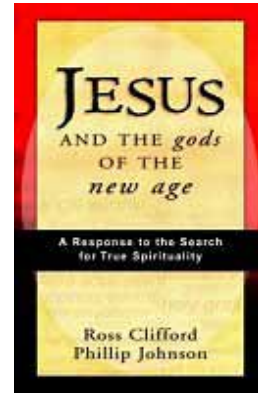


# Appendix A

Excerpts from the book  
*Jesus and the gods of the New Age*  
By Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson  
Victor Books



## Chapter 1 {excerpts} Incarnating the Good News

It is fair to say that most modern errors are only ancient heresies and doctrines in a different guise, tailor-fitted for the age in which we live. Therefore it should not surprise us that the old answers from the accumulated wisdom and theological expertise of the apostles, church fathers, and reformers are the best means of fighting ancient occultism in its modern forms. It is difficult, if not impossible, to improve on what the historic scholarship of the Christian church has to say about the revival of occultism in this New Age.<sup>1</sup>

The advent of the New Age can be seen as a mixed blessing for Christians who are called upon to respond in faith to the presence of new religions. While the New Age may be drawing away from traditional faith many dissatisfied individuals who have embarked on a personal religious quest, it might also be doing a service to Christianity by encouraging Christians to delve deeper into their religious tradition and rediscover its treasures.<sup>2</sup>

The 21st century has opened with a widespread resurgence of interest in spirituality. This has been spurred on by the colossal degradation of human existence that occurred during the two World Wars, the Holocaust and other tragedies. Secular philosophies that were founded on rationalism and scientific naturalism failed to furnish any substantial meaning for life. For so long, spiritual and religious thought were disparaged as archaic and intellectually primitive. The past century's denial of the spiritual is now being reversed.

This surge of spiritual exploration is being made in several different places, but today's seekers do not normally include the church on their "shopping list" of places to investigate because they regard the church as being devoid of true spirituality. This is further compounded in North America, Britain, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, where church affiliation is, in

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Martin, *The New Age Cult*, Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999, p. 231.

many places, static or in serious decline. Some Westerners are attracted to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Others seek fulfillment in a myriad of new religions—those groups popularly branded as cults. However, the greatest and most popular impulses are found in a do-it-yourself spirituality, where belief and practice occur outside the bounds of organized religion. This do-it-yourself spirituality began blossoming in the latter decades of the 20th century and used to be called New Age.

Nowadays the expression “New Age” is rather hackneyed. Just like the word “fundamentalist,” it didn’t take long for the cynics to pour contempt on it as representing something superficial, ephemeral, or silly. Although the whole New Age thing did attract a lunatic fringe, there was a deeply disciplined side to it. Phil Rickman in his best-selling novel *Midwinter of the Spirit* neatly sums up through the character Jane what New Age spirituality means to so many people:

The New Age is about...It’s about millions of people saying: I want to know more...I want an inner life...I want to commune with nature and the cosmos and things, find out about what we’re really doing here and who’s running the show, and like what part I can play in the Great Scheme of Things.<sup>3</sup>

Jay Kinney, editor of *Gnosis* magazine, suggested in 1998 that the New Age as a movement has started to reposition itself. He compares it to the civil rights and women’s movements. Just as these movements started on society’s fringes, so too New Age originally looked offbeat, but soon became normative. Although New Age jargon initially seemed odd, it was suited to the temperaments of the time. By the late 1980s this avant-garde movement had touched many people. It spilled over into many facets of society, such as business, counseling, education, and medicine. By the century’s end, it had so saturated the culture that New Age jargon and ideas had become interwoven into the fabric of mainstream social discourse.<sup>4</sup> Even though New Age spirituality has now leveled out, the spiritual surge continues to spread far and wide.

The growing Christian concern about reaching New Age seekers coincides with it becoming mainstream, but just as the term is falling out of favor with seekers and scholars alike. As Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying, the church specializes in being behind. The current

<sup>3</sup> Phil Rickman, *Midwinter of the Spirit*, London: Macmillan, p. 39. The ellipses are in the original text.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Kinney, “Dissecting the New Age,” *Gnosis*, 49, 1998, pp. 14-17.

expressions now preferred include Aquarian Age, New Consciousness, New Edge, New Sense, New Spirituality, Next Age, Next Stage, and Postmodern Spirituality.<sup>5</sup> These expressions reflect more recent developments in this spiritual and cultural ferment. While we will use the term “New Age” for the sake of simplicity, we suggest that either New Spirituality or Postmodern Spirituality may end up being the preferred or most commonly used label in the 21st century.

