

New Age Movement

History, Beliefs and Practices

Identity: The New Age Movement is not an organized religion. Rather, it is a worldview (philosophy of life) that has blended together the spirituality of Eastern religions (most notably Hinduism) and the occultism and man-centered humanism that developed in 19th and 20th century Western society. It has exercised a pervasive influence in Western society. Its occultic and humanistic philosophy can be found in the entertainment media, global politics, environmental crusades, educational paradigms, alternative medical practices, and the world of business.

The New Age Movement seeks to transform the worldview of individuals toward an understanding of self-deification, to the end that they will form a society eventually producing complete global harmony among nations and peoples.

Founders: The New Age Movement as such has no specific founders. Its origin and general contours are traced to writers and advocates representing a broad range of spiritualist, mind-science, and theosophical movements. For an overview of New Age Movement's historical background, together with its past development and contemporary forms, see the following web site: <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/newage.html>¹

Beliefs and Practices:

Although the New Age Movement represents an eclectic (elements from various sources) blending of a multiplicity of ideas, generally speaking its adherents espouse and promote several key principles that shape its philosophy of life:

- All is one (monism); therefore all is God (pantheism). The Divine Mind (the Universal Energy or the Force) is the oneness that pervades all things. The god of the New Age is an impersonal energy force or field.
- Humanity is divine and has unlimited potential. Since each person is his or her own god, each person has potential to create his or her own reality.
- Humanity's basic flaw is ignorance of its divinity and of its latent "Christ-consciousness."
- Consciousness-altering techniques must be practiced to raise the level of each person's awareness of innate divinity.
- Increased personal awareness and development of one's own divinity is the springboard to global transformation.
- All religions are one and at their core teach the oneness of all things (syncretism—the uniting of conflicting beliefs).

The practices of the New Age Movement are extremely varied, but can generally be divided into two broad categories—though both categories are often combined into a confusing mix:

- *Occult* practices include: channeling spirit guides and contact with extraterrestrials; consulting psychics; manipulating the flow of divine energy by means of various alternative health care techniques (e.g., therapeutic touch, some forms of yoga); some martial arts based on mind control and universal energy manipulation; and, such faddish practices as using quartz crystals as a source of healing energy and *Feng*

¹ See also a resource such as William Watson's *A Concise Dictionary of Cults & Religions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 162-65.

Shui—the practice of arranging furniture and other objects in a room or office to improve the “energy” balance.

- *Humanistic* practices that support the notion of human self-sufficiency focus on self-improvement and the self-realization of one’s own divinity by creating one’s own reality. Such practices include meditation techniques, mind control taught at business seminars, healing through right thinking, affective learning and value clarification methodologies in public schools, and promoting a one-world government in the realm of politics.

A Lutheran Response

Based on the revealed Word of God in Scripture Lutherans teach that while God is one, not all is God—as New Age practitioners commonly affirm. God alone is God and there is no other who is God (Is. 45:5-6). Furthermore, God’s creation is not an undifferentiated oneness but a plurality and diversity each “according to their kinds” (Gen. 1:20, 24). Lutherans also believe that God is not some impersonal energy, mind, or force but that He relates to people as a Father (Matt. 6:9) who loves His children to the depths of His being. An impersonal force cannot love but “God is love” (1 John 4:9). While people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), this does not mean that the essential nature of God dwells within the human race so that people can in any sense be considered divine. Human beings are fully creatures, not extensions of a divine being in their nature. As Psalm 8 testifies of man, “you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings....” (8:5).

Lutherans teach that in spiritual matters it is not possible to speak of a “human potential” by which higher knowledge of the spiritual may be attained and appropriated to human life and activities. As St. Paul states, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). And, apart from faith in the true God, it is impossible for human beings to please Him—however they may wish to try (Rom. 8:8).

Lutherans also teach on the basis of the Scriptures that the reason for “limited human potential” is not ignorance of an alleged divine nature within, but rather, ignorance of or a failure to acknowledge *sin*, which is transgression of God’s divine will (1 John 1:8, 10). God’s Word makes it clear that sin, not divinity, is at the core of our being, for “out of the heart” (Matt. 15:19) come the sins and evil of humanity. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). What is needed, then, is not personal enlightenment and transformation to realize one’s divinity. Instead, people “living in darkness” (Matt. 4:16) need to be enlightened to see and confess their sin and to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7, 9) by coming into a living relationship with the One who is “the light of the world, Jesus Christ” (John 8:12). Because of their sin human beings deserve nothing but God’s eternal punishment. Yet, a personal and loving divine Father gives His Son to be “the atoning sacrifice ... for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). This Son does not just have some highly developed “Christ-consciousness.” He is God Himself who has come into human flesh (1 Tim. 1:15-17) and who is one with the Father (John 10:30), the God who is I AM from all eternity (Ex. 3:14; John 8:58).

That a series of individual transformations will bring about a utopian “mass consciousness” of global peace and harmony—as many New Agers believe²—is entirely foreign to the biblical revelation. Rather, the Scriptures teach that only when God brings His work of salvation in Christ to its final fulfillment will those who believe in Him experience a new heaven and a new earth marked by a peace that only God can create (Is. 11:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:12-13).

Lutherans reject the notion that all religions are one. Rather, they accept the central biblical affirmation that there is only one true religion or faith. The claim of Christ and of Christianity is that He alone is “the Way and the Truth and the Life.” “No one comes to the Father except through” Him (John 14:6). The stumbling block and foolishness of the cross will always keep the Christian faith distinct from and elevated far above the religions of man’s wisdom and strength (1 Cor. 1:22-25). Therefore, the path to life with God is not through contacting spirit guides, realizing one’s divine potential, consciousness-raising techniques, or other New Age practices or concepts. None other than Jesus Christ is the Door to life (John 10:7; Acts 4:12).

² Marilyn Ferguson in her *The Aquarian Conspiracy* spoke of this “global transformation” as “a collective paradigm shift”—language that became quite common among New Agers (see Eldon Winker, *The New Age Is Lying to You* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994], 25).

For Further Reading

Douglas R. Groothuis. *Confronting the New Age*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Philip H. Lochhaas. *How to Respond: The New Age Movement*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.

George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols. *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993 (201-207).

A. R. Victor Raj. *The Hindu Connection: Roots of the New Age*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.

Ron Rhodes. *The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

Eldon K. Winker. *The New Age Is Lying to You*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994.

Links and Websites

<http://www.equip.org/store/topical.asp?Div=Keyword&Da=y&Author=&TopID=&Keyword=new%20age&K2=&DeptID=335&SubID=&List=all>

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/newage.html>