

THE CHURCH AND THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

GORDON R. LEWIS*

During America's bicentennial celebration in 1976 Tom Wolfe wrote that we are now seeing "the upward roll (and not the crest, by any means) of the third great religious awakening in American history, one that historians will very likely term the Third Great Awakening."¹ The editors of *The New Age Journal* call it the "consciousness movement," the "New Age," the "Aquarian conspiracy." While working on this address I have come to think of it as the "new spirituality." In 1984 leaders of the new spirituality produced "a guide to the nearly limitless possibilities of the life of the spirit today" for "all those who want to live everyday life as part of the spiritual path, to get (and to give) the most from each moment of life."²

I. THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

According to researcher J. Gordon Melton, the new spirituality is "built much more around vision and experience than doctrines and a belief system."³ Huston Smith explains: "Unconvinced by theology, which along with theory of every sort is dismissed as a 'head trip,' the young especially are looking to experience direct, unmediated God-awareness through altered states of consciousness."⁴

1. *Roots.* Carl A. Raschke traces the new spiritual consciousness to gnosticism: "The Gnostic flight by mind-magic into eternity is spurred by an unsettling realization of the loss of worldly *place*."⁵ Related roots can be noted in spiritism, mystery religions, neo-Platonism, medieval mysticism, theosophy and—most recently—the anti-establishment trends of the 1960s.

* An earlier draft of this presidential address was delivered on November 20, 1992, at the forty-fifth annual meeting of ETS in San Francisco by President-Elect Gerry Breshears because President Gordon Lewis, professor of systematic theology at Denver Seminary, P.O. Box 10,000, Denver, CO 80210, was medically unable to attend the meeting.

¹ R. Fields *et al.*, *Chop Wood, Carry Water: A Guide to Finding Fulfillment in Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1984) xi.

² *Ibid.* xiv.

³ J. G. Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland, 1985) 112-113.

⁴ H. Smith in F. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (rev. ed.; Wheaton: Theosophical, 1984) xxiv.

⁵ C. A. Raschke, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980) 271.

In response to a questionnaire asking leaders of the new-age spirituality to name individuals whose ideas had influenced them, Marilyn Ferguson reports those most often named in the order of frequency:

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, C. G. Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Aldous Huxley, Roberto Assagioli, and J. Krishnamurti. Others frequently mentioned: Paul Tillich, Herman Hesse, Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Buber, . . . Alan Watts, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Muktananda, D. T. Suzuki, Thomas Merton, Willis Harman, . . . Erich Fromm, Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Frederick Spiegelberg, Alfred Korsybski, . . . Werner Erhard, . . . Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.⁶

The religious sources of the new spiritual consciousness are best outlined by John P. Newport⁷ and include Hindu-related groups (transcendental meditation reflecting the Vedanta tradition, Hare Krishna the Bhakti tradition); Buddhist-related groups (Zen, Nicheren Shoshu); Taoist-related groups (Unification Church); Islamic-related groups (Sufism, Subud, Meher Baba, Gurdjieff, Baha'i); western, allegedly secular, new-consciousness groups (Scientology, Silva Mind Control, Erhard Seminar Training, Life-spring); occult-related individuals and their followers (Castenada and other channelers, shamans, goddesses of neopaganism).

Some seekers go from one of these approaches to another. A former Moonie told me that she had been spiritually promiscuous. Many are eclectic. Granting the primarily eastern roots, the new spirituality is new only to westerners who are preoccupied with Judeo-Christian and naturalistic thought.

2. *Meaning.* The new spirituality is not easy to define because adherents pick and choose among any of its roots as they will. They do not feel obligated to coherence. As one writer put it: "Defining the New Age Movement is as difficult as nailing bean curd to the wall!" Difficulties like that, however, do not stop philosophers or theologians. The new-age movement has almost as many denominations as adherents, for each person may create his or her own reality. Some emphasize occult ways to personal health, relaxation, creativity and business success. Others major on "new" social and political programs leading, they think, to an Aquarian age of world peace. We cannot assume that every characteristic mentioned applies to every new ager we meet. It seems fair to say, however, that generally the new spirituality presupposes (1) a pantheistic or panentheistic worldview, (2) a noncognitive, mystical view of spiritual experiences, (3) an occult (magical) approach to spiritual knowledge and power, and (4) a vision of future world peace.