### **Signposts of New Age spirituality**

A little later in this chapter, we will consider how the church has responded to New Age spirituality. After that, we will explain why we use incarnational mission principles to reach today’s seekers. However, right now we want to identify some easy-to-recognize signposts of New Age spirituality and briefly consider why they have arisen.

The obvious signposts of New Age spirituality can be seen in books, magazines, festivals, radio, TV, movies, and on the Internet. A quick visit to a secular bookshop reveals a large selection of titles under the rubric “Mind, Body, and Soul.” Some of the most popular and influential authors include Fritjof Capra, Deepak Chopra, Shakti Gawain, Louise Hay, Shirley Maclaine, James Redfield, Anthony Robbins, and Marianne Williamson.

Peruse the mainstream women’s magazines and note the regular columns devoted to astrology, feng shui, and tarot. Radio and TV chat shows and lifestyle programs reflect these same interests. Cult TV shows of the likes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, and *Star Trek Voyager* touch on spiritual and paranormal themes. Movies such as *The Matrix* readily spring to mind as further indicators of these concerns. Internet sites devoted to angels, astrology, paganism, spirit guides, tarot, and Wicca abound, many of which record high numbers of daily hits.

Perhaps the most visible indicator of interest in this area is the alternative lifestyle and spirituality exhibitions. Each year The Whole Life Expo crosses several cities from California to New York and draws in thousands of patrons. The International Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit convenes in London, Manchester, Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, and its annual combined attendance rates reputedly makes it the world’s largest spiritual trade exhibition. Similar New Spirituality exhibitions will be found in such diverse cities as Adelaide, Auckland, Dublin, Johannesburg, and Toronto. Psychic fairs and neo-pagan gatherings will be found in many urban and rural districts, especially where alternative/counter-culture lifestyles prevail. The common

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<sup>5</sup> See Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement*, p. viii.

feature of these exhibitions is the do-it-yourself nature of the quest and that what counts is what works best for you.

### **The mindset of modernity**

This New Age thinking has probably arisen for many historical and sociological reasons. One that commentators such as John Drane point to is that it represents a reaction to the mechanistic and rationalist outlook that has dominated the past four centuries of Western history. That outlook, which pulsed through the European Enlightenment and beyond, is referred to as modernity. Advocates of modernity redefined reality in non-spiritual ways and treated both humans and the cosmos as mere objects for scientific analysis.<sup>6</sup>

The primary method of thought in modernity, which can be traced to philosophers such as Descartes (1596–1650), was grounded in doubt or skepticism. Added to this were the scientific discoveries made by Galileo and Newton, which made a lot of previously held views about the cosmos untenable. Darwin's thesis overturned many other long-held beliefs about the creation. Naturalism became the prevailing dogma.

So, in North America and Europe, parts of the intelligentsia developed a mindset that trusted in human rationality and science as providing ultimate meaning in life. Many chided religious beliefs as primitive superstitions, casting doubts on the Bible and miracles as being rationally and scientifically impossible. The very assumptions of Christian belief were challenged and discarded in many quarters.

Of course, this mindset did not spell the end of religion at all. It led to intellectual jousts between Christians, agnostics, humanists, and skeptics. Some theologians acceded to modernity's criticisms of the Bible and miracles and sought to accommodate or reinterpret the faith along rationalist and scientific lines. Others sought to uphold and defend orthodox belief by using the critical tools of modernity.

The epitome of modernity is its tendency to both dismiss spiritual viewpoints as incredible and reduce life and meaning to behavioral, economic, rationalist, or scientific explanations. One of the clearest examples of a modernity-based philosophy is Marxism, with its primary emphasis on economic explanations of human life and activity. It is not surprising that

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<sup>6</sup> John Drane, *What is the New Age Still Saying to the Church?* London: Marshall Pickering, 1999.

some see the collapse of Marxism throughout Eastern Europe in 1989 as signifying the very end of modernity.<sup>7</sup>

### **Charting New Age spirituality**

Widespread disenchantment with modernity's shortcomings has stimulated the development of a perspective known as postmodernity or globalism. It is a different way of viewing the world and the way we can live. Modernity uses the "stories" of science to understand things. Postmodernity sees these as limited stories. In postmodernity the stories need to include the supernatural or at least be open to views that go beyond pure materialistic explanations. John Drane is convinced New Age spirituality is the religious expression of the postmodern mindset.<sup>8</sup> However, a chief feature of it is the notion that truth is shaped by social factors—race, gender, and culture. Therefore, spiritual truth is a matter of pragmatic experimentation and personal preferences, as summed up in the oft-used expression, "That's your truth—I have my own." Postmodernity also has a secular element to it, and it would be incorrect to assume that New Age spirituality and postmodernity are merely synonyms.<sup>9</sup>

