

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

7. Introduction to the Cults (iii)

Lesson Objectives

Understand what the main "Christian-related" cults teach, how people are drawn to them, and how to reach followers with the Gospel.

The "New Age Movement" and Neo-Paganism in the West

*"Believe in any God and in anything,
but do not claim that your god, or your belief, is exclusive "*



"Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD'. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made hands. Nor is He worshiped with men 's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life breath, and all things; and He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17:22-31

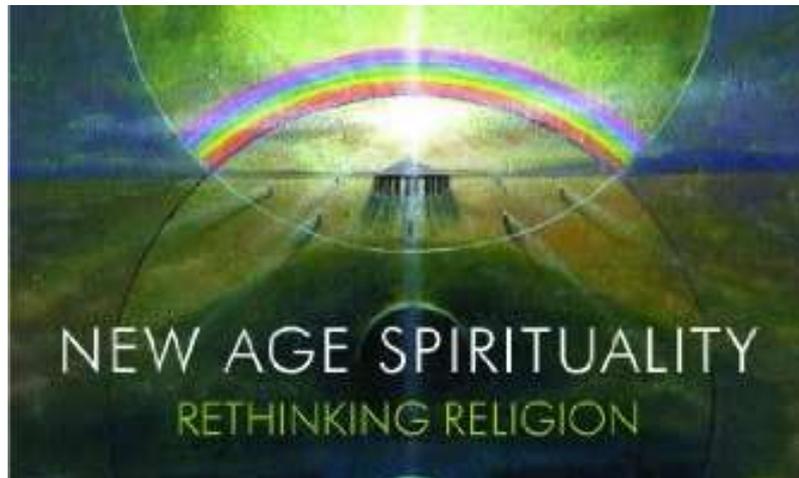
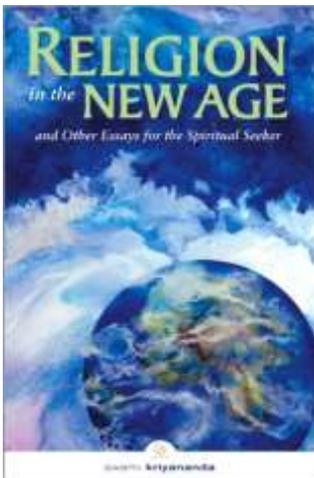
Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

Introduction

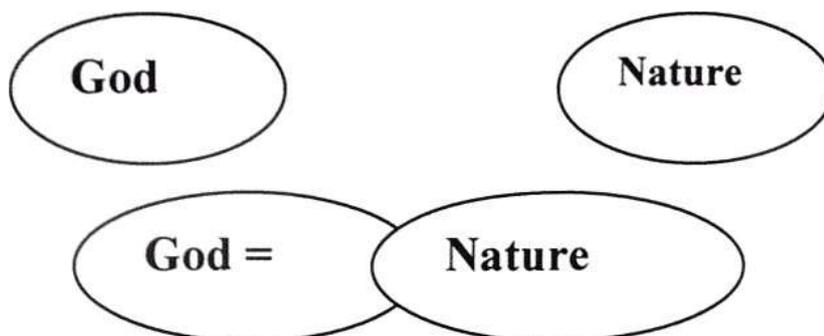
Paul's message to the people of Athens has always been regarded as a key approach to people with pagan world views. Paganism has always been around, but it keeps coming back in different ways. Essentially, it involves worshipping the creature rather than the creator (see Romans 1), confusing roles and blurring God and nature. It often appeals to legitimate concerns about the destruction or degradation of nature, environment and human identity. Goes on to emphasize "higher self", god-likeness, Inner Light and other terms for deity.

People want to be "in charge" of the world around them (a God-endowed faculty-Genesis 1 :28; however, this is only valid if God is in His role).

Many different views of New Age and Neo-Paganism. Important to be aware of key areas without generalising.



The so-called "New Age Movement" is a rapidly expanding menu of variants on paganism. People are naturally religious (Jung) and paganism is an expression of their search. It has been evident in every civilization. Fallen man distorts General Revelation.



Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



Where is God in Everything?

Religious expression is experiencing a revival in the West, but it is taking the form of a new paganism, eg Earth Mother; Stonehenge, Druids, spirit guides, cosmic consciousness, holistic healing, spiritual responses to ecological concerns.

It is very real in Australia. Mark Chipperfield claims that Australians are, "spending \$100 million a year on courses such as personal transformation and rebirthing in their quest for a more satisfactory lifestyle." This only the tip of the iceberg.

The revival in religious interest is largely a reaction to the sterility of modernity. Eastern mysticism is still there, albeit in a sanitized form (Monism – all is one - is high in Western thought). Evident in extreme environmentalism, eg David Suzuki: "All is interconnected". Embracing the Moonies; Sri Chinmoy; Dianetics (Scientology); yoga; meditation; focusing; visualising, guided imagery"; mind merging; gurus, Eckankar; astrology - new respectability.

Dianetics originated with US writer L Ron Hubbard. Claims to be, "the analysis, control and development of human thought". Sounds innocent, positive, even scientific, attracting "respectable" members such as John Travolta. The Church of Scientology (founded by Hubbard in 1952) claims to have millions of members. As far as God is concerned, "There are gods above all gods and gods beyond the gods of the universes".

Shamanism is based on belief that gods, spirits, demons influence all human life, but are responsive to shamans, or witchdoctors. Shamanism appeals to and validates identification with indigenous spirituality (eg American Indian traditions, Australian Aboriginal "spiritual attachment" to the Dreamtime).

Remember this table?

Percentages of Respondents Who Claimed they Believed.

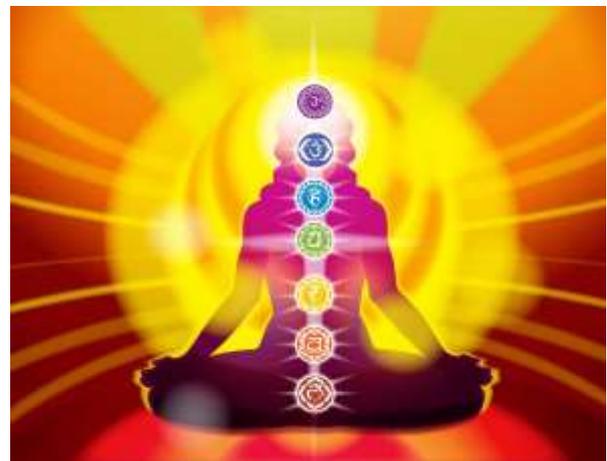
Subject	Changes over the past 20 years
Faith Healing	10 > 45
Astrology	17 > 37
Reincarnation	9 > 25
Spiritualism	12 > 52
UFOs	24 > 30
Fortune Telling	4 > 14

There is no doubt that secular (non-religious) people often have deep spiritual needs that they seek to fill.

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

Neo-paganism includes many other practices, eg

- eastern mysticism
- Lucifer worship
- firewalking
- shamanism
- meditation (including mantras and chanting)
- altered states of consciousness
- colour therapy
- visualisation
- Ascended Masters
- psychic powers
- crystal powers
- vegetarianism
- tarot cards
- runes
- witchcraft
- numerology
- holistic health
- divination
- yoga
- spirit channelling
- aroma therapy



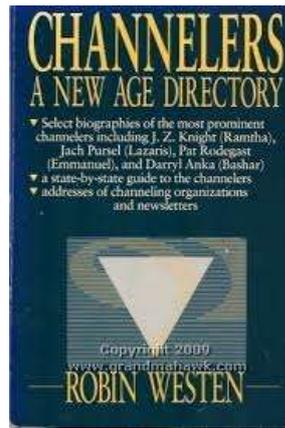
Marks of Paganism

Neo-Paganism has many forms, but features common to most include:

