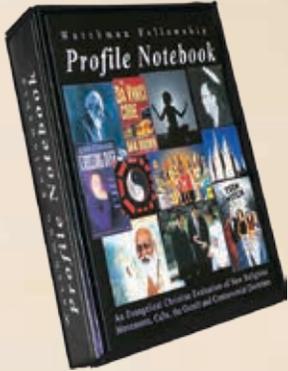
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The New Age Movement is both a religious and a social movement. In fact, Western culture is currently experiencing a phenomenal, spiritual, ideological, and sociological shift. It is a religious world-view that is alien and hostile to Christianity. It is a multi-focused, multi-faceted synthesis, in varying degrees, of the Far Eastern, mystical religions, mainly Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Western Occultism, adapted to and influenced by Western, materialistic culture. It sometimes appears in secularized forms.

It is comprised of hundreds of groups and individuals who have gained significant influence, affecting almost every area of the culture – sociology, psychology, medicine, the government, ecology, science, arts, education, the business community, the media, entertainment, sports, and even the church. The movement expresses itself in widely divergent and various mutated forms, from the blatantly obvious to the subtle. It is expressed in organized religious forms such as Christian Science, Unity, and even forms of Witchcraft. Yet, it shows up in secular forms as well, in various human potential seminars, and much in between, i.e., transcendental meditation, some alternative holistic health practices, and certain curriculum in public (and private) schools.

The most central and commonly shared beliefs among New Agers are various combinations of gnosticism and occultism. Gnosticism is an ancient world-view stating that Divine essence is the only true or highest reality, and that the unconscious Self of man is actually this essence. It is through intuitional discovery, "visionary experience or initiation into secret doctrine" (not the plenary revelation of propositional truth in the Bible), that man becomes conscious of this true Self.<sup>1</sup> Occultism is a "general designation for various theories, practices, and rituals based on esoteric knowledge, especially alleged knowledge about the world of spirits and

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unknown forces of the universe.”<sup>2</sup>

The term “New Age” is an informal term derived from astrology, which indicates that this earth, if not the cosmos, is on the verge of an evolutionary transition from the Picean Age (rationality) to the Aquarian Age of spirituality, bliss, and harmony of all things. Even though it is undergoing a significant revival, the “New Age” is hardly new. In fact, it is very old.

## HISTORY

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The New Age Movement is a modern revival of very ancient, divergent, religious traditions and practices. The actual original root is squarely centered in Genesis 3:1-5, and reverberates throughout the movement’s continued historical expressions. In the original lie, Satan questions God’s word, His authority and benevolent rule (v. 1), disputes that death results from disobedience (vs. 4), and claims that through the acquisition of secret or Gnostic wisdom man can be enlightened and can be “like God” (vs. 5).

Many of the occult practices and beliefs revived by the modern NAM were a part of very early pagan cultures. Many practices common to the NAM such as witchcraft/sorcery, spiritism, divination, (clairvoyance; seeing the future), necromancy (consulting the dead), and astrology are clearly and strongly condemned in Scripture (Deut. 18: 9-17; Isa. 47: 9-15). These and other occultic practices were spread through the ancient magic and mystery religions of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and most notably the Assyrian-Babylonian culture.<sup>3</sup> Noting the scope of its continuing presence, the Bible informs Christians of Babylon’s eschatological implications. The lie of Genesis 3 is significantly developed in Babylon (Isa. 47) and continues to its ultimate state of development, revealed as Satan’s one-world system at the end of the age (Rev. 17-18).

Three major world religions whose beliefs and practices are entwined with the NAM are Hinduism, a product of 5,000 years of development, Buddhism, circa 560 B.C., and Taoism, circa 500 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Another prominent occultic influence in Europe was Druidism, the religion of the Celts, which extended from 300 B.C. into the middle ages.<sup>5</sup>

Prominent expressions of the NAM were carried on into more modern times in Europe and America by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), transcendentalists like Thoreau, Emerson, and Wordsworth (early 1800’s), and Theosophy introduced by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891).<sup>6</sup> The decade of the sixties witnessed a revival of Eastern mysticism as traditional values were being challenged. Zen, Carlos Castañada, the Beatles, Transcendental Meditation, and yoga all became popular.

In the eighties, Shirley MacLaine’s autobiographical books and television mini-series gave the NAM more popular exposure and momentum. Today, various research polls are consistently demonstrating that a significant shift has been occurring in the West, both in the beliefs and practices of the New Age world-view. For example, 36% of Americans believe that astrology is scientific, and 25% now believe in reincarnation.<sup>7</sup>

It is important for Christians to recognize even the most disguised forms of the New Age Movement. The following is a list of some of the organizations, beliefs and practices associated with the NAM: astrology, aura, black and white magic, bioenergy, Brahman, Buddhism, chakras, *chi* energy, Christ-consciousness, Christian Science, Church Universal & Triumphant, crystals, Druidism, Eastern mysticism, ESP, est, extraterrestrials, the Forum, firewalking, Gaia, gnosticism, Hare Krishna, higher consciousness, Hinduism, human potential movement, Kaballah, karma, Magick, Mind Science, Native American spirituality, near-death experiences, neo-paganism,

nirvana, parapsychology, prana, psi, psychic, reflexology, reiki, reincarnation, Religious Science, shamanism, Silva Mind Control, spiritism, Tai Chi, Taoism, tarot cards, Theosophy, therapeutic touch, trance-channeling, Transcendental Meditation, transpersonal psychology, UFOs, Unity School of Christianity, Witchcraft, yin-yang, Yoga, and Zen.

