

# The New Age: Its Identity and Our Ministry

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The New Age touches people.

- People like Jerry and Diane who won a get-a-way weekend in a local radio contest and got to get away to San Francisco for 4 days. Imagine their surprise when, in their hotel room dresser, they found the Buddha Scriptures next to the Gideon Bible.
- Or there's Margaret. At 84 years old, she now lives in a Twin City health care center. She is daily exposed to such inspirational messages boldly posted near the dining room as:

Today I take the time to be with me and find peace and love and truth.

It's mine if I just stop and think the thoughts I want to feel.

- Then Bud tells me how his employer—a major corporation searching for answers to its productivity problems—mandates motivational programs for middle management which stress 'visualization'. Some seminars include unconventional religious dimensions applied with physical and spiritual exercises.
- American families are intrigued and humored on Mondays at 7 with ALF—the alien life form come from Melmac to Earth to introduce a little magic and fantasy into children's lives—and ours. And let's not forget E.T., Star Trek, Star Wars or Quantum Leap!
- A trip to the local department store—or a flip across the radio dials reveals a separate category of music with such onomatopoeic titles as "The Sky of the Mind," "Ancient Dreams," "Breakfast in the Fields."

Each account may be insignificant, even innocent, by itself. More so, they tend to be particles of the greater vapor that pervades our present culture. That vapor is the New Age. And it touches people.

New Age themes touch the Christian Church, as well.

- It's a 'hot' topic in Christian book stores and professional clergy journals.
- Well-meaning Christians speak of the "One God", be it as their simple answer to complex denominational differences or as their clear confession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- A drive to ecumenicity still steers many denominations and synods within the Christian Church on earth.
- And hasn't our own church body, as it tunes in to the real spiritual issues which the New Age tries to address but fails, called for a spiritual renewal among us at the 1987 Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod?

In point of fact, here we are today. 225 strong in number, stronger yet in the faith and word of the prophets and apostles and their revelation of the Only Son from Heaven. Jesus Christ. Here we are, by God's grace, confessors and professors of the historic, orthodox Christian Church, studying this New Age to better equip us as Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this age. So here let us focus on identifying the New Age. Later we shall make comment on our ministry for Jesus in it, as in every age.

## I. The Identity of the New Age

The New Age movement is better viewed as a world-view shift than an organized global effort to usher us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This movement has no membership lists, leader/laity labels, or uniform ceremonies. But it does have voices. Douglas Groothuis in *Unmasking the New Age* identifies some of them: Marilyn Ferguson (author), Fritjof Capra (physicist/author), Shirley MacLaine (actress/author), Theodore Roszak (historian), David Spangler (author/mystic), Ken Wilber (psychological theorist), William Irwin Thompson (historian). They join a chorus of lesser known voices which shape New Age thought today.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the books, articles, tapes, and seminars generated by these people, the only other written documents significant to the New Age are the Hindu *Vedas* and the Buddha Scriptures. Much of the New Age mentation is shaped by those books and the religions associated with them.

A review of Hinduism now will prepare us for New Age premises later. Here are 5 main points condensed from *Religions of Mankind, Today and Yesterday* by Helmer Ringgren and Åke V. Ström:<sup>ii</sup>

1. God is all, all is God.  
In the beginning there was Existence, One only, without a second. Some say that in the beginning there as non-existence only and that out of that the universe was born. But how could such a thing be? How could existence be born of non-existence? No, my son, in the beginning there was Existence alone—One only, without a second. He, the One, thought to himself: Let me be many, let me grow forth. Thus, out of himself he projected the universe; and having projected out of himself the universe he entered into every being. All that is has its self in him alone. Of all things he is the subtle essence, He is the truth. He is the Self.
2. Man is then not simply body, but as expression of Brahman, one of three faces of God. You go through stages of realization of your divinity.
3. Reincarnation is a dominant theme in the immortality of the soul. Whether you are reincarnated as a ‘higher’ human being or a “lower” animal or object depends on your realization of divinity and cooperation with the laws of Karma.
4. Karma is the law of cause and effect—what you sow you reap. More good than bad secures you a higher place in the reincarnation.
5. Many people combine the above principles with the idea of a spirit-being to whom you can speak in order to advance in your illumination, (i.e., Buddha, guru, etc.).