Trying to define New Age spirituality has been compared to nailing jelly or bean curd to a wall.<sup>10</sup> This is because it has no central organizing body (like a church council or synod) and no confessional statement of belief (like the Nicene Creed). There is no founder or central leader in this spirituality. As these customary features of organized religion are absent, precise definitions are problematic.

Although a simple definition might seem elusive, we can still describe some key features. New Age spirituality is characterized by the notion that human beings can evolve spiritually. The seeker undertakes an interior spiritual journey to tap into those creative powers or energies within that link us to the divine source of the cosmos. A major focus is on holistic answers for mind, body, and spirit. For the individual seeker, spirituality impinges on all facets of living—business, career, diet, ecology, education, health, home and office design, parenting, and relationships. Each seeker explores various tools—be it astrology, channeling, rebirthing, or

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<sup>7</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992; and Paul Heelas, David Martin and Paul Morris (eds.), *Religion, Modernity*.

<sup>8</sup> John Drane, *What is the New Age Still Saying to the Church?* London: Marshall Pickering, 1999, pp. 13–14.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Heelas, David Martin and Paul Morris (eds.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Lewis, "The Church and the New Spirituality," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 36, 4, 1993, p.434.

tarot—to achieve personal healing, spiritual evolution, and global transformation. Within this do-it-yourself impulse, there is also a corresponding yearning for a sense of mystery about the cosmos and a spiritual longing for authentic community.

Today's seekers accept many of the benefits of scientific discovery, but reject the naturalistic explanation of the cosmos. Many seekers find spiritual inspiration in pre-modern times. Seekers do not wish to revert to pre-modernity, but rather to blend the best elements of modernity with carefully selected morsels of pre-modern spiritual practice. So New Age spirituality attempts to re-sacralize a world that has been de-supernaturalized by modernity. According to Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe of the University of Calgary, this re-sacralization process is stimulating the creation of new cosmic myths—myths here being sacred stories that give meaning to a given group or culture. These myths not only highlight modernity's shortcomings but also offer New Age spirituality as the remedy. Advocates generally reject dualist thinking that separates mind from matter and humanity from God. Their alternative is to proclaim holism—that the whole of reality is in essence one seamless fabric. It promulgates a vision of a transformed cosmos.<sup>11</sup>

As New Age spirituality is in a state of constant flux, what we are about to outline will no doubt require modification as time goes by. We suggest that New Age spirituality presently entails several different strands or visions about life and the cosmos.

### **Monist holism**

The monist vision emphasizes the oneness of reality. Some Christians have narrowly defined the New Age spirituality by this formula: all is one = monism; since all is one, all is divine = pantheism. Monism + pantheism = New Age spirituality. However, as we discuss in chapter 7, monism has several subtle nuances to it, and this perspective is not uniformly accepted within New Age spirituality.

Two key concepts in the monist vision are the hologram and spiritual evolution. The hologram is based on ideas formulated by David Bohm and Karl Pribram, also outlined in chapter 7. But to sum up, spiritual evolution is a positive process where we reconnect with the divine source of the cosmos or where we may progress into divinity ourselves. This is the vision presented in James Redfield's best-selling novel *The Celestine Prophecy*.

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<sup>11</sup> Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures*, Boulder: Westview, 1997; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 119–120 and 520–521; and Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996.

Unfortunately, some Christians have assumed that the concept of spiritual evolution is just an extension of Darwinian theory. Their hearty response has then involved rebutting Darwinian evolution as the first critical point of engagement with seekers. While some seekers may accept some form of biological evolution, their understanding of spiritual evolution derives from 18th-century romantic views of oriental religion and has no connection with Darwinian theory.<sup>12</sup> The question of who made the cosmos and how long ago this happened is a peripheral matter in the minds of most seekers.

Some advocates do espouse a form of pantheism (all is divine) where seekers discover their own inner divinity. God is viewed as an impersonal energy. Realizing that beyond the physical realm we are all divine is what transforms our consciousness. So some seekers will say that they are earnestly striving to return to the ultimate source from whence we came. The key to unlocking this divine consciousness will involve the various psychotechnologies we discuss chapter by chapter.