## DOCTRINE

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Keeping in mind that the myriads of New Age groups are quite eclectic, drawing from several religious traditions mentioned earlier, the following is a general description of the more prominent unifying themes of the NAM.

**God:** Even though many New Age adherents describe “God” in personal terms, ultimately, “God” is an impersonal life force, consciousness or energy.<sup>8</sup> The cosmology (nature of the world and universe) of the NAM is monistic and pantheistic, which means that everything that exists is of One essence, and that One essence is God. Everything is a different form of that essence (energy, consciousness, power, love, force). The state of God is called by various terms among different New Age groups, i.e., God-consciousness, Universal Love, Self-Realization, the I AM, Higher Self, Brahman, Nirvana, etc.

**Jesus Christ:** Jesus was a man who evolved spiritually to the state of “the Christ.” “The Christ” is an actual state of ultimate essence. Everyone’s true being is “the Christ” and each person’s goal is to come to that self-realization.<sup>9</sup> So to the New Ager, Jesus is one of many ascended masters—a way-shower, whose function is to awaken humanity and illumine the path. Many even reinvent the historical Jesus by claiming that He traveled to India and learned the New Age doctrines there during His “silent years.”<sup>10</sup>

**Man:** Man is not sinful since his true essence is divine and perfect. The only discontinuity between man and “God” is man’s ignorance of his unlimited potential. Man is divine. He creates his own reality. Absolute truth is replaced by relativistic, subjective experience.

**Man’s Destiny:** Since man is intrinsically divine and perfect, his only real problem is ignorance of that fact. Man has a perception of finiteness which is in reality an illusion.<sup>11</sup> Salvation in the New Age is for man to become enlightened through experiential knowledge (gnosis). New Age groups offer various occultic techniques to enable individuals, and ultimately the world, to evolve into this oneness (unitive) consciousness.<sup>12</sup> These techniques may include altered states of consciousness (often transcendental meditation), yoga, crystals, channeling (spirit guides), psychics, past life therapy, acupuncture, etc.

An almost universal belief among New Agers is an adaptation of the Hindu concept of reincarnation which teaches that after death the soul, or essence comes back in another form to continue spiritual evolvment. New Agers misrepresent church history, the doctrines of Christianity, and often twist Scripture to support the idea that original Christianity taught reincarnation. They wrongly argue that the early church suppressed the doctrine and censored its teaching.<sup>13</sup>

## CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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Individual New Age followers are at various stages of transition and assimilation of its teachings. In addition, since the NAM teaches that truth is relative and individualistic, Christians must approach New Agers as individuals. Ask the New Agers questions. What spiritual background do they have? What happened in their lives that precipitated this path? What books, experiences, or ideas are most

influential, most important to them? The answer should give Christians good direction as to where to focus their attention.

The fundamental issues that need to be addressed with New Agers are epistemology (the source of truth), the irrationality of relativism, factual and historical errors, the fallacies and inconsistencies of living out their world-view, and finally, a clarification of the real God, Jesus, and gospel, contrasted to those of the New Age. New Ager must see that there is a choice to be made instead of blurring the distinctions.

Christians should be able to demonstrate that the Bible does not teach reincarnation. When Jesus calls John the Baptist "Elijah," He is clearly speaking metaphorically. Luke 1:17 demonstrates that John was filling the office of Elijah, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6. In fact, Elijah was seen with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-3. The meaning of the resurrection is the opposite of reincarnation (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Cor. 15:12-28). Point out that if God is an impersonal force, then love and forgiveness are not possible. These are personal attributes as opposed to impersonal karmic law. Fundamentally, intercessory prayer is absolutely necessary. The battle for the souls of men is won through God's grace, intervening and drawing them to Himself.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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*Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* by John Ankerberg and John Weldon. This well researched work covers a wide range of New Age beliefs, practices, and leaders, providing a Christian analysis. 670 pages with index.

*A Crash Course on the New Age Movement*, Elliot Miller. One of the best overall analysis and critiques of New Age ideology and trends. 260 pages with index.

*Thieves of Innocence*, John Ankerberg, John Weldon, Craig Branch. Covers the beliefs of NAM and uncovers its strategy to infiltrate schools to capture the minds and souls of children. Offers practical steps to eliminate it. 345 pages with index.

*The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement*, Ron Rhodes. Reveals the false history and deception of the reconstructed "Jesus" presented by the New Agers, and contrasts it with the authentic Jesus. 255 pages.

*New Age Spirituality* by James Walker. This manual and audio recording provides an overview of New Age theology and history.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 10, 1968, p. 506; J.D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, pp. 473-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 7, p. 469.

<sup>3</sup> *Ancient Empires of the New Age*, pp. 15-62.

<sup>4</sup> *Eerdman's Handbook to the World's Religions*, pp. 170, 221, 252.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-19.

<sup>6</sup> *The New Age Rage*, pp. 22-4.

<sup>7</sup> Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age*, pp. 20, 130-133.

<sup>8</sup> M. Ferguson, *Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 382; S. Gawain, *Living In the Light*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> *A Course in Miracles*, Vol. 3, pp. 83-4.

<sup>10</sup> Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb*, pp. 233-34.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Keyes, Jr., *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, pp. 125-29.

<sup>12</sup> James Redfield, *The Celestine Prophecy: An Experimental Guide*, pp. 243-60.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Ring, *Heading Toward Omega*, p. 158.



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