But we need a working definition of the New Age movement. Jeremy Tarcher, spokesman for a Los Angeles firm that publishes New Age books, says, “No one speaks for the entire New Age community. Within the movement, there is no unanimity as to how to define it or even that it is significantly cohesive to be called a movement.”

So let us ask the Members of the New Age Society—subscribers to the *New Age Journal*—“what does “New Age” mean to you?” as did Russell Chandler. He’s the religion writer for the Los Angeles Times and author of *Understanding the New Age*:

One member replied, “It is the beginning of a spiritual reawakening for many people on earth.”

“Ideally it represents nonhierarchical, global consciousness, respect for our bodies and who we are,” said another.

Suzanne Robinson of Sugar Hill, GA, defined it: “moving into that era that emphasizes self-discovery, spiritual growth and enlightenment. It is an exciting time of reaching past our limitations.”

Carolyn Ladner of Rancho Cordova, CA, called New Age “a global and individual change in perception that promotes a shift in thoughts and actions toward a more cooperative way of being, instead of our current separating, competitive way of existence.”

And news religion expert J. Gordon Melton says, “The New Age is ultimately a vision of a world transformed, a heaven on Earth, a society in which the problems of today are overcome and a new existence emerges.”<sup>iii</sup>

Since the New Age movement itself has not codified any statements of belief for itself, we depend on people like Christian author Douglas Groothuis, Christian reporter Russell Chandler and Rev. Philip H. Lochhaas who serves the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s Commission on Organizations. These three, in separate works, have each identified six broad tenets as the philosophy/theology of the New Age. Here is a compilation of their work.

### **1. All is One**

The idea that “All is One” is the absolute foundation for the New Age. Deity humanity, creation and consciousness and all things dissolve into universal, undifferentiated oneness. We recognize this as the ancient heresy of monism.

It is best described in impersonal terms such as Principle, Mind, Power, Unity and, especially, Energy. Yet they are all one.

Of special interest to us, is the implication that there is no good and evil, nor does good overcome evil. Good and evil are transcended through consciousness and cosmic unity is achieved.

### **2. All is God**

All is God simply flows from the premise that All is One; they are twin assumptions. We saw this in Hinduism when Existence projected the universe out of himself and then entered into every being. Therefore, all things—plants, snails, books, people and so on—are said to partake of the one divine essence. Here is pantheism.

This premise carried one step further then implies that all is perfect since all is God and God must be perfect. (If we don’t see things perfectly, it is not the problem of the perfect thing, but rather our consciousness, as we will see.)

### **3. Humanity is God**

We are ready to complete the bottom line of the New Age premises:

All is One. We are One. All is God. We are God.

It’s logical, it’s natural. It’s humanism.

“You are the only thing that is real,” insists New Age editor Jack Underhill, publisher of the fast-growing *Life Times* magazine. “Everything else is your imagination, movie stuff you’ve brought into your screenplay to help you see who you really are. Nudge that around for a while... There are no victims in this life or any other. No mistakes. No wrong paths. No winners. No losers. Accept that and take responsibility for making your life what you want it to be.”

“Man,” Douglas Groothuis further comments, “is not only seen as the measure of all things, he is the metaphysical master; we are one with the One and thus have access to unlimited potential.”

No wonder Shirley MacLaine shouts on the Malibu Beach “I am God!” We are god in disguise. Swami Maktananda—a great influence on Werner Erhard (founder of EST—Erhard

Seminar Training—and lately of “Forum”) pulls no pantheistic punches when he says “Kneel to your own self. Honor and worship your own being. God dwells within, you are You.”

Here is where New Agers accept our message that Jesus Christ is God. He is god, as you are god, as I am god. More often than not, the only reference you really find to Jesus Christ in New Age literature is in the form of Christian refutation to New Age heresy. And this does not surprise. Why be concerned about the Son of God when you are God!

#### **4. Man’s Crisis? Change Consciousness!**

We are god! It’s so simple! But why don’t we know ourselves as god? Why don’t we display more divine behavior? Again, it’s so simple. Ignorance. We are just blind to this reality. We have a kind of “metaphysical amnesia” which has caused us to forget our true identity. Call it ignorance. They don’t call it sin!

