

Précis,
Old Heresies In A New Age
Presentation on The New Age & Monism

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(Page numbers reflect where discussion of that subject commences in my paper.)

I. INTRODUCTION: West Meets East (p. 1)

This morning, the subject of my presentation is the New Age and monism. Since the middle of the last century, there has been a dramatic shift in spiritual interest in the West generally, and in America particularly. This shift has been away from typically Western ways of viewing reality towards what were previously exotic forms of spirituality, such as Eastern pantheism, Wicca, Tarot, the paranormal, nature religions, Theosophy, and a host of others.

In James Herrick's book, *The Making of the New Spirituality*, he refers to this phenomenon as the *New Religious Synthesis*.¹ Some people refer to this exceedingly broad movement as the New Age. However, as Herrick points out, the New Religious Synthesis embraces more than what even the broadest definition of the New Age would include.² In Herrick's view, the New Age is actually a sub-category within the larger synthesis.

Keeping Herrick's distinctions in view, as I use the term "the New Age" today, I am referring to this sub-category of spiritual interest in things which are closely related to a Western version of Eastern style pantheistic monism. Even at that, my subject matter is extremely broad and diverse, and today's discussion will be merely a cursory overview of important issues.

In a moment I will define the term "monism."

II. HISTORY: The Journey East (p. 6)

This morning I will only very briefly touch on the history of Western New Ageism. In the Western world there has been a long history of people and groups that have sought to introduce pantheistic or monistic philosophies. This long "road to the East" includes terms and names such as, Gnosticism, Spinoza, Toland, Swedenborg, Schleiermacher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Haeckel, Vivekenanda, de Chardin, Blavatsky, Theosophy, and George Bernard Shaw. Each of these sought to promote a monistic spirituality.

¹ James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15

² Ibid., 20

The explosion of spiritual interest in things Eastern beginning in the mid-twentieth century was fostered by cultural phenomena I discuss in my paper, and by such individuals as, Theodore Roszak, Carl Jung, Carlos Castaneda, Fritjof Capra, Deepak Chopra, Shirley MacClaine, Jean Houston, Stephen Spielberg, George Lucas, Oprah Winfrey, and many popular books and movies.

Though the New Age gets little sensational media coverage nowadays, it is not because it has lost favor with the public, but because it is now so common place as to no longer be news worthy.³

III. NEW AGE THEMES: Age Of Aquarius (p. 16)

I should reiterate that when I use the term New Age, even in the limited sense which I have denoted, it is nevertheless an extremely broad and diverse movement. Added to this fact is the problem that few people ever adhere consistently to their worldview, often acting contrary to it, or embracing ideas from other worldviews that are foreign or even contradictory to it. So as I set out what are the basic themes characteristic of the New Age movement, keep in mind that few people, if any, will adhere perfectly at all of these points.

That being said, what are the major defining themes that constitute New Age beliefs?

A. Themes

1. *Oneness (monism)* (p. 18)

The central dogma of the New Age movement is the idea of oneness, or monism. All reality is actually One, all distinctions and separations are only illusory. In Eastern monism this is expressed by the phrase *Atman is Brahman*, where *atman* is the individual soul, and *Brahman* is the universal soul or One Reality.

2. *Humanity as God* (p. 20)

Of necessity then, if all is one, then all humanity is also one, and is one with the One Reality. In the sense that this reality is God, then all humans are divine. This is not, however the transcendent personal God of biblical revelation.

3. *A Change in Consciousness* (p. 21)

The reason most people do not know they are One is because of ignorance and the illusion of reality and separateness. The answer, or “salvation,” then lies in achieving a new consciousness in which the illusion of reality (*maya*) is overcome and one’s oneness with the One is experienced. Because this requires overcoming the illusion of separateness, it inherently implies the loss of personality or individuality. This runs counter to deeply ingrained Western individualism, and much of Western New Age thought denies this aspect, making the self central to the One.⁴

The techniques for achieving the new consciousness are admittedly many and diverse, but a dominant thread is the idea of meditation. This is not meditation in the

³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th Ed. (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2004), 166-67

⁴ Sire, 181-2

typical Western or Christian content-directed sense of the term, but an effort to empty the mind of *maya*. As such, it is fraught with dangers, as I demonstrate in my paper.

4. *Cosmic Evolutionary Optimism* (p. 27)

Inherent in the New Age is the belief in a coming blissful day when all have realized their oneness with the One, and an age of peace, harmony, and love pervades the earth.

5. *All Religions as One* (p. 28)

If all is one, then certainly the apparent distinctions between various religions is also only illusory. If examined carefully, they will all be seen to be teaching the same essential monistic principles.