The new-age movement generally may be defined as a spiritual, social and political attempt to transform individuals and society through mystical experiences of alleged oneness with the energy of the cosmos and occult

⁶ M. Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1980) 420.

⁷ J. P. Newport, *Christ and the New Consciousness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1978). The classification of the table of contents is here adapted with minor changes.

techniques for ending the threat of nuclear destruction and inaugurating a new era of global peace.

3. *Varied uses.* In the narrowest sense the new-age movement includes only those groups who identify themselves as new age, participate in new-age gatherings, and advertise in new-age publications. In a much broader sense the new spirituality in the west designates all theologies and philosophies that are monistic and encourage occult spiritual disciplines with a view to transforming individuals and society.

Individually the new-age movement is made up of countless persons seeking to achieve their highest potential. Institutionally it is the networking of innumerable grass-roots activist groups. Ethically it is made up of relativists uninhibited by Judeo-Christian ethical norms (except for "love"). Politically it advocates abandoning national citizenships for a single world government. Missiologically it expects high commitment to global networking.

4. *Impact.* Since the 1960s the new spirituality has produced a major cultural shift in the west. By 1983 a Gallup poll found that about one-fourth of Americans believed in reincarnation. Since then, actress Shirley MacLaine's best-selling books, television specials and seminars have reached many more. New-age ideas frequently appear in the media, magazines, movies, health services, the public schools and self-help books on psychology and religion. No passing fad, concepts that formerly were known only to specialists in eastern religions and occultism have become household words: psychics, horoscopes, karma, reincarnation, pantheism, wholeness, visualization, channeling.

From 1978 to 1987, according to Gallup polls in America, interest in astrology has increased from 40 percent to 59 percent among schoolchildren. Sixty-seven percent of adults read astrology reports, while 36 percent believe that the reports are scientific. Forty-two percent of American adults now believe they have been in contact with someone who has died, and 67 percent said they had experienced extrasensory perception. Culturally the new-age movement no longer makes so much news because it has increasingly saturated the society.⁸ A replacing of the usual means of grace by a magical view of "faith" is all too prominent in the telechurch.⁹

II. COMPARISON AND CONTRAST WITH CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Some inclined toward a fundamentalist mentality tend to see only differences and can find no common ground in the spiritualities of other religions. Other liberally-inclined thinkers tend to major on similarities

⁸ See R. Chandler, *Understanding the New Age* (Dallas: Word, 1988) esp. 20–21; *Racing toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

⁹ H. Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene: Harvest, 1993).

and admit few major differences. More objective scholars must seek to do justice to both similarities and differences.

1. *Common ground: to be used or not to be used?* We must commend new agers for their vision, strategies and determination. Like the Athenians of old, they are "very religious" (Acts 17:22). Although we reject a new-age pantheistic worldview we can acknowledge elements of truth within it. Indeed there is more to life than meets the eye. Humans have souls that survive death. What one sows one reaps. Personal transformation is prior to social transformation and world peace. Earth's resources should be prudently used and not exploited. A nontoxic environment ought to be preserved for the growth of nontoxic food. Spiritual values motivate all aspects of life. People should seek their highest potential and holistic health. Spiritual values should be communicated to the entire, shrinking globe. Will Christian theists in the 1990s use such important points of contact in reaching new agers? Presuppositionalists on principle forbid their use as points of contact or common ground.¹⁰ But Lit-sen Chang indicates that, prior to the communist regime, fundamentalist missions to China failed because they did not build bridges. Although they remained true to the gospel of special revelation they did not communicate it well because they did not utilize points of contact with the culture from general revelation. In contrast Chang found that "liberal missionaries to the Orient had only the truths of general revelation, and so adapted to the culture that they lost the central message of redemptive revelation."¹¹ An effective missionary to Buddhists, he wisely advises, needs the truths of both the universal, moral revelation and the special revelation in Christ and Scripture. Similarly today's church members in contact with adherents of the new spirituality need to be faithful to the distinctives of both general and special revelation.