Since ignorance is the cause of man’s crisis and higher consciousness is the solution, let’s stop for an instant anatomy course on the human brain as it biologically functions.

In recent years neuroscientists have unlocked many of the brain’s secrets. It is a three and a half pound object about the size of a grapefruit, pinkish-gray in color, with the appearance of a giant fissured walnut and the consistency of Jello. The brain has two hemispheres with unique functions. In general, the left hemisphere does the thinking, the right side does the feeling. These functions are reversed for left-handed individuals. These two hemispheres are connected through the *corpus callosum* and are integrated in function. Jerre Levy, a biopsychologist at the University of Chicago explains the balance between right and left brain dominance—not exclusivity—in function this way: “To the extent that regions are differentiated in the brain, they must integrate their activities... There is no activity in which only one hemisphere is involved or to which only one hemisphere makes a contribution.”<sup>iv</sup>

According to the New Age mind-set, much of the blame for our ignorance of Oneness lies with the numbing influences that Western culture has on the feeling side of the brain. We become fragmented, compartmentalized, competitive, unfeeling people. For the New Agers, there is higher wisdom in the right hemisphere—a kind of ‘body-knowing’ that attunes one to God as it stills the wordy chatter of our left hemisphere. Shirley MacLaine puts it this way:

A person who thinks laterally, or with the right hemisphere, is capable of seeing a broader connectedness to events that would be little more than a contradictory puzzle to a left-brained Westerner. ... Eastern thinkers are more open to intuitive thinking... [which] addresses higher dimensions and more realities, which enable us to feel connected to the source of what I call God Energy. It speaks to the language of the soul, the universality of the spirit. When we go within ourselves there will be something there.<sup>v</sup>

In pursuit of this spiritual enlightenment within the right hemisphere of the brain, one might—or must—seek help, depending on a person’s ability to perceive subtle energies. Such help is provided with an army of mediums that fall into three ranks: guru, channel, trinkets.

The guru is a spiritual master who teaches and helps the uninitiated. In return the guru demands that the disciples totally surrender to his/her authority. It is interesting to note that in the New Age system where all is One, all is God, gurus are said “to be greater than God because they lead to God.” A representative, but not comprehensive, list of recent or influential gurus includes: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Elizabeth Clare Prophet (Guru Ma), Bab Ram Dass, Swami Muktananda, Guru Maharaj Ji, Zen Master Rama, Benjamin Creme, Swami Behondananda.

Another rank of mediums are channels or channelers. They go into a trance state to establish contact with a spirit, ascended master, off-planet being, higher consciousness or even

an evolved animal entity. The channel then receives and repeats the messages and impressions from the “other side.”

Channels are multiplying. Today you can tune into any one of these channels: J.Z. Knight (Ramtha), Jach Pursel (Lazaris), Kevin Ryerson—the medium on MacLaine’s TV miniseries (John—a MidEast scholar from Jesus’ day; Tom McPherson—an Irish pickpocket who served the English diplomatic corps during Elizabethan England); Penny Torres Rubin (Mafu—a leper from Pompeii); Darryl Anka (Bashar—an extraterrestrial humanoid from Issassani, a civilization roughly 500 light years in a future time line in the direction of the Orion constellation); Brazilian Luiz Antonio Gasparetto (50 “Old Master” artists including Renoir, Picasso, Goya, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Latrec); Rev. Neville Rowe (dolphins, Soli—an off planet being from the Pleiades); Virginia Essen (Jesus); Veronica Leuken (Virgin Mary).

If you don’t want to follow a guru or tune in to a channel, you can reach enlightenment and God Energy with a compliment of trinkets. Here you’ve got your crystals and prisms and pyramids (properly aligned with magnetic north, of course) and rocks—preferably quartz—and precious gems. Dangle them, affix them, wear them, stash them or focus on them and you, too, will be enlightened.

Yes, man does have a problem. It is ignorance. But there is hope. In fact there is unlimited potential to your divinity and God Energy once you get in touch with it. Some of the names for this transforming experience should be noted for our professional familiarity: cosmic consciousness, God-realization, visualization, self-realization, enlightenment, illumination, Nirvana, sator, at-one-ment or satchitananada.