- ↪ rejection of orthodox religion (including Christianity), while many parallel terms and concepts
- ↪ underlying belief that God and Nature are One – pantheism; hence emphasis on protection of environment, saving whales, ending world hunger, inaugurating world peace
- ↪ inclusiveness – polytheism; draws everything into itself– quest for One World Religion; the community is everything, the individual is simply part of the whole
- ↪ acceptance of divination (eg crystals, rocks), even by people regarded as highly educated and sophisticated by their peers
- ↪ superstition and cultic practices – attempts to control the world by magic, science fiction, fantasy, interconnected (virtual) communities ■
- ↪ mind control, eg under the guise of "group consciousness"

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

- ↪ fatalism and determinism, eg belief in astrology
- ↪ exaggeration of immanence of "vital life forces"; very subjective, appeals to individuality and personal experiences; confuses experiences with reality. [Christians need to be careful that an emphasis on personal experience is grounded in Biblical truth, not simply offering people an "experience"]
- ↪ redemptive focus – "salvation" possible through good works, self realization, self actualization
- ↪ experimentation – many New Age believers regularly migrate from one group to another, without spiritual bearings.



Other ways of considering New Age Belief:

Views of Social Transformation

New Age	Biblical
For man's glory	For God's glory
Authority: self and spirits	Authority: the Bible
Occultically inspired and directed	Heavenly inspired and directed
Results in our hands	Results in God's hands
Final Hope: self-realised humanity	Final Hope: the Second Coming of Christ

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



Views About Salvation

New Age	Biblical
No sin, simply ignorance	Sin is the basic problem
"God" is impersonal	God is a person
Emphasizes divinity of "self"	Emphasizes the justice and love of God
Achieved through mystical techniques	Offered by God's grace
Saves from illusory consciousness	Saves from Hell
Offers self-realization, self-actualization	Offers Heaven and eternal life.
Experienced through self	Appropriated by faith in God

Neo Pagan Language

Term	Neo Pagan Definition
God	An impersonal energy force, immanent in all things. He or she, mother or father, god or goddess. Sun, moon, stars- indeed all of nature- can be worshipped as God. "God" is in all of use; we are part of divinity.
Christ	A Reincarnated avatar, messiah, or messenger who had special insight. The physical man Jesus was separate from "Christ", which He did not monopolize. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius and others were also "Christ", Enlightened Masters. Jesus spent years travelling, studying, teaching in the mystic including Tibet. Some believe Jesus was a member of an Essene brotherhood.

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



	<p>The fact that He died on the cross is of little significance. "Christ is the impersonal divinity within all people that we can tap into."</p> <p>Cite passages such as Matthew 11 : 14 and Mark 9:11-14 as proof Jesus was a reincarnation. (Also claim appearance of Elijah at Transfiguration proof of reincarnation, but Elijah never died – Luke 9:28-36, cf2 Kings 2:11-12.)</p>
Angels	Ascended masters, masters of wisdom, ancient masters, spirit guides, spirit counsellors, super-beings, "the hierarchy'.
Born Again, Conversion	Personal or planetary transformation and healing. Point at which a believer "lets go" and allows their higher self take over. and guide their life. Receiving higher consciousness, greater spiritual awareness and wisdom. "Christ consciousness".
Second Coming	Christ consciousness, spiritual transformation, often to divine being.

Impact of Paganism on Contemporary Men and Women

What meaning is imposed on the world by neo-paganism? Is it just a "cop out"? What forces are at work to explain the existence of evil in the world? Formerly laissez faire, now people want explanations. Many perceive Christianity to have failed for them. Also, Christianity is about human responsibility within the sovereignty of God, which makes inroads on their "freedoms".

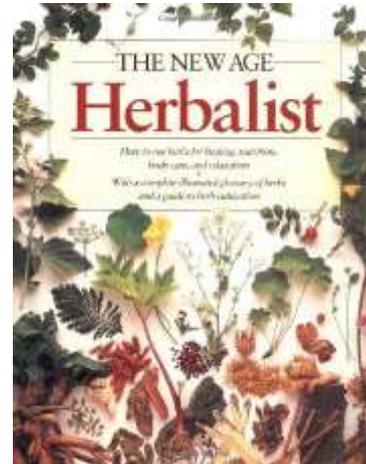
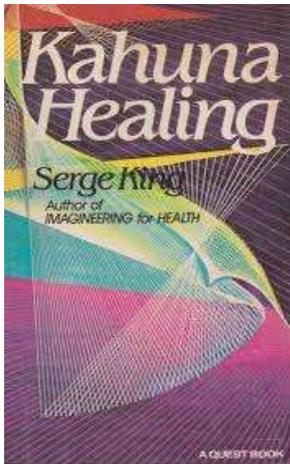
[People want good outcomes- hence higher belief in heaven than in hell in most surveys.]

