

## What is the New Age?

**Andy.** Pastor, we've got neighbours who are well into New Age thinking. They seem to have read a lot, and they talk about it all the time! Bob even turns New Age on with the hose-pipe when we're washing the cars on Saturday morning, and Sue goes on about it endlessly to my Jane when they go shopping together. We've tried to understand the subject but, to be honest, we're totally confused. I used to think it was just about healthy living, organic spuds and holes in the ozone layer; but it seems a bit more complicated than that. Is New Age really so impossible to understand?

**Pastor.** No Andy, not impossible - just difficult.

**Andy.** Go on then, I'm ready, where do we start?

**Pastor.** Let me warn you that I'm going to use some phrases and words that may be unfamiliar to you, unless of course Bob has already mentioned them. You see, there's no point in trying to talk about New Age thinking unless we understand New Age language. They have a language of their own.

**Andy.** Sounds pretty heavy! Have I got to be a mobile dictionary to understand it?

**Pastor.** No it's not as bad as that. In fact, I hope I can explain things fairly simply and you may find you know more than your neighbour before we've finished. You will also know something Bob and Sue don't know.

**Andy.** What's that?

**Pastor.** You will know the weaknesses of New Age thinking and the strengths of true Christianity.

**Andy.** All right, now Jane has joined us, let's go.

**Pastor.** Talking about New Age is a bit like talking about football: there are certain rules that govern every game, but each team has its own way of playing. The books and magazines on New Age are endless, so I will have to make some general statements that won't fit every New Age thinker . . .

**Jane.** But you will give us an accurate summary?

**Pastor.** Well, I'll try. To start with, New Age thinking has been prompted by the obvious failure of our present day social, political and even religious systems. In spite of everything good that science has given us, the world is in a mess. All our solutions, national and international, have failed and what is needed is a brand new way of thinking; they call that a paradigm shift.

**Andy.** A what?

**Pastor.** A paradigm is another word for an example or pattern; by the way you pronounce the word as 'paradime'. New Age explains it as a new way of thinking about old problems. They believe that every so often an outrageous or 'heretical' idea is put forward as an alternative to old ways of looking at things. At first it is scorned and ridiculed, but gradually it gains acceptance until a significant minority, or perhaps a small majority accept it - that is the paradigm shift. After a while even this new thinking becomes inadequate and another new paradigm shift is needed. Some New Agers refer to a Quantum Leap of Consciousness and others to a Consciousness Renaissance; they mean slightly different things but basically it all refers to the need to see things in a radical and different way. But you must understand that for New Age thinking there are no absolutes, nothing is fixed and final; everything is in a state of movement and change.

**Jane.** Does that include New Age views as well?

**Pastor.** Yes, it does Jane. All views about reality are considered as 'myths' - just ways of explaining things, but not necessarily true.

**Andy.** Now wait a minute. Bob keeps talking about the need to see the whole world as one community and not separate units, because what one nation does affects all the others, like acid rain, CF gases, and so on. He says we need a 'planetary' view of the world, and he talks about a General Systems Theory. Is that the New Age thinking, sorry, the paradigm shift that is needed?

**Pastor.** Yes it is. And you've picked up more of the lingo than you realised. The General Systems Theory was put forward by a man called Ludwig von Bertalanffy as far back as the 1930's. He said you can't talk about any area of life, whether social, political, economic or health without considering it in relation to everything else. So, for example, you cannot speak of productivity and economics without reference to health and ecology.

**Andy.** Oh, I knew we'd get back to organic veg and ozone layers soon. Is that what it's all about?

**Pastor.** No, but that's certainly included as we will see.

**Andy.** But so far New Age thinking seems pretty helpful. We all know the dangers of putting profits first until we've ruined the world around us; and we know that what one nation does certainly has a knock-on effect for the rest of the world.

**Pastor.** Sure, and that's the attraction of New Age views among people who, quite understandably, are fed up with a selfish and affluent way of life, a narrow-minded scientific approach, and a greed that hurts so many others.

**Andy.** You sound just like my neighbour! It can't be a bad thing to care for the whole of our environment, so what's the problem? Why don't we Christians climb on the wagon?

