

RESPONSE TO THE NEW AGE

PART II - THE NEW AGE ITSELF

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1. Greenery and the New Age

Since there is some confusion among Christians between Greenery and the New Age, in Part 1 I attempted to clarify exactly what Greenery is and show its historical roots. Greenery is not itself part of the New Age. It can be seen rather as a groundswell of public opinion that has much to do with what Walsh and Middleton, in their book, *The Transforming Vision*, describe as a world view crisis. People, though they might not admit it openly, realise that the modern world's idols of science, technology, economics, materialism, have failed. We are in a new era, even if not New Age, in which the planet is under threat, and deep inside the human breast is a recognition that money and centralisation do not provide all the answers. Since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Western humankind has gone off to certain extremes, and now people are starting to question that extreme. Of those who know they feel this way, some are reacting against it, while others are repenting of it. This feeling is Greenery.

As discussed in Part 1, Greenery can be seen as a world view that abhors rationalism, materialism, individualism, reductionism, centralisation and the like. Christians have long been uneasy about these things since they came out of the humanistic Renaissance and Enlightenment, and it is no surprise that the isms that god-less humankind has allied itself to are now proving false idols. Greenery is a recognition of this.

Insofar as Greenery is an abhorance of things that are evil in this Modern World View (as Middleton and Walsh call it), it is biblical. (And, in my view, this is true of most of true Greenery at present, though some 'lefties' have entered the scene.) But it is not New Age. Greenery is a couple of steps in the right direction, but it does not go the whole way. Though spirituality (as an opposite of materialism) is a major plank of Greenery, it does not define that spirituality and is currently reasonably open to true spirituality that centres on the Living God as well as New Age and other types of spirituality. Greenery is a diagnosis, not a cure (though political Greenery sees its role as defining policy), and it is a largely biblical diagnosis. But, if this diagnosis is not to be just wishful thinking, then human beings require the help of the One who created, owns and seeks to redeem all things. This is what biblical reality offers. The Bible offers the cure - Jesus Christ, the Anointed Saviour. Thus, as the diagram shows, Greenery can be seen as a step towards a biblical world view, but it does not get us fully there.

As will become plain, I believe that where the New Age fits in is that it takes a similar diagnosis, but offers another cure: occultism and false religion. That, in a nutshell is my view of the New Age. Others hold other views, so let me explain why I see it this way. In this Part of the article I first examine what characterises the New Age, and then examine possible responses. I then go on to suggest what responses Christians should make.

A lot has been written by Christians about the New Age in a thoughtless way, concentrating upon the evils in the New Age. In this article I want to balance this. If I

wrote an academic paper on the New Age, stating my position in boring completeness, I would say much more about dangers and potential dangers, but since these have had too great an exposure already among Christians, I will assume the reader already is aware of the dangers. I am not going to say that the New Age is good, but I do want to encourage a rather better - and I believe more biblical and Christ-like - response. To find out what this response should be we must look at what the New Age.

2. Why is there a problem?

Why is there a problem with a Christian response to the New Age? Someone suggested to me that the problem was that most books about the New Age written by Christians were based on the American scene, and we need some based on the UK scene. This is true, especially since the American New Age has a different emphasis from that in the UK. As with most other American movements, it is more tainted with worship of the individual, of self, of success. Over here it takes on a greener hue. But I do not think a British view is the only thing we need. What we urgently need is to bring clarity and heavenly wisdom to bear on two questions:

- a) What is there about the New Age that gives cause for concern?
- b) What response should we then make to this?

Recently I was talking to someone who said that the pernicious thing about it was that you couldn't define it. In military terms, if you don't know your enemy then that enemy has an advantage over you. It is true that the New Age cannot be defined, but I'm not sure a military metaphor is apt, and I'm not sure indefinability makes a thing pernicious. Try asking a number of people to define Christianity! Definitions were the pets of the Rationalists; a Rationalist would like to define everything. One can therefore expect that anti-rationalists would dislike definitions. But this does not mean that lack of definition is a bad thing. God's good order of creation cannot be completely encompassed by the arrogant Rationalist mind. In Herman Dooyeweerd's system of philosophy (which was an attempt at building a Christian philosophy), it is fundamental that the whole of created reality refers outside itself to its Source, and cannot be understood fully without reference to that Source.

So I accept that the New Age cannot be defined. However, we can characterise it. While anti-rationalists would reject it altogether, analysis is a very valid aspect (as Dooyeweerd would call it) of human functioning. I do believe that we can say something about the New Age that will allow us to recognise it, but, more important, to understand what is really bad about it. Then we can discuss what ought to be our response to it.

While part of the problem is that there is no clarity about just what the New Age is, the other part is that there is also no clarity on how we should respond to the New Age. While some 'liberal' Christians like it, most evangelicals who have written on it strongly dislike it. Sadly, many New Age Bashers (NABs) have made responses that are unworthy of the Name of our Saviour. To have clearly stated reasons for warning about danger is one thing, but the force behind these warnings strikes me as suspect. "The wisdom from above," says James, "is pure first of all, it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy."

The tone of many NAB books and tapes may have an appearance of purity, but is certainly not peaceful, gentle, friendly, and definitely not free from prejudice or partiality. On the contrary, many NAB responses seem to be driven by fear, prejudice and assuming guilt by association. Often the reader feels forced to go along with the writer's arguments, and may feel a traitor to the Lord if questioning them. For example, in the margin of my copy of *The Seduction of Christianity* (Hunt and McMahon) I find I once wrote, "seems to be adding force to his ideas by saying (a) there will be a Great Deception, (b) it is very important, (c) this is the Great Deception." If there is one thing that Christians (and perhaps humans in the West) dislike it is being hoodwinked, finding ourselves to have been deceived. The idea of a Great Deception strikes chords in our hearts. And do we not find Satan himself being called the Great Deceiver? So whatever the authors then claim to be tied in with this Great Deception does not stand a chance at the court of the Christian mind; it is guilty even before the trial has begun: prejudice. Shame on us readers for our lack of heavenly wisdom. But even more shame on the purveyors of this kind of response to the New Age!