People want integrated lives:

"This is a great place for both men and women to visit if you're looking for practical ways to apply spiritual, new age, metaphysical, intuitive and mystical concepts to improve the quality of your life ... create personal success and happiness, relieve stress, improve your self-esteem and a lot more. You'll find this site especially valuable if you've tried lots of spiritual approaches before but haven't produced the consistent and lasting results you long for. " (Invisible Path Publishing)

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World

Many are attracted by practical approaches to issues, eg meditation to relieve stress, health products, retreats.



Modern people want to mix and match religious systems and experiences. Strong belief religious "norms" only serve to construct, limit and oppress free society. People don't trust leaders, traditional belief systems. Ironically, as a result, a vacuum of "meaning" has emerged, what Francis Schaeffer called the Death of Hope.

In a fragmented, fractured society, an environmentally degraded world and a widespread sense of ennui, the notion that "all is one, all is interconnected" has a strong appeal. Personal meaning can be derived from the belief that. "God and nature are one and I am therefore part of God". In this context any move back to "organised religion" is perceived as a reversion to "control".

People are attracted emotionally to a system that offers love, acceptance, identity and significance, in which they can find meaning and purpose. Without necessarily demanding personal accountability. With the break-up of family the element of "tribe" is lost. People are desperate to locate themselves – "tribe" creates value, provides a "story" for their. That is why church community appeals to many who have no attachments that give them meaningful relationships. ("Tribe" can also be used negatively, eg Nazism used the appeal of folk religions; Serbian Orthodoxy appeals to history and nationalism; extremist Islam often identified with ethnic groups.)



Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



How to Speak Meaningfully to Pagan Cultures

In Acts 2:17 Paul did not start out by rejecting the religious systems of the Athenians. He observed that they were “very religious”. In affirming their (universal) religious desires he appealed to them to listen to what he had to share in the Gospel (even though he was personally distressed by the idolatry that he saw). He quoted their poets and started with General Revelation. God has revealed Himself through His creation, and through what he has built into people’s consciences. Only then did Paul challenge their idolatry and talk to them about Christ, addressing the inadequacy of their religions and offering salvation through the resurrection and life of Christ.

Rules for Engagement

- † seek to understand why people get involved. eg searching for self realisation (cf “Search for Significance”)
- † know the world of the listener - educate yourself in the areas of New Age techniques
- † be “on the planet” as the listener (don’t be paranoid. eg hearing New Age Music in music doesn’t make you crypto-pantheist)
 - † be respectful, relational and real
- † connect with their language
- † enlist the help of others; talk to former members. educate friends and family members and solicit their support: long-time friends of the person are often effective.
- † remember, this is a “power encounter”
- † Demonstrate by your own life that lasting personal transformation and spirituality only come via a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Everything else may be real but it is not genuine.

New Age vs. True Christianity A Contrast	
God is the creation and creator, the All-in-One. He/she/it is the Divine Intelligence and the Creative Force.	God is separate from, greater than, and master of His creation (Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:16, 17, 1 Corinthians 4:7, Genesis 1:1, Isaiah 48:11, 12)
God and the Holy Spirit are impersonal: a presence, a vibration, an energy force, universal law, Universal Mind, Cosmic Consciousness, Divine Presence, Eternal Reality, Real Presence, Creative Force, Cosmic One, etc.	God is “Personal.” Though Spirit, He is eternally transcendent (external to man) (John 1, 16:13, 14, Revelation 4:11)
Each human being is endowed with a spark of divinity. An illumined, or enlightened, person is beyond such moral distinctions as “good” or “bad.”	Humanity is fallen, born in bondage to sin, and in need of redemption. Satan is real and evil exists. Man can become free of the condemnation of sin through Jesus Christ (*Romans 3:23, John 3:16-19, Jeremiah 17:5-9, Ephesians 2:8, 9, Revelation 3:20)