**Pastor.** I've only told you about the starting point of New Age thinking. It develops this General Systems Theory. New Age ideas are inseparable from a firm conviction

that evolution is true, but New Agers believe that evolution is purposeful and creative, always working towards a higher organisation. So our paradigm shift will be the next step in the world's evolutionary progress.

**Jane.** How on earth can they believe that when you look at the state of the world today? The nations seem to be as much at war and careless about human suffering as ever.

**Pastor.** They have an answer to that as well Jane, but get ready for another big phrase! Scientists have recently been going cold on the idea the evolution is a gradual development of species from simple to complex forms, because there is no fossil evidence for this. A fact, incidentally, that evangelicals have been pointing out for decades. Anyway, admitting that our school text books are probably wrong after all, the new idea is that every so often a time of severe stress will cause a species to make a sudden and giant leap forward. This radical change, or advance, is referred to as a punctuated equilibrium. That is where New Agers think we are at the present; they believe we are on the verge of the punctuated equilibrium when the sheer stress of modern society will compel a radical evolutionary paradigm shift in our way of thinking.

**Andy.** I think I'm getting a paradigm shift! I'm beginning to understand the New Age movement for the first time. Go on.

**Pastor.** This punctuated equilibrium is also referred to as a conscious evolution when, for the first time, we are deliberately co-operating with the design of our world. In America there is even an Institute for the Study of Conscious Evolution. The New Agers are working towards a great New Age or millennium, which many expect to dawn around the year 2000, when the world will be at one with itself because the inhabitants will achieve 'holistic health'; that means, soundness in every area of life and relationships. You see, one of the big attractions of New Age thinking is its offer of meaning and direction in life, greater success and fulfilment, and increased physical and spiritual well-being. That is personal salvation. But personal salvation is only a preparation for that time when the whole of humanity takes on the role of co-operating with evolutionary design. They talk about Global Civilization or a Global Order, and are looking forward to one world government, economy and religion.

**Andy.** You're making a good case, it sounds all right in some ways; so how do we fault it?

**Pastor.** We're coming to that now. You remember telling me how your neighbour talks of the world as one big interdependent community? That sounds great, but Bob doesn't say this because he has biblical views; on the contrary, he believes all existence is of one and the same essence. Everything is one; we call this 'monism'. Everything has an Ultimate Reality or Being that goes round and round. So Bob and Sue almost certainly believe in reincarnation . . .

**Jane.** You mean the idea that we have all lived in previous life forms, and will come back again? Yes, Sue often talks about that - in the supermarket of all places!

**Pastor.** Right, they sometimes call this reincarnation by the name Karma. Each successive life takes us nearer enlightenment. New Agers even look for their soul mates who they believe were with them in a previous existence. This belief in reincarnation is very popular today and it is a key belief of New Agers. But Bob and Sue believe not only that all is one, a never-ending circle of existence, but that all is God, which is really age-old pantheism. Salvation is the state of being at one with this Ultimate Reality. Or, to put it another way, you become 'God'. That is the grand object of New Age thinking, and therefore its greatest blasphemy. Self becomes 'God'.

**Andy.** And how does someone get to this state?

**Pastor.** By a personal transformation. The way it differs from Christianity is that this is not a spiritual conversion through faith in Christ, but it is a knowing and feeling that you are in charge of your own life. It is therefore self-centred.

**Jane.** But how does such a change actually come about?

**Pastor.** The clue to that is found in the way New Agers talk about the year 2000. The turn of this decade ushers in the Age of Aquarius, the water carrier in the calendar of astrology. This 'new age' will bring with it the end of strife and suffering as we move into a new way of thinking. We are in the Age of Pisces, the fish, at present; and that, for New Agers, is the age of the church, or Christ - which they believe has failed miserably. A great deal of New Age thinking and the mechanics of how you develop in higher consciousness, that is, thinking more in harmony with everything else, is bound up with ancient mythology and astrology, together with modern gurus and mantras. So you can probably see already that New Age thinking is pantheism and spiritism mixed up with Hinduism. Many New Agers are even looking forward to a Global Mind evolving when we will all have a single consciousness; some call it simply The New Consciousness Movement. This Global Mind is called Gaia or Terra after the earth goddess of ancient Greece and Rome.

