

CHAPTER 9
Do-it-yourself
New Age
Spirituality

Ross Clifford

My intention for your experience of religion
is that it becomes a religion of the self.
*Ron Smothermon*¹

INTRODUCTION

At a recent stay in hospital I got talking to Jillian, a young medical technician. She introduced herself and, while hooking me up to a variety of machines, commented on the *Simpsons* t-shirt I was wearing. Obviously a fan of the show, she asked whether I had seen the episode where Lisa explores Buddhism. Lisa finds herself torn, as Christmas is approaching, and she still wants to be caught up in all the traditional Christian activities.

'That episode describes me', said Jillian. 'I am searching for something more, I'm open to the supernatural but I'm fascinated by all religions, not just Christianity. I'm exploring Wicca and I love crystals. I guess I'm New Age, if that is the right term.'

New Age was an appropriate nametag for her search, I agreed, although some today prefer other terms such as 'New Consciousness', 'New Sense', 'New Edge' and 'Postmodern Spirituality'. In fact many dislike any term preferring expressions like, 'I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual'. Jillian represents a rapidly growing phenomenon; interest in and adoption of 'New Age' spiritual practice and belief.

History

The New Age movement has no founder-figure like Jesus or Buddha. It has no church, authoritative text like the Bible, or agreed prayer book. It is an evolving spiritual movement. However, as we will see shortly, we can pinpoint the emergence of the phenomenon from the late twentieth century. It is a new religious movement, but this is not to say it didn't have forebears. In the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, there were 'magical' and spiritual movements looking for a new way, or a means of ushering in an Aquarian age.³ For example, in 1875 Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891) established the Theosophical Society, which drew on the hidden insights of Buddhist, Hindu and Western occult traditions so as to examine the nature of God. Although theosophical traditions

In every human being is a deep, ongoing search for meaning and transcendence—part of the image of God in our very nature. Even if we flee God, the religious imprint remains ... Everyone, believes in some kind of deity—even if that deity is an impersonal substance such as matter, energy or nature.
Charles Colson²

in the West can be traced back to the Renaissance, Blavatsky's inspiration was a modern forerunner for New Age.

Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934) was a leading Theosophist who served as the first bishop of the liberal Catholic Church in Australia. Dr Greg Tillett states, 'The modern occult revival owes more to him than to anyone else; his concepts and ideas; his popularising of occult and theosophical terms and principles run through all modern works on these subjects ... Words like *karma*, *chakra* ... have continued to be used in the sense in which he used them ...'⁴

Another influenced by the Theosophical Society was the architect Walter Burley Griffin (1876–1937). His use of the esoteric craft of geomancy (a belief that there are lines of energy—ley lines—that traverse the planet that create harmonious space and atmosphere is evident in his design of Australia's capital city, Canberra.⁵

FAILURE OF CLOSED UNIVERSE PERSPECTIVE | Some writers suggest that the popularity of New Age Spirituality may be traced to the failure of the closed universe perspective, characteristic of modernism, to adequately account for the spiritual dimension of life. The dominance of modernism and its cynicism regarding the transcendent has left many people thirsting for what many consider a vital aspect of being human.

If the Bible is correct in telling us we are made in the image of God, and that we have not only a body but also a soul, then it should be no surprise that increasingly people are in search of spiritual understanding and insight.

With respect to movements like Wicca, it is often asked if we can go back further than the last hundred years or so to discover its origins. After all, forms of witchcraft, magic and sorcery are found in biblical times, in medieval history and primal cultures. Certainly there is some connection with these old 'pagan' ideas, however New Age and Wicca have distinctly reshaped practices like astrology and nature-based spirituality for the seeker of today. Novels such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* transport the reader back to ideas of

biblical times being about a 'Goddess' and Gnostic movements with initiation into secret teachings, sometimes about Jesus, but New Age faith has evolved well beyond these early influences.⁶

Personalities

Watching talk-show host Oprah Winfrey is often an encounter with New Age thought. Leaders of the movement like Deepak Chopra and Marianne Williamson are regular guests.⁷ Hollywood stars are attracted to this spirituality. Actress Shirley MacLaine was one who led the way.⁸ Others quickly followed, exploring a mix of Kabbalah and Scientology. Australian pop star Fiona Horne is a leading Wiccan.