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



<p>Jesus did not die for the sins of the world. shedding of blood, though tragic, is irrelevant to man's spiritual needs today. No atonement. Christianity is a "bloody religion."</p>	<p>Jesus died on the cross as a sin sacrifice.</p> <p>Through His blood we are saved and through His and victory death. (Hebrews- 9:22; 3:23; Galatians 1:1-5; 2 Corinthians-5:21, Ephesians 2:8, 9)</p>
<p>Jesus was a god, a Christ, a perfect Master, a man who earned his divinity, a perfected man, a messenger of God, a prophet of God; He was as much God as are all of us.</p>	<p>Jesus is, was, and forever shall be God Almighty, the One True God; and there is no other besides Him.</p> <p>Jesus created all things. He, the Father and the Holy Spirit are eternally One. They cannot be separated – ever. (1 John 2:20-25, Hebrews 1:8, Colossians 1:14-19, 2:9, 10)</p>
<p>Man must take responsibility for his problems and forgive himself. There is no one outside of man to whom we must plead for forgiveness, no one outside of ourselves who can forgive us.</p>	<p>A loving God can forgive our sins and cleanse us. He offers man a free gift of salvation (1 Peter 1; 1 John 2:1-6, 3:16, James 4:6-11)</p>
<p>Man must endure many life cycles (reincarnation) until his karma is cleansed, pure spirit is achieved, and union with "God" is attained.</p>	<p>Man has only one physical life on earth. Upon death, man returns to God, the Creator, who is our Judge. Those who are saved escape condemnation and receive eternal life (John 3:16, Hebrews 9:27)</p>
<p>Through good works and/or enlightenment, man can aspire to divinity and union with "God" (all that is). This is the universal law.</p>	<p>Man is not saved by law, or through his good works. No can man become enlightened through his own efforts. Eternal life and heaven are free gifts given by a loving, personal God to those who accept His grace and are thus born again (Galatians 3:1-4, 2:16, Titus 3:5, John 3:3).</p>
<p>Eating meat produces negative karma in a person. Meat is forbidden and the (enlightened) superior spiritual being does not eat meat (vegetarianism).</p>	<p>God blesses all things He has created for man to eat, including meat (Colossians 2:16, 1 Timothy 4:3).</p>
<p>Spirit beings, or entities, are able to provide spiritual light and guidance. They are helpers who can show man how to become fully and realize self (become divine).</p>	<p>There is only one mediator between man and God—Christ Jesus. Communication with spirit guides and entities is an occult practice called necromancy. It is an abomination to God. Such spirits are unclean and not of God. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; I Timothy 4:1; Isaiah 8:19; I Samuel 28:1-25; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14.)</p>

Communicating Christ in a Multicultural World



<p>The Bible is insufficient as a guide. Other "bibles" from other religions, ancient religious texts and writings, and fresh new revelations either from people living today or spirit entities are equally as valuable and reliable.</p>	<p>The Bible is authoritative, powerful, and able to guide man in every aspect of his life, producing joy and satisfaction in the reader who knows Christ as Lord. (Revelation 22:18-19, John 5:39, Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28, Romans 15:4, 16:26; 2 Peter 1:21).</p>
<p>Man is part of and one with the creation; the creation thus man is also "God." He is co-creator of the universe. Through an evolutionary process, man is "awakening" and returning to godhood.</p>	<p>God is the great I AM—transcendent to His creation, magnificent, glorious, King of kings. Man is made to serve God. Some day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Philippians 2:5-13 Revelation 22:18-19, John 5:39, Revelation 21:1-8, 22:8-9; Matthew 18:3; John 3:3, 14:6).</p>

Mans, T, New Age Cults and Religions, Living Truth Publishers, Austin, Texas, 1990