2. *Entry points: psychological need or moral repentance?* Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist, said, "Disappointment is the best chariot to use on the path to Dharma. People must be disappointed with themselves, their power and their old ways." Again, the entry point to a spiritual life may be a nagging sense of discomfort and boredom with life lived primarily for materialistic goals, or dissatisfaction with one's spiritual experience. A leader in the Divine Light Mission said, "In the church all I got was words; now I have experience of God." According to Marilyn Ferguson, "entry can be triggered by anything that shakes up the old understanding of the world, the old priorities." The new-age leader specifies drugs:

For a great many, the trigger has been a spontaneous mystical or psychedelic experience, as hard to explain as it is to deny. Or the intense alternative re-

¹⁰ See the discussion of C. Van Til's admission of proximate common ground while denying ultimate common ground in G. R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990) 135-138.

¹¹ L. Chang, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 105.

ality generated by a psychedelic drug. It is impossible to overestimate the historic role of psychedelics as an entry point drawing people into other transformative technologies.¹²

I heard a lecturer on Buddhism say, "Enlightenment has nothing to do with ethics." The new spiritual masters are allegedly beyond good and evil, and so their teachings are amoral and valueless. All values conceptually knowable are illusory (*maya*). Paradoxically a new-age promotional piece insisted: "It is a sin to call a person a sinner!" It seems that many evangelicals preaching positive messages agree. Whatever happened to sin? Are regeneration and sanctification indispensable to spirituality or not?

Will the Church of this decade make it clear that the deepest problem of men and women is not one's metaphysical distinctness but moral rebellion against the Creator-Redeemer? Will preachers explain that people have a poor self-image and fail to achieve their potential ultimately because of (1) an inherent propensity toward evil, (2) objective moral guilt, and (3) estrangement from a personal God? In the 1990s will Christian leaders emphasize universal dependence on the living Lord of all, accountability to the divine Judge, and moral guilt before God? Will Church leaders enamored of a positive message have the courage to deliver the divine summons to all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30)?

3. *Spiritual experiences: immediate or mediated?* The new spirituality offers the possibility of the beatific vision, a direct, indescribable experience of God (the cosmos, its energy or Force) now from nature by certain meditative techniques. Although the language is different they assume that any experience of God is salvific. But if through our fallen selves we could achieve immediate reconciliation with the living God, Jesus would not have needed to become flesh nor the Bible to have been written. Experience of God as Creator may be mediated through the beauty and power of creation. From nature, new agers ought to realize their dependence upon One who is powerful and wise, their accountability to the moral Lawgiver, and their guilt before the divine Judge. But effable intuitions occasioned by universals in nature do not contain God's once-for-all plan of redemption. They do not hear the gospel without a preacher (Rom 10:14).

I agree that the new spirituality leads to God—as Judge. The question is this: How can a sinful person be acceptable in the immediate presence of the absolutely Holy? In God's presence, 99 is not a passing grade. All need the gift of Christ's perfect righteousness. Salvific experience of God (as distinct from experience of his power in nature) is mediated through Jesus the Messiah attested by the Holy Spirit through the written Word. But even the believer's experience now is not immediate in the same sense as it will be in glory. As clearly as there is one God there is one Mediator between sinners and God (1 Tim 2:5). Salvific experience of people in history is mediated through the Jesus of history.

¹² Ferguson, *Aquarian* 89.

New agers may regard the Christ "spirit" or "principle" to be the spirit of the cosmos and so speak of experience of "the Christ." But the Christ of the new spirituality has nothing to do with the Jesus of history. The Jesus of the new spirituality was a human who attained consciousness of the Christ spirit to a degree above others of his time. He exemplified the Christ, but never do new agers affirm with the first-century Christians that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:28). The new spirituality regards Jesus as one of many avatars or gurus.¹³ At Christmas new agers commemorate a man who became God, while Christians commemorate God who became a man once for all. Once for all, Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose again, and ascended to the right hand of God the Father, far above all angelic and demonic powers.