However, New Age is a people movement, not just Hollywood directed. Leading consumer-predictor, Faith Popcorn states that everyday people will continue to develop personalised faiths (DIY religion) by blending parts of belief systems and rituals. She concludes, 'Customised Bibles will be created, merging passages from Animism to Zen'.⁹ The personalities of New Age are our next door neighbours, teachers, friends and colleagues.

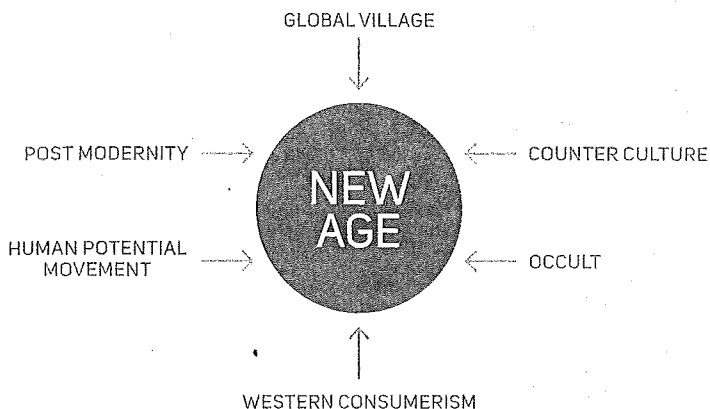
MEDIA

HARRY POTTER | The Harry Potter books and movies are a good example of the acceptance and interest in spiritual and supernatural phenomenon, which in itself is a function of New Age thinking.

As we accompany Harry through his time at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, we not only learn about magic, but he, Ron and Hermione come into conflict with forces that exist beyond the physical realm, again and again—headless ghosts, evil spirits, contacting the dead, reincarnation, prophecies, the occult and spells of many kinds are all part of their adventures.

In its depiction of supernatural forces, what lies beyond death, and life forces being neither good nor evil but inevitable, the program reflects some widely held New Age beliefs.

INFLUENCE



The above chart reveals that in the last 30 or 40 years a number of developments and forces of change have created an environment where the New Age movement has flourished. Let's look at each of these areas in more detail, while acknowledging that this is not an absolute statement on origins.

We are a **global village**. Via the media, immigration and travel, Western societies are increasingly coming into direct contact with the spiritual traditions of the East such as Buddhism and Taoism. Hindu gurus like Swami Muktananda have brought Siddha Yoga to the West.

In the 1960s and early 1970s baby boomers rebelled against institutions and traditional ways. Lifestyle alternatives were explored, and some experimented with drugs and Eastern religions. The New Age movement is the 'heir' to the 1960s **counterculture**.¹⁰

Occult means the secret, esoteric or hidden things. Since the 1970s various occult traditions and practices have prospered, although they have been with us throughout human history. Spiritual seekers have in particular been drawn to practices of divination such as tarot and astrology. Also, people often do religion today as they shop. They purchase goods from a variety of shops and give little attention to brand loyalty. This **Western Consumerism** is seen in spirituality where the 'customer' doesn't want to be limited to one shop or brand.

The **human potential movement**, with its emphasis on attaining personal 'peak experiences' through techniques like mind powers, has flourished since the 1970s. Proponents of this thinking encourage you to learn how to positively script your own destiny relying on your mind and thoughts. The leaders of the movement include Wayne Dyer, Anthony Robbins and Werner Erhard. This emphasis fits well with an often-held New Age affirmation that you are the master of your own destiny.

Finally there is **postmodernity**. A chapter on this world view is included in this book, and it has a direct relationship to New Age. Many postmoderns see the stories of modernity, which rely on science and technology, as very limiting. Therefore they look to myth, if not supernatural experiences, for stories that transcend science and technology.¹¹

The growth of the New Age has been assisted by **other factors**. Undoubtedly one of these is a lack of trust in such institutions as the Church. Institutionalised religion is often viewed as oppressing women and their spirituality, as well as having a history of sexual and other abuse. These concerns are certainly found in Wicca, which endeavours to bring a balance to what is felt to be a lopsided 'patriarchal' view of God as a male. Also numerous seekers are looking for a healing spirituality in the midst of our chaotic world. Wicca, like its umbrella movement New Age, offers 'magic' on behalf of others and oneself, for healing, as one aligns oneself with alternative reality.¹²

CENTRAL BELIEFS

New Age is not primarily a set of commandments and beliefs. Its heartbeat is: 'I want an inner life; I want to commune with nature and humanity; I want to find out why I'm here.' It is therefore difficult to list its beliefs. Having said that, it certainly does have two marks.

