

The New Age Movement

The name New Age Movement¹ is misleading for it describes something that is neither an organised movement nor a recognised religion: it has no structure, no acknowledged membership and no official representatives. New Age people are not distinguishable by their appearance.

The New Age Movement is best thought of as an influence or trend in the world that affects what people think and believe: you have probably come across it without knowing it.

The New Age Movement shows itself in different ways through individuals and organised groups. Those groups are not necessarily linked to one another but they share certain common values and a common vision and for that reason they cooperate with one another. Many of those groups are actively seeking to shape the future of our culture. For that reason the New Age Movement is often described as a third social force competing with Judeo-Christian tradition and secular humanism.

Basic Beliefs

The basic beliefs of the New Age Movement are hard to define for New Age spirituality is more a matter of experience than belief. Many who are part of it would say that truth cannot be expressed in mere language: it can be experienced but can only ever be partially expressed in words and our best expression of it will always be flawed. They would go on to say that every religion in the world is merely another attempt to express the same ultimate truth: all those religions point to the same goal. For this reason there is no rigid New Age belief system. Indeed, to formulate and express beliefs is often portrayed as a hindrance to enlightenment, whereas anything that facilitates experience is encouraged.

Having said that, there are some assumptions that tend to be characteristic of New Age thinking.

- Everything is one.
- Ultimate reality is being, awareness, bliss.
- All that is, is God (pantheism).
- Man, as part of all that is, is likewise divine.
- Man is separated from God only in his own consciousness.
- Man has a false sense of separate identity, which is the cause of all his problems.
- Techniques that alter consciousness give experience of oneness with God.
- The mystical experience is the doorway to transformation.
- Experience and intuition (not revelation or reason), therefore, are the final authorities.
- Also central is a spiritualised doctrine of evolution.
- Personal transformation leads to planetary transformation and a New Age.
- Transformation of a critical number of people will transform the planet.
- Belief in the New Age (The Age of Aquarius) is not based on biblical prophecy but on an appeal to astrology and evolution.
- Some hold to the Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma.

New Age Thinking

New Age thought is life and world affirming, and in this it differs from traditional Eastern mysticism. It affirms the value of nature, people, culture, education, politics and science and may be seen as an attempt to wed Eastern mysticism and Western learning.

¹ The tendency today is to speak of New Age spiritualities, or simply the new spiritualities.

New Age thought is forward looking and concerned with progress toward global peace, unification and ecological balance. It reflects a strong social conscience.

New Age thought strives for personal as well as spiritual fulfilment. In this it is strongly influenced by Rogers and Maslow. The concepts of self and self-actualisation are emphasised, more so because of the belief that the distinction between creator and creation is illusory, so that men can become gods. Man is seen to have the power and potential to shape his own destiny, and when accountability and responsibility are talked about, they are defined in terms of the self — “You owe it to yourself” is a commonly used expression.

New Age practice emphasises the importance of mystical experience, which is considered to transcend normal reasoning, and various techniques are employed to produce it. Those techniques include the practice of yoga or transcendental meditation, the use of hallucinogenic drugs, hypnosis and listening to “New Age music” which is geared toward producing a state of deep relaxation.

Manifestations Of The New Age Movement

The Human Potential Movement

- Humanistic psychology (with elevation of self).
- Positive thinking.
- Crystal gazing.

Practice Of Mysticism

- Yoga.
- Transcendental Meditation.
- Chanting.
- Creative Visualisation.
- Hypnosis.
- New Age Music.

Occultic Practice

- Channelling.

New Age Politics

- The vision of a united global community.
- Neither left nor right, but radical centre.
- Advocacy of decentralisation in favour of self-reliance.
- Emphasis on individual freedom and removal of authority.
- Underlying values are survival, unity and interdependence, human autonomy, humanness.

The Green Movement

- Much of the drive for environmental conservation derives from a New Age world view.

Holistic Health Care

- New models of wellness and healing.
- Eastern medical models which suppose an invisible dynamic force within the body.

Psychic Healing

- Therapeutic touch based on the Hindu doctrine of prana (universal life energy).

New Age Science

- Consciousness research.
- Parapsychology.
- New Physics — psychic energy is the fundamental stuff of the universe.

- Rejection of the analytic Cartesian scientific method in favour of a holistic paradigm (a conceptual framework within which thought takes place) which incorporates mystical thought.
- Evolutionary thought — nothing is fixed, everything is progressing.

Education

- The use of consciousness-expanding techniques to promote "Right Brain Learning".
- Promotion of positive self-esteem.

The Workplace

- Positive thinking.
- Guided Imagery.
- Meditative techniques.
- Organisation Development/Transformation.
- Encounter Group experiences.

Questions For Discussion

1. Where have you come across New Age thinking and Practice?
2. From the perspective of a Christian what is wrong with New Age thinking?
3. What are the dangers it poses?