6. *Good and evil* (p. 30)

Since all is one, then obviously both good and evil are One. Groothuis writes, “In the philosophy of the One, ethical distinctions evaporate, supposed opposites—light and dark, good and evil, humans and God—merge and fuse.”⁵ This has profound implications for the future of a society.

7. *Logic, Reason, and Truth* (p. 33)

Also implied in the doctrine of monism is the elimination of logic, reason, and truth. All of these require a dualism which is denied by monism. Sire explains, “Knowledge, like personality, demands duality—a knower and a known. But the One is beyond duality, it is sheer unity. ...In other words, to *be* is not to know.”⁶ Logic and reason are rendered nonexistent by fiat. This approach, as I show in my paper, is self defeating, however, because it relies on reasoning and a presumption of knowing to assert its truth.

8. *The New Age Jesus* (p. 35)

The New Age approach to Jesus is the eighth theme I want to address, but given its importance and extent, I will devote the next part of my presentation to this subject.

IV. NEW AGE JESUS: The Co-opted Christ (p. 36)

A. Regard for Jesus (p. 37)

Generally, New Agers believe Jesus was an historical figure and great teacher. Many hold him to be an enlightened guru, even on a par with Buddha or Krishna. Many believe in the reality of His miracles.

B. Jesus Versus Christ (p. 38)

Since the days of the early Gnostic, Valentinus, many monists make a distinction between Jesus and Christ. They believe Jesus to be the man, but the name Christ to refer to a spirit or consciousness that came upon him or to which he attained. That Christ-spirit is believed by many to have come on Him at His baptism and departed prior to His death.

⁵ Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1986), 154

⁶ Sire,154

C. No Unique Jesus (p. 38)

To New Agers Jesus was not the unique incarnation of God as Christians have traditionally believed, but simply one of a number of enlightened avatars, gurus, or Ascended Masters.

D. Jesus' Crucifixion (p. 38)

If it is acknowledged at all as historical fact, Jesus' crucifixion is given no spiritual significance.

E. Jesus' Resurrection (p. 38)

Jesus resurrection is not believed actual, but is rather spiritualized in an Eastern mystical sense as some kind of spiritual triumph similar to other Ascended Masters.

F. Jesus' Return (p. 39)

Jesus return is not literal or physical, but a step in the evolutionary progress of the race.

G. Exotic Scriptures (p. 39)

New Agers tend to accept enthusiastically exotic extra-Biblical writings, such as the so-called Gnostic gospels, and often consider the New Testament documents to be of considerably less credibility in disclosing Jesus' true acts and teachings.

H. Esoteric Doctrines (p. 40)

The New Age typically believes the Christian church has missed the point of Jesus' life and teaching. There are, however the secret, esoteric doctrines that are hidden from most people, but available to the "knowers," those who have been enlightened. This is essentially Gnosticism, and hence the eager embracing of the Gnostic writings. Also believed by some is that Jesus traveled to India during his early years and studied under Eastern gurus, and that these Eastern ideas are hidden in His teachings.

I. Closing observations on the New Age Jesus (p. 45)

Finally, two points should be observed about the New Age view of Jesus. First, Jesus' entire life and His teachings are lifted out of the clearly Jewish context in which they actually occurred. This violates a key principle of considering context in interpreting ancient or any other texts.

Second, such an approach to the text of the New Testament reflects elements of postmodernism in which original intent is irrelevant, and the reader feels free to assign any meaning he or she chooses to the text.

V. CONSEQUENCES: A New Age Price Tag (p. 48)

The New Age worldview comes with a significant price tag. Some of the consequences which accompany it are as follows.

A. A Closed Universe (p. 48)

The monistic New Age universe is a "closed system." As such, as Sire says, "The New Age worldview falls prey to all the pitfalls of solipsism and egoism. ...There is

simply no place for ethical distinctions.⁷ Further, as a closed system, it eliminates the possibility of human significance.⁸

B. Presence of “other beings” (p. 49)

The New Age phenomenon is replete with stories of encounters with “other beings.” As Sire observes, it borrows from animism a “host of demigods, demons and guardians who inhabit the separate reality or the inner spaces of the mind.”⁹ There is no objective way to determine whether these “beings” are good or bad, real or unreal. But for the Christian, this raises a host of red flags.

C. Epistemological nihilism (p. 50)

New Age thinking regarding reality trades objective reality for subjective experience. Sire warns, “Taken to its logical conclusion, this notion is a form of epistemological nihilism.”¹⁰ We are left with no means to test the validity of anything the New Ager may claim. As Tal Brooke observes, “We are left in a sellers market.”¹¹

D. Karma, Sin, and Compassion (p. 50)

Though it may appear otherwise on the surface, the idea of *karma* counters the concept of sin in the sense of something being inherently evil. Seeking to do good in order to acquire good *karma* is a far cry from biblical good or compassion. With *karma* it is simply a matter of achieving oneness or enlightenment. Under *karma*, doing good for those who are suffering only delays their suffering, it does not eliminate it. It only benefits the doer, who moves closer to enlightenment.