Others adopt a different monist outlook that is grounded in a popular, westernized form of neo-Buddhism. Here the vision does not entail discovering inner or cosmic divinity, but rather is a quest for the ineffable experience of nirvana's nothingness. Neo-Buddhist seekers tend to scoop up techniques from a smorgasbord of Buddhist traditions. As spiritual consumers, they happily combine elements of Sangharakshita's teachings in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order with Thich Nhat Hanh's Zen teachings, Vipassana meditation, and aspects of the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Buddhist thought.<sup>13</sup> We are finding that more and more seekers are adopting the neo-Buddhist view of karma as an explanation for human suffering because they find the Christian view of a loving God permitting evil an absurdity. We have also observed that neo-Buddhism is now a strong spiritual option in the gay culture. It may well be that neo-Buddhism becomes one of the most important strands for the 21st century.

Still others are panentheists (all is in God), believing that there is a personal God, but the cosmos is part of God's being. In line with Matthew Fox's theology, these seekers chart their spiritual life as one that develops as God develops and changes. The world is affirmed as an "original blessing." Our observation is that seekers are more inclined to have a panentheist view

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<sup>12</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp.113–181.

<sup>13</sup> See Sangharakshita, *Vision and Transformation*, Birmingham: Windhorse, 1990; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, London: Rider, 1987; William Hart, *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka*, San Francisco: Harper, 1987; and Dalai Lama, *The Power of Compassion*, London: Thorsons, 1995.

of God, and some Christian apologists seem to have overlooked panentheism while stressing the significance of pantheism. (For more on this, see chapter 7.)

### **Neo-gnostic holism**

Neo-gnostic spirituality is framed around the concept of *gnosis*, or knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is embedded symbolically within the human psyche. Holistic transformation occurs when mythic symbols, such as the universal hero and the tempter, are discovered in altered states of consciousness and dreams. Carl Jung is the seminal influence here. Also in this strand we would include the interest in spirit guides, angels, extraterrestrials, and the ancient Gnostic writings. Writers such as George Trevelyan differ on neo-gnostic holism because they see themselves in a direct lineage to ancient Gnosticism and operate with dualist ideas.<sup>14</sup>

### **Neo-pagan/Wiccan holism**

Here spirituality is framed around natural magick, as we will discuss in chapter 3. The neo-pagan/Wiccan holistic vision is about our oneness with nature and the presence of the goddess in the world.<sup>15</sup> Neo-paganism has overtaken a considerable section of what was New Age spirituality, probably because it offers a more structured and rigorous pathway, while still encouraging a do-it-yourself approach to ritual.

### **Hermetic holism**

Hermeticism can refer to the teachings found in a body of ancient texts called the *Hermetica*. The *Hermetica* consists of various tracts and sermons with the chief character being Hermes Trismegistus (meaning thrice-great Hermes). He may represent the blending of the Greek deity Hermes with the Egyptian god of wisdom Thoth. His famous axiom concerns correspondences between the cosmos and the individual human (“as above, so below”).

The term hermeticism may also be used in a broader sense to refer to the Western esoteric and magickal traditions of alchemy, astrology, Qabalah, and tarot. These arts are employed as tools for self-awareness and counseling. The cosmos contains symbolism that is revelatory about God and cosmic unity, and these are the tools used to decode the symbols and discover ultimate

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<sup>14</sup> John Drane, *What is the New Age Still Saying to the Church?* London: Marshall Pickering, 1999, pp. 68-80.

<sup>15</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 77–89.

healing.<sup>16</sup> Esoteric groups such as Rosicrucianism and the Masonic orders are partly based on a hermetic philosophy.

### **The church's response**

Good mission should flow out of good teaching, but few apologists have extensive field experience in sharing with devotees and seekers. Consequently, they rarely offer any practical suggestions about how to understand the search and how to effectively share the Good News. What is often overlooked is that this spirituality is addressing serious questions to the church—to see it as a mirror in which we find ourselves reflected for what we have neglected to do as Christ's disciples.