Firstly, it is eclectic in nature. That means it will draw on numerous religious traditions and practices. It's OK to consult

The great refrain running throughout the New Age, is that we malfunction because we have been indoctrinated, or ... been 'brainwashed' by mainstream society and culture. The mores of the established order—its materialism, its competitiveness, together with the importance it attaches to playing roles—are held to disrupt what it is to be authentically human.
Paul Heelas¹³

the stars, wear a cross, rely on a crystal and try Buddhist meditation. In contrast, the Bible is the sole authority for what Christians believe and it is their source for what is right and wrong.

Secondly, the New Age emphasises self-spirituality. In a populist sense this is found in the self-help teaching of media giants like Oprah Winfrey. It's about self-discovery, progress and growth, with the individual to decide how that is done.¹⁴ This is a real mark of a DIY religion with each seeker believing they are empowered to 'create' a faith that meets their own needs and aspirations. Neville Drury states, 'One should transform oneself before endeavouring to transform others.'¹⁵

Whilst one must be cautious in listing New Age beliefs, aspects of it can be contrasted with the Christian world view.

GOD

Not all New Agers believe in God. Fiona Horne acknowledges that for Wicca God can exist within the individual, but not in the sky out of reach. However she concludes, 'I have always felt gods and goddesses do not exist in their own right but are projections of our consciousness'.¹⁶ Most speak of God in a pantheistic and monist way. In a simplistic sense, we can express it like this: all is one = monism; since all is one, all is divine = pantheism.



This sense that all is one, all is divine and that we ourselves have eternally been part of this divine energy, is well expressed by one of the characters in the best-selling New Age novel, *The Celestine Prophecy*:

I sat down again on the rock, and again, everything seemed close; the rugged outcrop on which I was sitting, the tall trees further down the slope and the other mountains on the horizon. And as I watched the limbs of the trees sway gently in the breeze, I experienced not just a visual perception of the event, but a physical sensation as well, as if the limbs moving in the wind were hairs on my body.

I perceived everything to be somehow part of me. As I sat on the peak of the mountain looking out at the landscape falling away from me in all directions, it felt exactly as if what I had always known as my physical body was only the head of a much larger body consisting of everything else I could see. I experienced the entire universe looking out on itself through my eyes.

This perception induced a flash of memory. My mind raced backward in time, past the beginning of my trip to Peru, past my childhood and my birth. The realisation was present that my life did not, in fact, begin with conception and birth on this planet. It began much earlier with the formation of the rest of me, my real body, the universe itself.¹⁷

Here we see a stunning example of the *New Age* sense of oneness of the self with the universe. You may detect a sharp contrast with Christianity at this point. While holding to the immanence of God and that through the Holy Spirit the 'divine' resides within the followers of Jesus, Christian thinking asserts that God is also separate or distinct from us. God is the creator of all things, and he alone exists eternally (Genesis 1 and 2). He is also a personal God, more than energy and consciousness.

However, as we have already mentioned, not all New Agers are pantheistic. Some will hold to a more personal God, others will be interested in 'first-nation' beliefs, such as the beliefs of indigenous people like the dreamtime of Australian aboriginals.

CREATURES DISTINCT | Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer liked to point out that in Michelangelo's famous painting of God creating Adam in the Sistine Chapel—God's finger never touches Adam's.

Schaeffer said this was deliberate on the part of the artist who understood that Adam was not an overflow of God's being—not made from the 'stuff' of God but like all humanity was distinct from God, created by God but not of the essence of God.¹⁸

This is in marked contrast to the New Age Spirituality's monism and pantheism and idea that everything partakes of the divine essence.

The apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome speaks about the pagan world and its misplaced reverence of the creation: 'They exchanged the truth about God for

a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen' (Romans 1:25).

SELF

As mentioned, there is a strong sense of our own divinity, as all is one and all is divine. A key outworking of this is that it is *you and me* who are in control of our lives. For example, a friend of mine was at University and frustrated with his studies and parents. He took a Mind Powers course that taught him that he could 'change the script'. He alone was responsible for what was occurring in his life. And he did change the script. He set things right with his parents and changed his attitude to his studies. Salvation, he was taught, is ultimately about discovering our self, our own divinity and controlling our own destiny. Jesus' affirmation, 'I and the Father (the divine) are One' is held to be true for all of us (John 10:30).