Will evangelical churches in the 1990s maintain the uniqueness of Jesus Christ or give in to the syncretism of the new spirituality?¹⁴ Will the coming generation of evangelicals abandon consistency with the unique claims Christ made for himself for an alleged complementarity of the contradictory claims of other manifestations of the Whole? In the 1990s will church members be adequately trained to distinguish immediate psychedelic dramas and mystical experiences of union with the cosmos from salvific experiences of the mercy and grace of our Father in heaven for sinners mediated through the incarnate Messiah?

4. *Spiritual experiences: of the creatures or the Creator?* Assuming that God is all, or in everything, anything can be spiritual and valuable. But since creation a metaphysical monism is false. Given the duality between the Creator and creation, the most dedicated spirituality may be idolatrous. And since the fall, there is a moral dualism, and thus dedicated spirituality may be demonic as well as divine, evil as well as good. And since the fall, humanity must distinguish an epistemological dualism. Deep spiritual dedication may be directed by truth or error. Some of the scholars most dedicated to critical study of the Bible seem to fail to realize that it supports only a critical use of spiritual disciplines. In spiritual growth it exhorts Christians to discern what is best (Phil 1:9-11). To do this they must use a brain that is not blown by mindless meditation but renewed (Col 3:10). The apostle John pleads: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Verified conceptual truth provides the essential guideline to authentic spirituality. It sounds more spiritual to claim that in our experiences of God we go beyond all conceptual distinctions. But according to the first and great commandment God wants a love that involves "all" our mind (Matt 22:37). Christian worship is not only in spirit but also in truth (John 4:24). Chris-

¹³ An influential work on Jesus Christ was allegedly channeled from the spirit world to L. H. Dowling, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (Santa Monica: DeVorss).

¹⁴ For an evaluation of the leading new-age gurus from India see V. Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus* (New Delhi: Nivedit, 1977).

tian spirituality tests, tries, proves, examines and holds fast only to what is true and good in reality.

In the 1990s are church members being prepared critically to evaluate their private and public devotional experiences to determine whether they are of drugs, the cosmos, demons, or the Lord and Savior? Will people in our churches continue to say with Paul, "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind" (1 Cor 14:15)?

5. *Interpretations of spiritual experiences: self-authenticating or verifiable?* How can the Christian mind determine whether the claims made on the basis of a spiritual experience are true? The new spirituality calls for a new paradigm of knowing that is intuitive and self-authenticating. They are rightly disillusioned by the naturalist's verification of truth reductively by sense data alone. Intuitions (if effable) can be valuable for suggesting hypotheses to be tested and so are a useful source of truth claims. But intuitions when stated in affirmations may support contradictory claims. Intuition alone is no more reliable as a criterion of truth than sense data alone.

New agers tend to think that their testimonies to their private experiences are self-authenticating and so settle all ultimate questions. We are expected to abandon all critical questions and simply accept the authority of an alleged guru or "spirit guide." If you have not experienced the divine light as they have, you have no right to evaluate their experience. But a nurse does not need to drink poison to treat one who has, nor does a physician need to have had cancer to treat the disease. God has revealed enough conceptual knowledge so that we can use our minds to decide between the conflicting claims of contemporary spiritual leaders. The alleged authority of a guru does not settle the question, for one must choose between the many conflicting claims of self-appointed gurus. Whose authority shall one accept? Why?

Although mystical experiences have a noetic quality, a psychological certitude does not guarantee the truth of a mystic's claims.¹⁵ If one's experience is totally beyond description, one should remain totally silent. The father of Rabi Maharaj did. At that guru's funeral his eight-year-old son had never heard him speak his name or even say, "I love you."¹⁶ But most in the new mystical spirituality choose to speak or write voluminously about their experiences. Having entered the arena of public discourse, however, their claims are as subject to critical examination and evaluation as any others.