A close reflection on this literature is that few seekers appear to have been introduced to Christ. The quality and cogency of apologetic literature varies, and regrettably, a minority of highly educated apologists indulge in the academic sin of plagiarism.<sup>17</sup> Douglas Cowan has suggested in his thesis that many writers, whether intentionally or not, have actually become propagandists to the church by manipulating and misquoting what New Age spirituality stands for. Cowan concludes that they act as gate-wardens fending off alien teachings whenever they impinge on the Christian believer. John Saliba remarks that most of these responses simply constitute a soliloquy or monologue inside the church. He observes that:

It [the church] cannot engage New Agers in a fruitful exchange of ideas or in a constructive discussion on ideological standpoints, spiritual goals, and practical agendas—[it] fails to give real witness to the Christian message of the Good News, because its methods and message are more attuned to elicit fear and anxiety and to dwell on foreboding and pessimistic outlooks for the future. Moreover it unintentionally confirms negative impressions of, and elicits antagonistic feelings towards, Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

### **Incarnational mission**

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<sup>16</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 384–401.

<sup>17</sup> One small example, of several that could be cited from the same text, is John P. Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview*, Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1998. Compare Newport on pp. 6-7 under the subheading “Reincarnation and Karma” with J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark and Aidan A. Kelly (eds), *New Age Almanac*, Detroit: Visible Ink, 1991, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement: A Critical Assessment*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999, pp. 77–78; and Philip Johnson, “The Aquarian Age and Apologetics,” *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 34, 2, 2000, pp. 51–60.

The concept of incarnational mission is grounded in both Scripture and the history of Christian mission. Down the centuries, missionaries have sought to understand the cosmology, cuisine, culture, and customs of those people they wanted to reach with the gospel. Classically, missionaries have joined the tribe and communicated the gospel in culturally meaningful ways. Attempts to completely dismantle a culture and debunk its values have invariably created havoc. The gospel certainly stands above all cultures, but the disciples of Christ must live and practice their faith within culture. We see this worked out in the New Testament where the Gentiles were not obliged to adopt Hebrew customs such as circumcision and kosher cuisine (see Acts 15).

Jesus Christ said to the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21, NIV-UK). In that commission, Jesus indicates that just as God became flesh—incarnated as a human and taught within a particular culture—so we must also incarnate the gospel by living and sharing inside other cultures.

It is easy to cope with the idea of mission taking place outside the Western world where many peoples have neither Bibles nor a church. To reconsider our Western cities as venues for mission probably sounds odd, especially when we have been trained in basic techniques of evangelism (Campus Crusade, Navigators, Evangelism Explosion, Christianity Explained, Alpha, Life Works, and The Y Course). These programs have all been blessed by God, and we have happily used them in ministry and seen people won to God’s kingdom.

However, we are persuaded that they are now only really effective with the God-fearers who inhabit the fringes of our congregations. Most non-Christians have no background of relatedness with the local church and are unlikely to respond positively to invitations to attend these discipleship courses. One reason for this is that these courses are highly cognitive, crammed with information, but with minimal opportunities for personal exploration and spiritual experiences to occur. The seekers’ important questions remain unaddressed because such courses are structured to deal with the questions we think it is important for them to have answers to. It is analogous to a door-to-door salesperson promoting ice chests to owners of refrigerators—who needs the ice chest?

In today’s global civilization, Christianity is declining in the West while simultaneously growing in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Western Christians need to recall Paul’s missionary model to become “all things to all people” (see 1 Cor. 9:16–22). As we now live side by side with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and New Age spirituality seekers, older formulaic techniques for sharing must give way to incarnational mission, which is not only biblical but also pertinent to living in postmodernity.

A classic example of incarnational mission and apologetics is found in Acts 17. Paul went to Athens. He shared his faith in the synagogue with Jewish people who believed the Hebrew Scriptures. He established a dialogue with them about Jesus being the Messiah foretold in their Scriptures. Here they had a common background and understanding.

However, when Paul tried to transfer this dialogue to outside the synagogue, he encountered Greek people who had no background of knowledge or belief in the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul entered their world and culture. He sought some common ground with the Greek philosophers as an entry point to sharing his faith. He commended the Athenians for their religious search and, although their idols offended him, he did not start a campaign to smash their objects of devotion or demonize them. He built up more common ground on the basis of a creation theology, affirming the unity of humanity in creation and the supremacy of God over the creation. Paul chose to quote the Stoic philosophers (Epimenides, Aratus, and Cleanthes in Acts 17:28) in a favorable way, confirming what was true in their insights, yet building on them to God's revelation in Jesus. He spoke about the resurrection, righteousness, and judgment, which was consistent with his preaching everywhere else. However, he never quoted the Bible to his audience, simply because they did not know its contents. That day, some people came to faith, others wanted to know more, and some scoffed.