In contrast, Christianity affirms the human dignity and worth of all humanity, not because we are part of the Godhead, but as a consequence of God's love for his creation. Despite recognising the importance of taking responsibility for our own actions, Christian understanding is that God's will for us, and external factors beyond our control are significant elements of the play of life.

THE FRUITLESS SEARCH FOR THE STRENGTH WITHIN | Michele, a Christian believer, recalls a moment when the inadequacies of New Age came sharply into focus. It was during a time when she had been hospitalised for depression. In a support group with other sufferers, a 'chaplain' who was into a fusion of Buddhism and New Age spirituality, was urging those in the group to look within themselves to find the spiritual strength to overcome their condition. Michele saw this as well-meaning but misguided advice. 'I knew at that point that if I had to find the strength within, I was going to be hopelessly lost', she says. 'I had nothing to give. At my lowest point, I took strength spiritually only from what could come from outside me.'

JESUS

I am attracted to the figure of Jesus—to his compassion, his courage, his fear, his humanity, the way he is born and dies, journeys through the underworld and lives again like Osiris in Egypt, like the great heroes of mythology. Yet Christianity requires a leap of faith of such magnitude that I feel I must parcel up all reason and leave it on the far side of some rocky gorge. *Samantha Trenoweth* (Typifies New Agers' mixed feelings about Jesus)¹⁹

New Spirituality seekers are attracted to the person of Jesus. In the New Spirituality, Jesus is an important spiritual guide who modelled how we are all one with the Father. He is not a saviour from sin as we are essentially good. *A Course in Miracles* purports to be teachings of Jesus channelled through a contemporary author. It states, 'No-one is punished for their sins and the Sons of God are not sinners'.²⁰

Jesus is often portrayed as one who travelled and his wisdom was therefore global. During his missing years, between the age of 13 and 29 on which the Bible is silent, Jesus was teaching and studying in lands such as India, Kashmir, Nepal and Tibet.²¹

In contrast Christianity teaches that Jesus is uniquely divine, that he did die and rise again to pay for our sins and his wisdom comes from his divinity, not his travels.

GUIDANCE

Whilst there is real appreciation for sacred texts and books on practical spirituality, guidance essentially lies within us. In the New Age, spirituality, the source of all strength needs to come from within. While there will be some people who feel good about that, many are uneasy about such a dynamic and don't feel they possess all within them that is required for making their way in the world and making sense of life. In contrast to New Age belief about guidance, evangelical Christianity stands for the Bible as the primary source for guidance on morals, life and practice.

'You are a spiritual being. You are energy, and energy cannot be recreated or destroyed—it just changes form. Therefore the pure essence of you has always been and always will be.'
Rhonda Byrne,
The Secret

New Age devotees who are attracted to occult links will explore 'psychotechnologies' like astrology, tarot cards, yoga, numerology, and *feng shui* (ancient Chinese folk religious practice of placing objects in such a way to promote good fortune by ensuring cosmic energy that flows through the natural world is not blocked), to assist them in their decision-making and guidance for life. In doing so they are rejecting a naturalistic exploration of the cosmos and returning to some of the pre-modern 'ancient' supernatural practices.

Christians believe such technologies are unnecessary, as through the Bible and prayer we have a direct connection with God. Further, the Bible warns that such 'psychotechnologies' can unintentionally open one up to dark forces (Deuteronomy 18:9-13). New Age itself, does not believe in the existence of cosmic demonic forces, however some do acknowledge the place of 'dark' angels.

FUTURE

A common New Spirituality belief is reincarnation, which literally means to come again in the flesh. For Hindus and Buddhists, reincarnation takes place between all forms of life including animal life. (For Buddhists there is no soul and one reincarnates in the same way that one candle may be lit by another.) In the West, reincarnation tends to imply that your soul, upon death, transmigrates from your present human life to your next human life in an upward evolutionary spiral. Where one is on the evolutionary spiral depends on the law of karma: what you sow in life you reap.

In contrast, Christianity holds to resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15). Resurrection implies that you die once (Hebrews 9:27) and your eternal destiny is not lived separate from some bodily experience. In Judaism and Christianity the body is good because God created it. New Age thought is more along the lines of Greek philosophy and Eastern religions that regard the body as inferior to spiritual things, and therefore should be left behind.