Spiritual experiences do not come with labels indicating whether they are from the fallen cosmos or from God. So one and the same experience may be given mutually exclusive interpretations by the same person at different times. When young, Martin Buber had a moving religious experience and spoke and wrote of it as a pantheistic absorption in an impersonal

¹⁵ W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902) 371.

¹⁶ For the rest of the story see R. R. Maharaj with D. Hunt, *Death of a Guru* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1977).

ultimate reality. Later he reinterpreted the same experience as an I-Thou encounter with the personal Lord.¹⁷ In neither case did the experience itself determine the validity of the claims he made for it. Any claims for spiritual experiences are subject to the criteria that test any other truth claims. As I have argued elsewhere, these would include logical noncontradiction, empirical adequacy and existential viability.¹⁸

When Christians say to new agers, "That is just your interpretation," new agers are likely to respond, "That is just your interpretation." How can anyone break out of these subjective hermeneutical circles and achieve a measure of objective validity for spiritual claims? It helps to test and confirm, or disconfirm, the possibilities by a fruitful method of research and decision-making. A purely empirical method fails candidly to admit its preunderstandings. A presuppositional method of reasoning is circular. A verificational method open to all the data of experience (of moral values as well as sense data) is more realistic. Although it starts with the hypothesis of the God revealed in the Jesus of history and the teaching of Scripture it is not circular because the hypothesis may be disconfirmed as well as confirmed. Hypotheses are acknowledged and tested by their coherence with both the relevant internal and external evidences, facts and values. Critically attested religious experiences and revelations through accredited prophetic and apostolic spokesmen for God become part of the data to be accounted for on any world and life view. Responsible people accept the most coherent option and live by it.¹⁹

Appeals to the authority of alleged new spiritual masters must be examined and confirmed or rejected as in the case of alleged prophetic and apostolic spokesmen for God in Bible times. So the channelers and their messages require critical evaluation as to their consistency of teaching concerning God (Deut 13:1-3) and Christ (2 John 9) and whether their disclosures fit the facts (Deut 18:22).

To avoid such critical considerations, leaders of the new spirituality often resort to myths. But an advocate like Joseph Campbell interpreted myths in accord with certain worldview assumptions. With circular reasoning he assumed that all the myths of different religions and countries conveyed the same monistic message. But then Campbell contradicted himself by charging that western myths teach a self-reliant individualism rather than a self-effacing mysticism. When it served his purpose he ignored lingering differences or considered them trivial.²⁰ Eventually mythologists

¹⁷ M. Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1947) 14-15, 88, cited by W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960) 155-160.

¹⁸ For a theological case for these criteria see G. R. Lewis and B. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 1.150-151; for a philosophical case for the criteria see Lewis, *Testing*, esp. chaps. 7-10.

¹⁹ For a comparison of verificationalism with evidentialism and presuppositionalism see G. R. Lewis, "Schaeffer's Apologetic System," *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (ed. Reugsegger; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

²⁰ R. A. Segal, "The Romantic Appeal of Joseph Campbell," *The Christian Century* (April 4, 1990) 332-335.

must indicate in nonfigurative language the point of their illustrations. Then their truth or falsity must be tested by the standard criteria of truth.

In the pluralistic 1990s will church boards accept testimonies of alleged immediate salvific experiences on the basis of the certitude of another's authority, intuitions or myths? Or will Christian leaders be so eager to get new members that they fail critically to test the claims of prospective church members for their spiritual experiences?

6. *The reality experienced: pantheistic or theistic?* In the present decade Christians in the west (like those in the east) confront increasing numbers of people who believe that reality is not a complex of distinct entities or personal agents but relative manifestations of an undifferentiated Whole. This monistic trend of the new spirituality alleges support in physics. Fritjof Capra finds that neither the former ideal of scientific objectivity nor the myth of value-free science can be maintained. But he finds amazing parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism. Western physics and eastern consciousness are seen "as an integral part of a much larger cultural transformation, leading to the emergence of a new vision of reality that will require a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values."²¹ And Paul Davies reports that the new physicists "learned to approach their subject in totally unexpected and novel ways that seemed to turn common sense on its head and find closer accord with mysticism than materialism."²²