Paul's remarks to the Corinthians need to be read in the context of the epistle. After commending the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 1:7), Paul tackles a series of problems dividing the congregation. Some were into guru devotion, breaking into factions centered on a favorite apostle. Paul rebukes them for chasing human oratory and human wisdom. It is in the midst of theological anarchy that Paul reminds them that they need to be Christ-centered.

Finally, scholars such as E.M. Blaiklock, F.F. Bruce, J.D. Charles, David Hesselgrave, Alister McGrath, John Warwick Montgomery, and Ned Stonehouse all agree that Acts 17 is a handsome illustration of the incarnational mission model we should all be using today, particularly with those who are unfamiliar with the Bible.<sup>19</sup>

Our plea is for incarnational mission to be swiftly taken up as the most effective way of impacting not only New Age spirituality seekers, but all of Western culture. This model takes

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<sup>19</sup> See David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989; A. Scott Moreau (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000; Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998; Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980; H.L. Richard, *Following Jesus in the Hindu Context*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1998; Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, Glendale: Regal, 1974; Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy But to Fulfill*, Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1965; and Eric J. Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar and Pilgrim*, Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984.

note of the strengths of the apologetic models we have assessed, but at the same time leaves the fortress of the church and enters the seeker's world. We believe that some apologists may have inadvertently overlooked the application of incarnational mission principles with new spirituality devotees. What we are advocating is nothing new, because other evangelical apologists have already shown how it can be applied to mystic and occult spirituality.<sup>20</sup>

We believe our call is in the exact same spirit as that which was expressed at the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization meeting at Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980. The Lausanne Occasional Paper Christian Witness to the New Religions, which issued out of the Thailand conference, clearly linked evangelism to the new religions with the model of Paul's Areopagus speech and acknowledged the need to find common ground in mission. Walter Martin (1928–89), the US pioneer of the heresy rationalist model of counter-cult apologetics, nonetheless expressed similar sentiments about finding common ground with devotees using Paul's principle of "all things to all people" (see 1 Corinthians 9:22) in his magnum opus, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Dr. Ronald Enroth, professor of sociology at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, and David Fetcho, the co-founder of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, have also noted the role of incarnational mission to alternative spirituality.<sup>21</sup>

### **How we started an incarnational ministry**

"Why do you guys go to alternative spiritual exhibitions?" Christians and secular journalists often ask us this question. For us, these are gatherings where Jesus would obviously be touching seekers. We feel it is normal for Christians to be involved. Here are people hungry for a spirituality that takes them beyond the facts, figures, and deadlines of their nine-to-five daily grind.

We want to be among those who crave that authentic inner life and who will not settle for simplistic answers to their deep questions. These are people who need the Lord Jesus Christ. These exhibitions are the best places to be for anyone into evangelism, mission, and apologetics.

In 1990, the two of us, independent of each other, visited a major crowd-drawing New Age festival that had just opened in our hometown. When we entered the venue we were

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<sup>20</sup> For example, consider the apologetic approach of John Warwick Montgomery in his apologia to the occult, *Principalities and Powers*, Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973.

<sup>21</sup> See Lausanne Occasional Papers: The Thailand Report on New Religious Movements at [www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/LOP/lop11.htm](http://www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/LOP/lop11.htm); Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, revised edition, Minneapolis: Bethany, 1997, p. 453; Ronald Enroth (ed.), *Evangelising the Cults*, Milton Keynes: Word, 1990; pp. 19–20; and David Fetcho, "Disclosing the Unknown God: Evangelism to the New Religions," *Update*, 6, 4, 1982, pp. 7–16.

staggered: this was culture shock. What a contrast between reading about this spirituality and being caught up in a huge crowd of seekers. Was this how Paul felt when he visited Athens (see Acts 17:16)? We spent the whole day soaking up the atmosphere, observing the activities and the kinds of people attending—their gender, age group, social class, and attire. We considered how the stands were decorated and operated and asked ourselves, “What is it that makes this exhibit attractive?” We spent time browsing the literature and watched public performances on the stage. Then we struck up conversations with exhibitors and patrons alike and sought opportunities to talk about Christ.

When the day was over, we were both exhausted and buffeted by mixed feelings. Several stands appalled and disturbed us in terms of what they offered as spiritual truth. We were pained to see so many people earnestly searching and sampling. We asked ourselves, “Where is the church? Why is there no Christian witness taking place?” We pondered, should we stand outside the venue handing out tracts in the hope of dissuading people? We realized how antagonistic that would seem and futile it would be. We quickly concluded that we ought to be inside the festival and our thoughts turned to how we could have a stand.