Many New Age advocates proclaim a dawning of the Age of Aquarius, which is an era of universal brotherhood. This vision of a transformed cosmos is one of the environment and humanity in harmony, a seamless fabric. For some it is returning to the myth of the lost continent of Atlantis. Christianity has a similar vision, but its climax is dependent on the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 21-22).

IMPACT

MEDIA

AFTERLIFE RESEARCH | Surveys in the US suggest that one in five people believe in reincarnation, while in the UK it is 30–35 percent of the population.²²

Despite the fact that at census time the majority of Australians tick boxes that indicate allegiance to mainstream religions, such as Christianity and Islam, their lifestyles and spiritual practices often indicate something else. Academic David Tacey has aptly captured the social impact of New Spirituality:

As the masculinist pubs, churches, convents, and barber shops go broke or close down in Australian cities, New Age bookshops and 'awareness centres' are popping up everywhere, offering the public a broad range of largely non-Christian, non-patriarchal esoteric arts and sciences, such as astrology, tarot, I Ching, karma sutra, sacred sex, herbalism, naturopathy, meditation, yoga, psychic massage, channelling, neo-paganism and wicca, martial arts, reincarnation, Eastern religions and philosophies, Native American vision quests and goddess spirituality.²³

One has only to visit the magazine rack, self-help and religious sections of the local bookshop to appreciate this influence. The astonishing success of Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret* is further evidence of the growing appeal of New Age teaching.

MEDIA

READ ABOUT IT | A quick scan of the New Age section of any major bookstore will give some indication of the interest in New Age thinking. The titles you are likely to come across include such as the following:

Discover the Psychic in You; Cracking the Symbol Code; Essential Psychic Healing; Discover Your Destiny; Divine Guidance; Contacting the Spirit World; Leaving the

Body—a Complete Guide to Astral Projection; Advanced Chakra Healing; and Your Sixth Sense.

When I conduct school seminars I find extraordinary interest in topics like Wicca, séances and astral travel (entering a trance or sleep-like state where one's spirit is free to leave the body and journey into other dimensions). Students share their stories of personal involvement. Anna, for example, found her dabbling in astral travel led to a situation where she could not control the 'spirit' guide who accompanied her. She was led into dark experiences.

DOREEN VIRTUE ANGELS 101 | Doreen Virtue claims to be an expert on angels. In her book *Angels 101*, she tells her readers:

'You have guardian angels with you right now. These angels are pure beings of divine light who are entirely trustworthy and who want to help you with every area of your life.

'Angels love everyone unconditionally. They look past the surface and see only godliness within us all. They focus only on our Divinity and potential and not on our "faults".²⁴

'The angels will work with any deities or beliefs that feel comfortable to you.'²⁵

The aspects of this type of thinking that particularly reflect New Age spirituality is the sense of the divinity of each individual and the way the belief adapts to each individual's tastes, interests and desires.

Also some schools, including Christian schools, have unwittingly used programs to improve students' self-esteem that are based on New Age insights including a combination of mind powers and astral travel. In tertiary studies such as nursing and beautician courses there are institutions that advocate techniques such as reiki and therapeutic touch (premised on the notion that there is a unifying cosmic energy—all is one—that can be tapped into and channelled).

MEDIA

WHERE NEW AGE FINDS A VOICE | New Age finds a place in psychology, the natural sciences, health and well-being alternative medicine, and in science fiction. In George Lucas' *Star Wars* series the divine energy—the force—carries with it both good and evil like the Hindu Brahman.²⁶

The thoughts of the guru Yoda are typical of what we witness in the film:

'Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? Hmm? Hmm. And well you should not. For my ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes. Even between the land and the ship.'²⁷

CONTACT AND DEPARTURE FROM CHRISTIANITY

New Age and Christianity do have things in common. There is the belief that life is more than a good job and chasing the dollar. There is openness to the supernatural. For example, the belief in angels is widespread and books and calendars abound on angelic beings from both New Age and Christian authors and artists. There is acceptance of 'divine' guidance. And most importantly there is awareness of our inner ache for divine connection and redemption. There is an understanding that when I tell you my story, you are listening to your own story. There is a search for healing, rescue from harmful ways and transformation. The popularity of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and CS Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* show how we connect to myths that embrace such longings.

In their purest forms both Christianity and New Age have a commitment to the environment. Gaia is the name of the ancient Greek goddess of the earth. This is why many New Agers refer to the world as 'Mother Earth'. Gaia

is a being dedicated to mother earth and she must be preserved, as she is a living entity to whom we are connected.