**Andy.** Wow! Now we really are a long way from Christianity. So that's it, is it? A desire for organic carrots can be the first step towards a desire for a Global Mind.

**Pastor.** It would be silly to think that everyone who cares about our planet or who prefers organic vegetables is a New Ager. After all, it was God who gave us the responsibility of caring for this world; so that is plainly a Christian duty. But New Age falls down at a number of important points.

**Andy.** Let me get a pencil. I'd better note these down.

**Pastor.** Go ahead Andy, but they're fairly obvious if you think about it biblically. First, since New Agers deny all absolute statements and claim that nothing is certain in this world, they have to admit that their own views may prove to be the biggest deceit of all and they will be found chasing a lie and grasping at the wind, or to use a parable of Christ, building on sand.

Second, the New Age diagnosis of the problems of the world and the remedies they offer are too simplistic. They blame our systems rather than human nature; that's exactly what Karl Marx did - and look how his philosophy is discredited

today. You see, since there are no absolutes for the New Ager, nothing is always true and certain; the only right or wrong is what you, as a supreme personal god, decide. That is a recipe for moral disaster. The eventual failure of New Age philosophy will be for the same reason that Marxism and Communism have failed: it has a defective view of the nature of man and no doctrine of sin.

Third, the idea that mysticism and the occult, which as the basis for most New Age strategy, is the way towards social advance and world harmony is simply denied by history. Mysticism and occultism have done very little for the good of our planet, so why should New Age mysticism and occultism be any different?

Fourth, the reliance of New Age thinking upon the supposed fact of evolution is a fatal weakness because evolution is not a proven fact but only a suggested theory. Yet New Age depends upon evolution being true or its basis falls.

Fifth, New Age thinking relies heavily upon some of the very things God has clearly forbidden, like spiritism and astrology. It starts with a belief in the ability of man to solve his own problems, a thing man has never been able to do. New Age denies original sin, believing instead that we are all basically good, but just ignorant and in need of enlightenment.

Finally, the Bible offers far better advice on the wise stewardship of our planet. It tells us that God gave man the responsibility to work the earth and 'take care of it' (Genesis 2:15) and reminds us that 'the righteous man is kind to his animals' (Proverbs 12:10). the Bible is also full of instructions on good and right human relationships.

**Andy.** I think I've got down those six points. It seems we at least agree with New Age thinking in one area, and that is our world is in a mess, and change is needed.

**Pastor.** Yes, but that's not too difficult to agree on! The answer to the tragic situation we are in is not to abandon biblical truth for pagan mythology. We must re-discover God's plan for creation and man's role in it, without falling into the tragic and blasphemous error of, as Paul reminds us in Romans 1:25, worshipping created things rather than the Creator.

**Jane.** Although Bob and Sue never used the phrase, I've heard people talk about The Aquarian Conspiracy. That sounds a bit sinister; is there really a plot to take over the world or something?

**Pastor.** The Aquarian Conspiracy is actually the title of a book published by Marilyn Ferguson in 1908. It proved to be a very popular book and is one of the most important publications pushing New Age views. It showed very clearly how New Age thinking is affecting every part of our culture.

**Jane.** Like what?

**Pastor.** Like everything: health-care, psychology, education, business and politics; there is even New Age music and art. The emphasis on Holistic Health is significantly influenced by Eastern mysticism; Psychic Healing and Therapeutic Touch is based on the Hindu doctrine of a universal life-energy flowing through the body. In fact alternative health programmes with a New Age content, like Acupressure, Colour Healing and Reflexology, can be listed by the score. Many doctors, particularly in America, advise Eastern methods or meditation or hypnotism for high

blood-pressure and stress. Other 'in' phrases concern education in schools and industry. Right Brain Learning involves yoga, chanting and fantasy role-play games, like Dungeons and Dragons. Lectures on Human Potential, Transformational Technology, and Organization Development (which has been called 'mysticism in the market place') have been taken on board by such massive corporations as IBM, Lockheed, Boeing Aerospace, Ford and General Motors, and NASA.

**Andy.** I thought New Agers were nearly all drop-outs, hippies and freaks until Bob and Sue moved in next door. They are a respectable couple of Yuppies.