### **5. All Religions are One**

If you were waiting for syncretism, here it is. New Age gurus frequently claim that all religions are one and share the same core of teaching the One for all. Jesus, Buddha, Lao-tse, Krishna and others taught and experienced the same oneness. Dogmas and ceremonies may come and go but the vital experience of “the god within” is common throughout the world.

### **6. Cosmic Evolutionary Optimism**

Evolution in the New Age is much like the New Age itself as it concerns itself more with evolutionary potential in the future than Darwinian evolutionary theories about man and the past; likewise the evolution of the spirit of man is much more important than bodily evolutionary possibilities. So when the New Age speaks of Cosmic Evolutionary Optimism it means just that. Through the premises and practices of New Age principles, mankind and the cosmos have every right to be optimistic about the future. After all, they are working for global transformation characterized by mass enlightenment and social unity as all people realize that they are deities. Although they see global problems increasing exponentially, sometimes more clearly and quickly than the rest of us, they also see our potentials growing exponentially as we are one with One.

A major theme to this cosmic evolutionary optimism is “reincarnation,” wherein, upon the death of the body, the Oneness of a person comes back in the flesh of another. Evidently “metaphysical amnesia” is part of this reincarnation since only again through the process of transformation does one realize previous life or lives.

The process of reincarnation is determined by Karma, the Hindu term for the “law” of justice, or cause and effect. It requires that the accumulated effect of one’s actions in this life determine the type of existence the soul will have in the next life. The more you are one with

your karma in this life, the more one you will be in your reincarnation(s) until you actually reach Oneness.

Most, though not all, New Age reincarnationists reject the idea that a human soul can transmigrate backward to lower life forms once it has progressed upward. After all, that would not be evolutionary optimism!

There are even some New Age groups who blueprint their future lives, coordinated with each other so that, for example, one would be born, knowing the specific soul which would incarnate as a younger sibling. Or two souls would arrange to incarnate, intending to meet and marry and give birth to a third soul's incarnation. "Immortality consultant" Patricia Rochelle Diegel outlined how she had been into her own incarnations as far ahead as 5500 A.D.<sup>vi</sup>

It is worth mentioning here that reincarnation is not only popular among New Agers, but Americans themselves. In a 1982 Gallup poll, 23% of the people believed in some form of reincarnation. The proportion rises to 30% among persons under 30.<sup>vii</sup>

A lesser theme to the cosmic evolutionary optimism is "millennialism." It shouldn't surprise us that this "ancient Jewish myth" resurfaces in the New Age since the New Age is looking for a return to earth of the visible and absolute kingdom of god, or the kingdom of "gods;" as it were. At this point in the development of New Agism, theories of the millenium have not been formulated in enough detail for our consideration here. But they are already subdividing into "Pre-Trib" and "Post-Trib" camps as well as the other divisions known to Millennialistic theologies.

## 7. The Agenda

Since the sequel to expanded personal awareness is planetary transformation characterized by mass enlightenment and social evolution, New Agers selectively endorse programs, causes and political planks which fit their goals and serve their purposes. Items on their agenda include:

1. *Ecology*. Since God and nature are merged, the New Age would seek broad advances in repairing and restoring the delicate balance of Earth nature and environment. This also promotes harmony for man in pursuit of Oneness.
2. *Androgyny*. Because all are one, male and female distinctions are irrelevant. There then needs to be full equality, opportunity and function between male and female as one.

This New Age androgyny may give us an insight into the impetus of the woman's movement in the last 25 years. Rev. Mark Smith (WELS, La Mesa, CA) points this out in his *New Age—Old Lies* series recently published in the WELS Lutheran Campus Ministry's newsletter, *Lightsource*: Many feminists see the woman's movement only as a political crusade to gain equality with men. For others, it is a spiritual crusade based partly upon the reawakening of "goddess consciousness" whose goal is not equality but matriarchy.