Christianity also affirms our stewardship of creation (Genesis 1). The psalmists declare that the trees, sun, seas, mountains, stars and birds join in the dance of praise to God (Psalms 96, 98 and 148). Romans 8:22 announces the whole of creation groans for the healing of the earth. In both world views the environment is important. However in Christianity, God alone is the creator and we are his creation, given responsibility for each other and the environment.

Although the primary focus of New Age is on oneself and personal transformation, the most significant departure is the nature of God. In Christianity God is personal, loving, and capable of emotions. He is not just energy or consciousness. Also God, in his nature, is greater than and separate from us. This means salvation is not about finding our own personal divinity, it is about having a lasting friendship with the Creator who is the Lord of our lives and of creation.

Jesus in Christianity is both man and God. In New Age, he is only god in the sense that we are all gods. In Christianity he is uniquely God. The divinity of Christ is verified by his resurrection (John 20:24-29). Anyone who eternally defeats our universal enemy, death, deserves to be worshipped. The resurrection of Jesus is presented as an historical fact with eyewitness verification in trustworthy documents and is not a myth or a secret teaching.²⁸

However, the Jesus of history answers all the longings found in myths. Tolkien said, 'The (New Testament) gospels contain ... a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy stories ... There is no tale that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its merits ... Legend and history have fused.'²⁹

In Tim Winton's novel *Cloudstreet* one of the characters reflects on the alleged difference between himself and a recently convicted criminal. The character confesses his own failings, 'I could've turned out angry and cold like him ... But it's not us and them anymore. It's us and us and us. It's always us. That's what they never tell you. Geez, Rose, I just want to do right. But there's no monsters, only people like us. Funny, but it hurts'.

In Christianity we all fail, we all sin, a concept New Age rejects. The implication of the New Age world view is that there is no saviour for our sins. To adopt the Christian world view is to appreciate that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Salvation is not about me, but about what Jesus did for me. The implication of this is that in Jesus I receive liberating grace—forgiveness (John 3:16).

I was watching a television chat program where the interviewer was asking the guest, who was a bishop of a church, a lot of fascinating questions about his life and the people he had met and helped. Finally the interviewer asked the bishop, 'When I die will Jesus interview me, will he ask me any questions?'. 'Oh yes', responded the bishop. 'But he'll only ask you one question. He will look you in the eye and ask, "What do you think of me?"'

Christianity, unlike New Age, says the answer to that question has eternal ramifications.

RESPONSE

Question

- 1 | What would be a good slogan to sum up the underlying beliefs of New Age spirituality?
- 2 | Why is a definition of New Age difficult to pin down?
- 3 | Of each of the forces creating an environment fit for New Age belief (page 151), which do you consider the most influential? Why?

Discussion

- A | How would you account for the rise in interest in New Age belief and practice?
- B | How convinced are you by New Age's belief in the essential goodness of humanity?
- C | 'The most striking feature of New Age fiction is its unbridled optimism'³⁰ (Anu Majumdar). What might be the strength and weakness of such a stance?

D | Writer Paul Heelas, says of New Age teaching that it has three elements. 'It explains why life—as conventionally experienced—is not what it should be; it provides an account of what it is to find perfection; and it provides a means for obtaining salvation.'

There are some obvious parallels with Christianity in this assessment. Where do the main differences lie between Christian and New Age teaching?

LOCATING STRENGTH AND HOPE | In his bestselling book, *The Power of Now—A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, Eckhart Tolle tells the story of a beggar sitting on the side of the road begging for 30 years. When he asks a stranger for some money the stranger says, 'I have nothing to give you', but tells him to look inside the box he is sitting on. At first the beggar is reluctant—saying it is just a box and he has sat on it for 30 years. Finally he looks inside and discovers it is full of gold.

Tolle says:

'I am that stranger who has nothing to give you and is telling you to look inside ... inside yourself. Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of being, and the deep unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfilment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.'³¹

Discussion

E | What is different about this way of understanding reality to the Christian teaching on the nature of humanity and the source of hope?

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,

I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.
Mary E Frye 1932

Discussion

F | Where in the above extract can you locate New Age thinking and belief?

Perception

- 1 | What appear to you to be the most appealing aspects of New Age as a way of viewing the world?
- 2 | What are its most identifiable weaknesses?