**Pastor.** I'm not surprised. New Age is growing in popularity among professional people in the world of science, medicine, education and politics. New Age belief in reincarnation means that abortion and euthanasia are seen as kind acts hurrying another soul into their next life. More sinister suggestions are made by some New Agers about removing those who are incapable of progress into New Age 'Oneness'. So, even mass extermination would not contradict New Age philosophy. Sadly New Age has no reliable morality to offer; its motto is: 'create your own reality according to what feels right for you'. It's a sort of DIY ethics - design it yourself. Don't forget, New Agers are not short on the evidence such a self-centred morality produces. For example, the actress Shirley MacLaine is a leading New Age promoter today and her books, articles, interviews and experiences have a considerable effect on the way many think. But she is hardly a model of morality for young people, or anyone, to follow! Although the hippies and 'flower people' of the 60's held New Age views, they are now the respected leaders of commerce and industry - often with the same views!

**Andy.** But is there really a New Age Conspiracy?

**Pastor.** Not yet in the sense of an organized infiltration from a specific headquarters, but New Agers do have definite goals. The promoters of New Age are both open and subtle about it. The Green Movement is all part of it, and Green political parties exist in a number of European countries including the United Kingdom. Greenpeace is thoroughly New Age, and Rainbow Warrior, the name of the Greenpeace Ship, is a totally New Age name, I'm afraid the rainbow is one of the New Age symbols. There is also a growing influence within the United Nations Secretariat.

**Andy.** Why there especially?

**Pastor.** That should be obvious Andy. The ultimate goal of New Age is one global movement by a hierarchy of those who have achieved the highest state of spiritual oneness with ultimate reality. They call this government Global Order or Planetization. Where better to start the ball rolling than in the UN itself?

**Andy.** It all sounds pretty big and well-organised. New Agers must see Christianity as a very big barrier to their understanding of progress.

**Pastor.** Some believe that New Age thinking is the third force in Western Society, after Jewish-Christian religion and secular humanism. It is definitely a major cultural trend and it is leading us straight back to paganism. Someone has referred to it as

'the occult going public'. One leading New Ager, who published three best-selling New Age handbooks before he was converted to Christ, doesn't hesitate to call it Satan's 'ultimate seduction'. He adds: 'What was home to me for fifteen years is one of the biggest lies going.' It would be foolish to dismiss it just because of the looney fringe. We have already seen the infiltration of New Age inspired courses in industry, and you will find an increasing number of New Age books being published. New Age publications, tapes, videos and other paraphernalia are big business in America, accounting for about three and a half billion dollars each year. But some Christians go over the top in describing it as a vast global conspiracy with a central control spreading out its tentacles like an octopus. It isn't like that. New Age is a network of movements with roughly common aims but often very different methods. However, there are signs that it is becoming more 'centralised'. And you are right about the attitude of New Agers to Christianity, Andy. The non bible-believing and social end of so-called Christianity will just be swallowed up into New Age; there are plenty of signs that this is happening already. But true biblical Christianity will be targeted as enemy number one!

**Andy.** Can we go back to what you said earlier about 'spirits'? Is New Age really involved in Spiritism?

**Pastor.** Yes, and I'll come to that now because this is by far the most dangerous aspect of it all. Many New Age leaders are in contact with an entity for whom they act as a channel to pass on messages to help us move upward in our self-realisation. This is known as channeling. In America these channels are more popular than consulting 'gurus' because the messages come directly from 'the other side'. Many of the entities or spirits are enormously popular and people pay large sums of money to hear their 'advice'. Some of them are well known among American New Agers: like Ramtha, an age-old warrior king; and Lazaris, who apparently never lived in a physical form, and John, an Essene Scholar at the time of Jesus who is now between reincarnations. There's even Tom Mcpherson, an Irish pickpocket from Elizabethan times . . .

**Jane.** Oh come on Pastor, you're joking. People don't really take all this seriously?

**Pastor.** I'm afraid they do. And they will pay big money, like one hundred dollars or more an hour, to get advice from the other side. Nothing is given for free among New Agers; there's a big price-tag for enlightenment, whether it comes by lectures, channeling, weekend courses, conferences and so on. But, to go back to these entities or spirits, the channel for Lazaris has a two year waiting list for clients. In California one man even claims to channel for dolphins!