Philip wrote two articles about this challenge.<sup>22</sup> When Ross spotted one of them, he phoned, and we decided to team up. Ross then approached the organizers about the feasibility of joining the following year’s festival. There was real excitement about our proposal of running a stand that featured healing in the form of the laying on of hands, prayer, and a video on Jesus. However, as the proposal began to unfold, clouds of concern enveloped the conversation. “Hey, who are you guys? What’s this all about?” Ross said that we represented a group of people who empathized with those who, like us, are involved in a spiritual pilgrimage. We wanted to share our journey with Jesus. Surely as they felt that all pathways are valid, how could they exclude followers of Jesus? Their hesitation was now most apparent. “Let us think about this and call you back.” And they did!

Once our application was accepted, we canvassed financial support and named our stand “The Community of Hope.”<sup>23</sup> We then began to work on devising an appropriate display. We considered what sort of literature would be suitable and set a timetable for training volunteers to man the stand.

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Johnson, “Now the (New Age) Carnival is Over,” *Take A Closer Look*, 11, December 1990, p. 11, and “It’s True for You, but not for Me,” *Australian Presbyterian Living Today*, February 1991, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> The Community of Hope is the frontline ministry of Global Apologetics & Mission Inc., which operates in several states of Australia. We can be contacted at PO Box 367, Hurstville, New South Wales, 1481, Australia, and at PO Box 54, Seville Vic, 3139, Australia.

The 1991 festival was our baptism of fire. Despite many years of study, training, and experience in evangelism and apologetics, we still had much to learn. Although it was an exhilarating time, when we had a post-festival debrief, we recognized several things. First, our witnessing encounters quickly revealed how shallow our preconceptions were. We had taken a strong adversarial stance of “us” versus “them,” and it had often inhibited effective communication. So, we appreciate what a struggle it can be to stop viewing this spirituality solely as a threat and switch to seeing it as an opportunity to make disciples. We also discovered the drawbacks to simply deconstructing and debunking a seeker’s experiences. Most took umbrage at our being dismissive of their journey. We also found that some of our volunteers were temperamentally ill-suited to this type of outreach.

Ever since that initial venture, we have been active in many more, in various cities. Like Paul in Athens, we positively interact with the myths, symbols, and practices of the culture so that the message of Christ will make sense to them. When talking with seekers, we have found that Christian jargon can be a stumbling block. More effective communication occurs when we use words that the non-Christian understands, so we sometimes use the expression “soul-sorrow” when speaking of sin. We also refer to the Bible as the Christian Sacred Writings or Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. The rest of this book shows how seekers can discover “the unknown God” by starting from where they are.

We never stop learning new ways of doing things and are continually reassessing what we do. We are persuaded that our ministry at the festivals is just one of many different and effective ways to make contact with today’s seekers. It takes Christians beyond the walls of the church (where efforts to reach them often have mixed results) and places us directly in the marketplace as it was in the apostolic era. (You will find more practical advice about how to conduct your own ministries like ours in chapter 13.) Now, let us introduce you to today’s New Age spirituality seekers.

## Chapter 3 {excerpt}

# Wicca—Goddess Worship Revival

*I love the rich earthiness of the goddess religions. I love the way they speak directly to my female experience of the world, the way they honour life and fertility, change and growth. Yet all logic in me riles at the notion of a deity of either gender.<sup>1</sup>*

*I dig Jesus and so do many other witches. It's not his fault that Christianity is so confused today, and as a person he was a very special guy, wise and generous, selfless and loving. I think he'd be horrified to see what his teachings have come to today. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that if he was around today, with his values of tolerance, acceptance, respect for nature and fellow people, he'd be a witch!<sup>2</sup>*

*God depicts himself to us, as it were, in the form of a woman and mother.<sup>3</sup>*

We met Hayley, Kimberlee, Lady Moonfire, and Laren on the Internet. As practitioners of Wiccan spirituality (the old English word for witchcraft), they had each initiated a dialogue with us. What stimulated it was an article by Philip about Wicca that was placed on the Internet. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and we soon found ourselves in fruitful dialogue with several Wiccans from around the globe.<sup>4</sup>

This spurred us to attend the Magick Happens festival in our hometown. This was an exhibition catering to Wiccan and neo-pagan interests. The venue was packed with mostly women spanning age groups from those in their fifties all the way down to teenagers.