E. Dissolution of the Individual (p. 52)

As Sire reminds us, “Atman is Brahman. Brahman is one and impersonal. Therefore, Atman is impersonal.”¹² Monism ultimately costs a person his or her individuality, his or her personality. We become as a drop falling in the ocean. This conflicts with what Solomon refers to as the “eternity in their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) which all of us feel instinctively.

VI. CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: No Disappointment (p. 54)

Finally, and very briefly, let me remind us of the Christian answer to monism and the New Age.

A. The Context of Jesus’ Life and Teaching (p. 54)

It must be remembered that Jesus entire life and teaching is set in the context of the Jewish/Palestinian milieu, and the Law and the Prophets. The New Age inclination to place on Him an Eastern spin is without merit.

⁷ Sire, 209

⁸ Stephen Neil, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1984), 115

⁹ Sire, 209

¹⁰ Sire, 212

¹¹ Tal Brooke, *Riders of the Cosmic Circuit*, (Lincoln, NE, iUniverse.com, 2000), 8

¹² Sire, 154

B. Separateness (p. 54)

The Bible is clear, God created distinctions and separations. These distinctions are part of His intention for creation, and reflect His glory. To obscure them returns the world to chaos and destroys the creation.

C. The First Heresy (p. 56)

The New Age/monist claim that we are all One, that we are all God, is simply a repeat of the first lie about man and God. Satan's temptation in the Garden was that Eve could be "like God." He was enticing her to follow in his own footsteps of mutiny against God. The consequence is not deific realization, but death.

D. The New Mind (p. 57)

In the Bible we are called not to the New Age new consciousness, in which the rational mind is lost in some cosmic experience, but rather to a "new mind," shaped by the objective truths of God's word, and formed in the likeness of the mind of Christ.

E. The Christian Hope (p. 57)

The Christian hope for the future is not some upward evolutionary consciousness achieved through cosmic-consciousness. Rather it is the assurance of Christ's return to establish His kingdom on earth—a kingdom in which righteousness dwells. For those without Christ, no such beatific future exists, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment.

F. Only by Christ (p. 58)

The New Age belief in the oneness of all religions not only requires the wholesale misinterpretation of the New Testament record, but also makes Jesus out to be a liar. Jesus declared unequivocally that He alone was the means of salvation for all mankind.

G. Problem of Evil (p. 58)

To the New Ager, humankind's problem is ignorance and the illusion of reality. The answer is the esoteric knowledge of the New Age. The Bible declares without reservation that our problem is one of sin, that is, of rebellion against our holy Creator. What we need is not chiefly knowledge (though that is necessary), but we need a Savior who can forgive our sins.

H. What is Truth? (p. 59)

In the New Age view objective knowledge is unknowable. Truth, as such, does not exist, and logic is useless. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed to be the embodiment of truth, and both He and the New Testament writers emphatically affirmed truth. They also employed vigorous logic and reasoning in defense of the truth.

I. Who Is Jesus? (p. 60)

The New Testament presents a picture of Jesus completely at odds with the New Age. Jesus and Christ are indistinguishable. Christ was said to have been born and to have died. The Greek word for Christ means "anointed," and is a reference to the One who would be "anointed," as Jewish kings were, to sit forever on the throne of David. Jesus claimed to be the transcendent, personal God of the Jews, Yahweh. In His crucifixion and resurrection He was shown to be the atonement for humankind's sin. His

physical resurrection and ascension is the prototype of what every Christian knows to be his or her own future.

J. The Ultimate Lie—You Can Be God (p. 62)

The deceptive lure of monism is the contemporary version of Satan's original lie, deceiving men and women into the delusion that they are truly god, and that the God revealed in the Bible is only a sad illusion. Satan promised prestige and a better life, but the consequences were shame and death. Sire asks about the New Age, "Does it deliver what it promises—a new life, a new person, a new age? One thing is clear: it hasn't yet, and the mañana argument is not reassuring."¹³

In contrast to the New Age, Jesus of Nazareth, the Anointed of God, stands as He has for two millennia, offering an invitation to all who are spiritually hungry, thirsty, tired, or downcast. His invitation is to receive Him, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, and in doing so to receive true life.

This is the Jesus of Scripture. He is the unique revelation of the personal God. He is the atonement for our sins. He is the resurrection and the life! Since he first walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, many millions upon millions have responded to His invitation, and discovered the truth of the ancient promise: "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed" (Romans 10:11).

¹³ Sire, 208