**Jane.** Now I've heard everything. But is this kind of thing condemned in the Bible or is it just a load of nonsense?

**Pastor.** No Jane, it's not all nonsense. You are quite right that this sort of thing is clearly condemned in Scripture especially in passages like Deuteronomy 18:9-12 and Isaiah 8:19. Some New Age channeling is clearly a con, some is self-hypnosis on the part of the channeler, and some is obviously demon possession, but it's all sinful. Make no mistake, New Agers expect channeling to become commonplace in

years to come and to be used in every part of life, even in the decisions of governments.

**Jane.** So what sort of messages do these spirits or entities give?

**Pastor.** Sometimes it's very complicated, but the bottom line is nearly always encouraging and comforting, assuring you that you are God and that all the answers lie in yourself . . .

**Andy.** So if the answers all lie within us, why do we need spirits to help us?

**Pastor.** Andy, you'd better ask your neighbour, because that's an 'own goal' for the New Age movement! Also remember this: the New Age claim that we are God and can find all the answers within ourselves is exactly the lie of Satan recorded in Genesis 3:5, 'Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' The sinful blindness of New Age channeling is that it rejects the Bible, claiming that we don't need a revelation from God, and then turns to the uncertain and evil world of spirits for revelations!

**Jane.** There was a New Age stand at our local show last week and they were advertising ouija boards, tarot cards and so on. But they were also selling crystals in a big way. What's that about?

**Pastor.** You probably know that crystals are good conductors of energy and that's why they are used in watches, computer chips and so on. Well, New Agers believe that spiritual energy can be transmitted along scientific lines, just like physical energy. Hence the crystals! Some New Agers will 'programme' crystals with knowledge which can be transmitted back when required, some use them for healing, channeling or just for good luck. It's all very much like the use of relics in the Middle Ages, and people really do believe in it all. Some are even helped or healed by these crystals, but the devil is at the back of it. The converted ex-leading New Ager I referred to a moment ago, Randall Baer, actually built his own Ascension Chamber to help him and his clients attune their minds to this global consciousness. It was full of crystals and pyramids, lasers and magnets, all positioned to harness spiritual forces. He later referred to 'it as a modernized form of white magic and sorcery'.

**Jane.** Oh dear, perhaps I had better get rid of the crystal brooch Andy bought me for our anniversary.

**Pastor.** There's no need to do that Jane. Crystals are beautiful things and part of God's wonderful creation; but fallen men and women manage to pervert everything that's good. Enjoy your brooch, but as a Christian you won't give it magical powers will you?

**Andy.** So how would you sum-up the error of the New Age views with reference to Christian teaching?

**Pastor.** First of all, New Age has a wrong view of God. The Bible teaches that God is Creator, and that he is separate from creation and not to be confused with it. 'In

the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' is how the Bible starts. New Age believes creation and God are one; so to worship God, self and creation is all the same thing. You recall I referred to the actress Shirley MacLaine just now, well, I've been reading one of her recent books. I've got it here. Listen to this. Right at the end she says she is looking forward to being 'aligned completely with that unseen Divine Force that we call God'. Then Shirley MacLaine follows this with a bit of her own logic:

I know that I exist, therefore I AM.

I know that the God-source exists. Therefore IT IS.

Since I am part of that force, then I AM that I AM.

**Jane.** Wow! That's terrible. That's just the way God revealed himself to Moses. Does she really say that?

**Pastor.** Yes, I'm reading it right here on page 404 - and because she puts some of it in capitals it's clear that she knows what she is saying. But the second error of New Age from a Christian viewpoint is that it holds a wrong view of Christ. The Bible teaches that he is the eternal Son of God who perfectly reveals God to us - 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' - and who alone can make salvation possible. Sadly, New Age reduces Christ to an age-old entity at best and places him alongside other spirits, which is just what Hinduism, the father of New Age, does.

Then thirdly, New Age has a wrong view of revelation. The Bible alone is 'God-breathed' and it is all we need for our faith and practice. New Age allows no place for a revelation from God, and opens the door to any number of spirits to give messages to men; New Age has no authority because it will not accept anything as certain.