Smith cited a case: A women's conference was held in southern California entitled: "Women: The Leading Edge of the New Age." A brochure promoting the conference said: "1982 is the year for revolution in religion, higher education, and New Age learning, in which the holistic interconnected nature of reality is widely recognized...and in which women are encouraged to express their "new" spirituality which is the oldest on earth," (i.e. Wicca—witchcraft).

3. *Nuclear Disarmament and World Peace*. This includes rapprochement and possible political unification between the United States and the Soviet Union.
4. *Natural Foods and the Healing Processes*. Natural foods are self-explanatory. The real shibboleth here is “holistic (Greek: “*holos*” = whole) health.” Holistic practitioners treat not only the sickness but the whole person—body, mind, spirit.

Since holistic health is a major theme of the New Age, we note some presuppositions which characterize this medicine. Paul and Teri Reisser and John Weldon, in their book *The Holistic Healers* supply the following:<sup>viii</sup>

- a. The whole is greater than the parts of a body, mind, spirit.
  - b. Health or “wellness” is more than an absence of disease.
  - c. We are responsible for our own health or disease.
  - d. Natural forms of healing are preferable to drugs and surgery.
  - e. Most methods of promoting health can be holistic, but some are more innately holistic than others. Such as: acupuncture, acupressure, biofeedback, chiropractic, osteopathy, homeopathy, iridology, massage and body work therapies, meditation, visualization, self-hypnosis, martial arts, nutritional therapies, psychic diagnosis and healing, sexual or mystical practices.
  - f. Health implies evolution. Through holistic health we may facilitate the next stage in human evolution.
  - g. An understanding of energy, not matter, is the key to health.
  - h. Death is the final stage of growth.
  - i. The thinking and practices of ancient civilizations are a rich source for healthy living.
  - j. Holistic health must be incorporated into the fabric of society through public policy.
5. *World Hunger*. We must unite to fight this most basic of human needs.
  6. *Humanize Technology*. We must put more ‘feeling’ into our technology.
  7. *A New System of Economics*. The New Age would dismantle corporate America and replace it with “alternative” economic units such as small industrial and agricultural collectives.
  8. *Foster Cooperative Living Styles*. Since androgyny in essence dissects traditional family structures, cooperative living takes its place in the global family.
  9. *Organize Global Politics*. This calls for a one-world government with, perhaps, the United Nations as the sole, central governing agency.
  10. *Create an Eclectic World Religion*. Obviously this religion would more closely resemble Eastern religious systems rather than current Western faiths.

To fulfill this agenda the New Age looks to the “information revolution.” As we move from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, the New Age hopes to cover the globe with a myriad of networks, interconnecting ideas, people, services and organizations.

Marilyn Ferguson, author of the New Age manifesto, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, finds these networks and networking crucial for transformation. As the New Age itself develops and evolves, she claims, there are “tens of thousands of entry points serving to band together the like-minded. Networking is done by conferences, phone calls, air travel, books, phantom organizations, papers, pamphleteering, photocopying, lectures, workshops, parties, grapevines, mutual friends, summit meetings, coalitions, tapes and newsletters.”<sup>ix</sup> Thus the transformative vision becomes a reality. The New Age will become the Now Age.

## Our Ministry

The people of God have always found themselves in two kingdoms. You have just heard about one of them. That is the kingdom of this world. And the New Age is part of it. We may laugh at some of its imaginations. We will despise its deception. We will search for God's truth where ever it is found. But its still just a New Age of this world. And it is part of our age.

But this New Age, as much as it is part of our age is not so new. Man's quest for complete oneness with the One God dates back to the Garden of Eden wherein Adam and Eve were not content with having been created in the image of God. They would be God, by the devil's tempting and their choosing. Man's reliance on his own powers stretches back to Cain who, despite the Lord's loving call to repentance and faith, relied on his own strength to solve the problem with his brothers. It was man's ignorance of Lord God and his Will, manifested with all kinds of evil imaginations and deeds, which precipitated the flood. Man's striving for "oneness with man" and "union between heaven and earth"—all at man's hand—was in the bricks and mortar of Babel's Tower. And we know God's strife over that! But still mankind aspires to a heaven on earth.