Some exhibitors were promoting tools used in the Craft, such as candles, ceremonial swords, figurines, and ritual clothing. Magazines such as *The Green Egg*, *Spirit Earth*, and *Witchcraft* were on sale. There were books about casting spells, eco-feminism, the goddess pathway, empowerment through menstruation, and neo-pagan parenting. A few Wiccan priestesses gave private consultations for self-awareness and guidance using numerology, tarot, and the runes. There were fairy children shows, African dancing, storytelling, pagan songs, and

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<sup>1</sup> Samantha Trenoweth, *The Future of God*, Sydney: Millennium Books, 1995, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Fiona Horne, *Witch: A Personal Journey*, Sydney: Random House, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis, volume 7*, WA 43, 541, St Louis: Concordia, 1965, p. 325.

<sup>4</sup> The article "The Way of Wicca" is at [www.shootthemessenger.com.au/u\\_jun\\_99/1\\_wicca.htm](http://www.shootthemessenger.com.au/u_jun_99/1_wicca.htm). A longer version entitled "Wiccans and Christians: Some Mutual Challenges" is at [www.jesus.com.au](http://www.jesus.com.au). Portions of them are reproduced here in this chapter.

folk music performed. Workshops covering Wiccan solitary rituals, crystal magick, and the Wiccan traditions were also well attended.

After the exhibition we reflected on what we had seen. Several things struck us. First, we had met so many warm, caring seekers who welcomed us and were happy to enter into a dialogue. These people did not fit the misleading stereotype of Devil worshipers. Some were highly educated, employed in government departments and major corporations. Others were living as the sole custodial parent of young children, struggling to eke out a meaningful life for themselves and those in their care. Second, here was a spiritual gathering attracting large numbers of women, especially teenagers. What was it they found so appealing? Undoubtedly they found there a spirituality that affirmed them as women and offered spiritual succor seemingly unavailable in the church. Third, this spirituality was addressing a number of important questions about god language, ecology, spiritual giftedness, healing, and spiritual fraternity. Our sense of current trends is that Wicca is fast becoming the preferred spiritual pathway for a lot of teenage females, particularly those fed up with their parents' hand-me-down faith.

### **Wicca versus satanism**

One of our new friends is Judy. We first met at a New Age festival, then caught up with one another a few weeks later at Magick Happens. As a sole parent, Judy has to juggle her commitments with her children, work, and Wiccan way of life.

We confirmed that Wicca is known as the "old religion." The word "Wicca" has come into common currency because the word "witchcraft" carries with it very pejorative images. We see these negative stereotypes in movies such as *The Craft*. Wiccans also tend to be circumspect about television series such as *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* and *Charmed*. These shows, in their desire to be entertaining, unintentionally belittle the seriousness of Wicca.

Satanists who sometimes use the word "witch" also compound the problem. Wiccans completely disassociate themselves from satanism and black magic. Wiccans do not believe in the existence of Satan, nor do they worship Satan. Contrary to lurid rumors, they do not offer human or animal sacrifices to the Devil. Wicca does not need to define its spirituality using the church as a point of departure. After all, satanism is a direct perversion of Christian beliefs and values: satanism's *raison d'être* needs the church so it can exist as a reactionary opponent to it. If

the church did not exist, then there would not be anything called satanism. Wiccan beliefs and practices are antithetical to satanism, so there cannot be any correlation between them.<sup>5</sup>

Judy was aware that some Christians link Wicca with satanism because of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). We told Judy that even though we were appalled by Crowley’s behavior, we saw no point in calling him a satanist. He was a late Victorian decadent. When Crowley accepted his mother’s branding of him as the “Great Beast,” he reveled in being the provocative, profligate rebel. Yes, his rituals were often ridiculous, obscene, and sometimes sadistic, but he did not worship Satan. As Crowley was neither a Wiccan nor a satanist, there is no point trying to insinuate otherwise or impugn Wiccans for his outrageous activities.<sup>6</sup> . . .

*To purchase the excellent resource, Jesus and the gods of the New Age (ISBN: 0781439434), inquire at your local Christian bookstore, or you may purchase it directly at our website: [www.cookministries.com](http://www.cookministries.com).*

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<sup>5</sup> On the differences between satanism and Wicca, see Nevill Drury, *The History of Magick in the Modern Age*, London: Constable, 2000, pp. 189–210; Lynne Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997, pp. 214–218; and Bob and Gretchen Passantino, *Satanism*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, pp. 45–48.

<sup>6</sup> On Crowley, see John Symonds, *The Great Beast*, London: Mayflower, 1973; and Susan Roberts, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1978.