Fourthly, New Age is wrong about salvation. The Bible's clear teaching about repentance from sin and reconciliation to God through Christ's death on the cross, and the offer of salvation through faith alone and not by our efforts, is all unknown to New Age thinking. Salvation and faith are not words familiar to New Agers. They prefer to talk about enlightenment and self-effort. For the Christian, salvation is a gift from God, for New Age it is worked out from within oneself.

Finally, we have already seen that New Age has a wrong view of human nature and no doctrine of sin, and that will prove to be its fatal downfall.

**Jane.** Why do you think it's becoming so popular today?

**Pastor.** Partly because it offers 'spiritual' answers, and people in our culture are fed up with thorough-going materialism - that's another reason why communism collapsed - and many people are just as disillusioned with the mad grab of an affluent society. Partly also because it is based on evolution as a fact, and so therefore is seen as modern and scientific; and partly because it puts self at the centre of everything, and that appeals to our ego and pride. It also offers solutions to the things that worry people, like war, pollution and unhappiness. It seems to be an exciting and uniting force in an often drab and divided world. I'm afraid we have to admit that the success of New Age is built on the apparent failure of the Christian church. Of course a lot of people enjoy the tingling thrill of entering the forbidden world of spirits, mediums, extra-terrestrial beings, UFO's and the like, all things that in 1 Timothy 4:1 God has called 'deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons'.

**Jane.** It all sounds a bit scary to me. How can we avoid getting sucked into the New Age thinking and practices without realising it? Should Andy and I stop talking to our friends next door?

**Pastor.** It needn't be frightening Jane, providing you remember that Christ who is in you is more powerful than Satan who is in the world and, as 1 John 4:18 reminds us, God's 'perfect love drives out fear'. No, keep your friendship going with Bob and Sue and witness to the love and fullness found in Christ. But be on your guard. Remember New Age teaching is inspired by Satan and he is very crafty. There are a lot of training days and weekends advertised to help you find your true self and realise your potential; self-improvement counselling classes, they are called. Unless they are clearly Christian, they are most likely New Age, and, as we have seen, Andy's firm may be putting on New Age courses. Find out who runs them, and what the basic philosophy is before committing yourself. Jane, beware of invitations to classes that rely on the repetition of words or phrases, or concentrate on objects so that your normal thought process is suspended. These can include for example, dynamic 'relaxation' classes, aerobic classes, crystal classes or therapy groups. Don't get involved in any kind of yoga meditation classes; yoga uses the mantras, or names of Hindu gods. Hatha yoga may seem at first to be just a physical training group; it's very popular, with classes often available at the YMCA or on the college campus. Of course you will steer well clear of any attempt to consult 'entities', 'counsellors' or 'wise persons' from another world; this is 'channeling' - and it's dangerously evil.

**Andy.** And 'holistic health' and the Green movement?

**Pastor.** Just be on your guard. Lots of people want to live a healthy life in order to feel fit, and many prefer the flavour of organic carrots, or can see the value of cutting down dangerous CF gases in the atmosphere. But all this can be a method of manipulating people into a way of life and thinking that is in harmony with the New Age. It's all very subtle. Just keep your eyes and ears open and you will realise how much New Age thinking is infiltrating every area of life. I'm so glad the Bible reminds the Christian that although the 'god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers' (2 Corinthians 4:4), you have been 'made new in the attitude of your minds' (Ephesians 4:23). Andy and Jane, if we stand by the teaching of the Bible we have the mind of Christ and nothing will move us away from our confidence in him.

I must leave you in a minute, but when you have a free moment, read together in your New Testament Philippians 2:5-11, and Colossians 1:15-23. These two passages will remind you of the great Saviour you love and serve. In the light of him, New Age has nothing to offer. Perhaps New Age is the Devil's last throw before our Saviour returns in power and glory. Well, I must go now because I have another call to make. I hope all this has helped a bit.

**Andy.** Yes, thanks for your time. Oh, and by the way pastor, you may need to take a quantum leap of consciousness as you go, or you might trip over the paradigm shift on the doormat, and that wouldn't be good for your punctuated equilibrium! Sorry, just don't fall over the cat! Bye.