So we see some of the same themes of the New Age repeated from of old. And repeated in every age. Ages past have already labeled the old lies of the New Age (i.e., monism, pantheism, humanism, mysticism, syncretism, millenialism). At all times we know who is the real perpetrator of it all: He is Satan, the Divider, the Devil, the Deceiver, the Prince of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient. Having failed in his attempt to establish his "New Age" in God's heaven, he has gone down to the earth. He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short!

He finds fertile soil to plant the half-truths and deceptions of the New Age in man and woman who, to a person, are corrupted by original sin and spiritual ignorance. This fertility quotient in mankind is compounded; although man has lost the image of God, there is the natural knowledge of a god in him and her. Therefore they seek a god and union with that god and the inner things that bring peace, harmony, life and hope until they think they have found it. Some would find it in the New Age.

That brings us to the other kingdom in this world. God's Kingdom and that of his One, Only, True Son, Jesus Christ. From of old, Lord God has promised our deliverance from the Deceiver and our redemption unto himself as a separate, transformed people through the Seed, the Messiah, the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Savior, Jesus Christ. In Jesus alone we find our complete union with the Three-In-One God in whom we live and move and have our being. We live now to give glory to God until Jesus takes us into that glory...forever!

As we serve the dying world with this living Word, I am reminded of one of Paul's "trustworthy sayings"—the one to Titus:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. Titus 3:3-8



With such words I believe Paul—and Jesus Christ—sets for us a course in ministry to the New Age. Let's not be surprised at the corruptibility of mankind to a person we have the potential of unlimited depravity. But let's stress the reality of a separate yet personal God—not an impersonal energy. He is the Three-In-One, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Preach how the Father neither effected evolution nor projected existence of the cosmos—He created it! Teach that God has come to us in the flesh as the God/Man Jesus Christ who purifies us from every sin—even that of ignorance. We want to impress the presence of the Holy Spirit who fills all the world and dwells within people through the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

Yes, let us deliver the whole counsel of God to the mind of man. Let us teach, teach and teach some more the “left brain” to obey everything God has commanded and recorded for us in his own, accurate and authoritative Word. Nor let us forget to minister to the “right brain” of feeling as we wash once in the baptismal waters of faith, promise and forgiveness only to be renewed daily through repentance. And let us be drawn into true union with God through Holy Communion with the true body and blood of Jesus Christ for strength and assurance of our life with God.

Let us not speak of karma as the force of life—but grace, as God richly and daily directs his undeserved, yet unfailing, love for us with providence, forgiveness and guidance. Let us not look for reincarnation but for resurrection. For God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. One of those kindnesses is also the resurrection of our bodies from the dust of death. Such resurrections are not a transmigration of the soul—but transformation of our spirit to life with God; and, one day, it ends in the transportation of the body, by the power of God, to God! And let us not support visualization which would have us manipulating God, but rather let us promote faith and trust wherein we commit our very being into the Father's hands.

Let us not seek mediums, crystals and gurus in the path of enlightenment but rather the One Mediator between God and man—the Man Christ Jesus. Let us tune in to no channel except the Holy Spirit who makes it clear that he wants to transform us through the faithful witness of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament. For this Spirit is still “calling, gathering, enlightening, sanctifying and keeping the whole Christian Church on earth with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” Through it all we follow not the New Age, but the One who is with us to the very end of the ages.

As we carry this Gospel witness to our age, we can intelligently and effectively minister to the New Age. We have God's Word on it...and his help...and always his grace.

To help us galvanize ourselves for such a ministry, let us be aware of six mental “traps” which would diffuse the power of salvation's Gospel. I am grateful to Douglas Groothuis who brought them to my attention in *Confronting the New Age*.<sup>x</sup> I bring them to yours:

1. *Quarantine mentality*. Those with this tendency are rightfully distrustful of the New Age world-view and agenda, recognizing that God's people are separate from the world. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God to declare his praise. But we are not a quarantined people. The quarantine mentality wrongly assumes that anything approved by the New Age is intrinsically evil and therefore “off limits” for all Christians. This may be departing too far to the right of what God says.