The cultural trend toward a monistic worldview is also being justified as the best base for psychological health. Ken Wilbur distinguishes four levels of consciousness (reminiscent of neo-mysticism). To the levels of (1) ego, (2) bio-social consciousness and (3) existential oneness overcoming all dualities between mind and body, subject and object, self and others, and life and death he adds the observation that (4) humanists are unable to attain a complete integration until they expand their consciousness beyond the usual limitations of sensory perception and feel connected to the collective unconscious (Jung) and the cosmos as a whole. "It is not enough to perceive this cosmic reality," he concludes. "One must become this cosmic reality in one's consciousness."²³ Becoming indistinguishable from a nonpersonal cosmic oneness, Capra explains, "is an experience in which one identifies with the entire universe . . . and all individuality dissolves into universal undifferentiated oneness."²⁴

Although advertised to help people achieve their full potential, the new monistic spirituality is depersonalizing. It is also idolatrous. R. C. Zaehner contends: "If the soul is regarded as either identical with Brahman or as

²¹ F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1983) 8.

²² P. Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983) vii. For the response of an evangelical to new-age physics see D. C. Halverson, "Science: Quantum Physics and Quantum Leaps," *The New Age Rage* (ed. K. Hoyt; Old Tappan: Revell, 1987) 74-90.

²³ F. Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (New York: Bantam) 370-371.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 371.

so constituted as to be unable to commune with other souls, then its final fulfillment will not be an ecstasy of union but an 'enstasy' of introverted narcissism."²⁵

The God of the new mystics is not sufficiently transcendent. The mystics may transcend the body, the mind, and the earth but not the impersonal cosmos. Christians commune with the supremely personal God who is distinct from themselves, their denominational leaders and the entire cosmos. As the appeal of holistic approaches in physics, psychology and other fields continues to tempt church members in the 1990s, will they be prepared to distinguish between a mindless merging with the Force and a Biblically informed personal relationship with a God who knows, cares, speaks and acts?

7. *The powers: unholy spirits or the Holy Spirit?* Spiritual experiences powerful enough to transform lives and produce cultural shifts cannot be dismissed lightly. Some may be naturalistically explained, but many life-changing experiences must be attributed to a higher power. Russell Chandler states:

Though widely diverse, these neopagan ideas about the deities—from Pele to Pan—relate to some kind of "connectional" and symbolic "experience" that is part of the totality of Nature and the Oneness of divine Reality. The spirit of magick, then—which the New Age prefers to call "spirituality"—is expressed in terms of self-empowerment. It is receiving what we need from "our Higher Selves" within and from the universe without—what Jach Pursel's channeled entity Lazaris fondly refers to as "God/Goddess/All That Is."²⁶

The new spirituality is not illusory. It taps into higher powers of "spirit guides" to improve their personalities, businesses and health. Like spiritists and theosophists, many seasoned new agers think of these as spirits of former spiritual masters. Some of the channeled messages that are not con games may be received from the subconscious. But when another entity or agent is present, the Scriptures attribute that hidden knowledge and power not to dead human spiritual masters but to demonic spirits.

Will Christian leaders at the end of the twentieth century help their people overcome the naive assumption that all that is supernatural is of God? Since the fall, not all signs and wonders are divine. In the 1990s will western Christians develop discernment to distinguish the power of unholy spirits from the power of the Holy Spirit? Will evangelicals realize that in the battle with demonic forces they will need more than sound information, crucial as that is? Will the pastors we educate draw upon the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and turned the first-century world upside down?

²⁵ R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1969) 11.

²⁶ Chandler, *Understanding* 125.