An example may be found in holistic health. The Christian will call on the name of the Lord for healing and not supposed occult energies or entities. But all that is holistic is not hellish. We, too, out of respect for the life of body, soul and spirit emphasize health and wellness according to the Master's plan for his creatures. We can appreciate natural foods and medicines; we can even use them as gifts from God. We pray for the sick and visit the shut-in, pursue recreation and enjoy friendships, all for the sake of godly well-being. Let us not quarantine everything holistic or even "New Age." Much is sanctified by the Holy Spirit and prayer.

2. *Taboo mentality.* This tends to substitute a list of taboos (which exceed the eight of the Ten Commandments) for the gift of discernment from the Spirit of God. These black and white rules of men help us little in cultivating the ability to understand critically the issues at hand as we use the Word of God and prayer.

For example: Shall we "outlaw" all pyramids and triangles just because of their identification with New Age elements? Then what of "Trinity" diagrams. And what of prisms? Aren't there some who are simply captivated by God's rainbow of colors visible in a prism? Rather than adopt taboos, let us be ever adept at "doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

3. *Paranoid mentality.* Perhaps it's as though this day you feel you've been introduced to yet another enemy of Christ and his Church in the New Age. And you feel persecuted and inadequate: This is where fear immobilizes us so that we are quick to condemn an error, perhaps too quick, without sharing the Gospel which transforms errorists.

Jesus Christ promised that not even the gates of hell will prevent his Church from moving forward with the Gospel like a mighty army. How much more successful we will be in ministering to the New Age—where there may yet be some saved!

4. *Chicken Little mentality.* How easy it would be for us to pass off the New Age movement as yet another fulfillment of Biblical prophecy concerning the rise of evil in the world before the Second Coming of Christ. "The End is near!" "The New Age is here!" "The sky is falling!"

But let us not assume that God has given up on our—or any other—culture. Although the coming of Judgment should drive us to our knees and into the streets, the end will come only when the Son of Man comes. Till then there is kingdom work to be done here and now. We have the apocalyptic invitation to extend to this world, the invitation of the King: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And give in neither to fear or confusion as we extend it.

5. *Ostrich mentality.* As a church we could ignore this all. We could stick our head in the sand and say, "We don't have to worry about this, not here in Minnesota! Maybe in California but not this land of loons, Lutherans and lefsa!"

But what when your daughter starts quoting Shirley MacLaine, or your son starts visiting the Church Universal and Triumphant near the U of M, or your Elder starts talking about visualization for your congregation? Could it all happen?

Our God did not stick his head in the clouds when he saw our need. He gave us the Word of his love, faithfulness and deliverance in Christ Jesus. This Christ has set up his church on earth and commissioned us to Go! Let's not stick our heads in the sand—not even the grace filled beaches of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheranism.

6. *Chameleon mentality*. This pitfall is a cousin to the ostrich. The ostrich ignores while the chameleon not only tolerates but embraces. The chameleons are the “Trendier than Thou”. You see, Christians and Churches have the ability to passively absorb their environment and change colors in accordance with popular New Age practices or ideas. So we get Christian yoga, Christian Zen, Christian TM. All truth is God's truth—in the New Age as in anyplace else. But not all that glitters is God's gold. There's plenty of fools gold around too!

The future of the New Age movement is uncertain. On the one hand we should view its own claims to fame and fortune with some suspicion. We can further doubt that God will let such idolatry exist for long—but we'll let him be the judge! On the other hand, the broad-based, yet loosely structured coalition of activists and academics, mystics and marketeers, have already made considerable head-way on their agenda. More will come.

But no matter what, the Ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will last to the very end of the age! The Word of the Lord will stand forever. God grant that we, personally and corporately, may be part of it.

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<sup>i</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986) pgs. 35-36.

<sup>ii</sup> Helmer Ringgren and Åke V. Ström, *Religions of Mankind*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) pgs. 341-344.

<sup>iii</sup> Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age* (Dallas/London/Sydney/Singapore: Word Publishing, 1988) pg. 27.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. pg. 37.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. pg. 38.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid. pg. 266

<sup>vii</sup> Russell Chandler, op. cit. pg. 263.

<sup>viii</sup> Paul C. and Teri K. Reisser and John Weldon, *Holistic Healers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983) pgs. 14-32.

<sup>ix</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980).

<sup>x</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988) pgs. 58-61.