8. *Special revelation: nonconceptual or propositional?* New-age "revelations" are all allegedly nonconceptual. "The only way to overcome the existential dilemma of the human condition, ultimately," pontificates Capra, "is to transcend it by experiencing one's existence within a broader cosmic context."²⁷ Wilbur's and Grof's models both indicate that the ultimate understanding of human consciousness goes beyond words and concepts.²⁸ Sometimes it is called an experience of pure consciousness, a consciousness without any particular concept in mind or object of attention, whatever that may be. In the new paradigm, we need not more knowledge but a new knowing.²⁹ When the new awareness works it is like adding sonar, radar and powerful lenses to the mind.³⁰ It is a direct knowing of "wholeness, and nondistinction."³¹ Hence linear logical, scientific and Biblical ways of knowing are dismissed. In their place, students in grade school should learn about paradox.³² But new agers miss informational guidance. One told my wife longingly, "You have a book to guide you. We have nothing."

Indeed the divine referent of Christian experience is distinct from the Biblical sentences conveying propositional meanings literally or figuratively. But the Greek sentences Jesus taught conveyed propositional truths (in linear logic) to direct our devotion away from idols to the God who is, acts and speaks. The Creator of the categories of our minds, the world and the Word made us to communicate truth revealed by his Son, prophets and apostles. We need not manufacture a Kantian grand canyon between our categories and those of things in themselves or of God. As God's image-bearers we can contemplate God's revealed thoughts disclosed in human sentences and serve as God's ministers in reality.³³ Will evangelicals in the 1990s imagine that people can attain salvific spirituality independent of Spirit-attested inerrant Scriptural guidelines? Will our parishioners and students be satisfied with what God chose to reveal, or will they lust for secret or occult things (Deut 29:29)?

9. *Faith: magical compulsion or personal trust?* In this decade, will evangelicals abandon their birthright of a faith-filled exercise of spiritual disciplines as occasions of spiritual life and power from the Spirit of grace? Shall we put in their place the pottage of magical manipulation? Shall we resort to "tapping into" impersonal spiritual forces for what we want when we want it? Will the coming generation of evangelicals try to command it and demand it? Shall we abandon belief in revealed truth and forsake trust in its divine referent? As Jesus Christ prayed, so must members of his Church: "Yet, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39). May the

²⁷ Capra, *Turning* 374.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 375.

²⁹ Ferguson, *Aquarian* 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 31.

³¹ *Ibid.* 380.

³² *Ibid.* 186.

³³ For support of these themes see the relevant sections of Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative* vols. 1 and 2.

Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century engage in prayer as devotional response and request to a personal God whose wisdom and timing is superior to ours!³⁴

III. CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH

The contemporary interest in spirituality affords one of the greatest opportunities in history for a resurgence of a vital spirituality founded on truth.

The counterfeit philosophy of spirituality requires church members in the 1990s to think holistically, not just in parts. Western church leaders must train members at early ages to think philosophically in order to distinguish theistic from pantheistic/occult worldviews.

Church leaders must train members also to think theologically. The new spirituality is not off base on one or two doctrines. It denies the importance of any Christian doctrine to spirituality. The new spirituality is not a challenge to one or two fundamentals but to every truth that Christ spoke. It denies that morality is involved in spirituality. Church members in the 1990s need to be equipped to show the significant contribution of classical Christian doctrines to spiritual life in the kingdom of light.³⁵

Church programs for the pleasure of insiders, however enjoyable, dare not go on as usual while the new, anti-Christ spirituality increasingly dominates the members' business seminars, holistic health services and schools. Pastors need to prepare people to respond to the new spirituality in business, health services, education and religion.

Christian colleges and seminaries ought to add programs as soon as possible specifically to prepare future church leaders to rise to the philosophical, theological and ethical challenges.

For this purpose mission boards ought to be sending those whom evangelical schools train as vocational missionaries to reach the burgeoning unreached group of spiritual seekers. We dare not leave all this to part-timers and amateurs, however dedicated and used of God.

Will the Church wait until 51 percent of Americans and Europeans are ensnared by counterfeit spirituality before taking action? Will we do too little too late? By the year 2000, which networking will have been the more effective—the new-age, or the Christian? As the twenty-first century dawns, which spiritual vision will dominate western culture?

³⁴ For more on a Christian view of the spiritual discipline of prayer see G. R. Lewis, "Prayer," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. M. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 4.835–844.

³⁵ I have sought to do this in the section on relevance for life and ministry in *Integrative Theology*.