However, some of the more recent books that have appeared are better. One in particular I would recommend if the reader wants to gain a good picture of the New Age is *Close Encounters with the New Age* by Kevin Logan. Unlike many, the author actually took the trouble to get first hand of the New Age by spending time with New Agers and listening to them. His book does not mis-represent the views of New Agers, but it does put forward a very clear Christian critique. It is also wittily written in places - a good read altogether.

Even among the more recent books there has been little attempt to discuss what our response to the New Age should be. So this is the main aim of this article. What I aim to do is not to arrive first at a definition of the New Age, but to clarify what it is about the New Age of which we should be cautious. This, then leads to a useful definition. We can then discuss our response to it on these grounds.

3. Some views on the New Age

What is the New Age? Increasingly the term, New Age, is occurring in our newspapers, and often tends to get mixed with President Bush's New World Order. 'New Age' seems to be used to speak of some kind of new 'niceness' among people. 'New Age' refers to the combination of the end of the Cold War, the desire to do justice to the planet and Third World, and to company structures that are not hierarchical but encourage the participation of all individuals. In this vein, the computer press is full of Apple being a New Age company. (Don't worry: I am not writing this on an Apple Mac, but on a far better machine: the Amiga!)

But this does not take us very far. There is obviously something more, since few Christians would react to the bundle of niceness described above. Unfortunately, there does not seem to much agreement about what New Age is elsewhere. If you ask New Agers what the New Age means to them, you get a variety of answers. Similarly if you ask Christians who are knowledgeable about the New Age what it is about the New Age that they dislike, you get a variety of answers. Let us look at some of them; I have come across at least half a dozen.

Some would say that Greenery is New Age. We have already seen that Walter Martin calls the Green Party an expressly New Age organisation. If so, then, since there is much in Greenery that is right and good, there must be a lot in the New Age that is right and good and of God. So, the New Age cannot be summed up as Green thinking.

Some Christians say that the New Age is simply a human-centred attempt at solving the world's major problems. But this is also true of many other movements and ideas, and we do not get so hot under the collar about them. Parliament is one such, but many NABs are staunch supporters of the current systems of parliament, quoting blithely such verses as Romans 13:1. So it cannot be human-centred attempts at justice that characterise the New Age.

For Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon in their book *The Seduction of Christianity*, the main characterising feature about the New Age is that it is tied up with maximizing human potential, a worship of self. They include in this the 'power of positive thinking' of three decades ago. They warn that Pastor Yonggi Cho's 'visualisation' is New Age. But worship of self is not new. Nor are attempts at maximising our potential. While the idea of there being worship of anything other than God tends to produce a strong response by Christians (sadly with the possible exception of worship of our houses, families, fossil-fuel mobility, churches and Christian activities), there is something more to the New Age than this.

Some see the New Age as an attempt at world government. This is partly the line taken by Roy Livesey in his book, *Understanding the New Age*, which has the subtitle, 'Preparations for Antichrist's One World Government'. He sees threads throughout society that all point to a future world government - the United Nations, the US Federal Reserve, the Freemasons, the Trilateral Commission, etc. - and, as explained earlier, he sees this as part of Satan's end-time strategy. And so any concept that links with a unified world is suspect: if I use the terms, 'One World', 'global', etc. then I am a New Ager! Granted, some people naively think that if only we human beings could have world government then all our divisions would end, but that thought comes from the Enlightenment and is far from new. I do not see that it should arouse strong reactions among Christians.

Perhaps nearer the mark is the idea that the New Age is 'a human-centred approach to spirituality'. After decades of suppression of the spiritual nature of things, there was bound to be a reaction, as I have argued in Part 1. Since people are not used to the idea of God any more, it is quite natural that they should try to centre spirituality in humanity; humanity is the only thing they know directly that has a spiritual element. Where this attempt stops at saying "The spiritual side exists and is important" then I do not think it is a problem; indeed, such thinking is an ally of the gospel, since we can then gently lead them to the true source of spirituality. But when it is more truly human-centred, and of an arrogant form, then it is devilish. It is this arrogant form that blinds people. An explicitly human-centred approach to spirituality is something relatively new in human history. So this could indeed be (part of) New Age. Christians tend to see such things as rivals, and we are rather sensitive to rivals.

Linked with this is the idea that the New Age is essentially an attempt to bring all religions together: syncretism. It is understandable why people should want to do so. After all, most of the major trouble-spots in the world owe their source and intensity to religion,

since religion is to do with people's most fundamental commitment. Couple with this the Enlightenment's separation of Fact and Value (most people, including sadly most Christians, have so succumbed to this assumption that they do not realise it; see Lesslie Newbiggin's book, Foolishness to the Greeks, for an excellent expose of this) and the placing of religion in the Value, the Private, part, and you get the idea that there is no fundamental truth. So why not try for a mixture? But the idea that you can assimilate the best bits of all religions is not new. It may be something that the New Age is involved in, but it is not the main characteristic of the New Age. Many Christians are rightly concerned about the inter-faith activities at Assisi and last year in Canterbury, in which an apparently self-confessed New Ager, Martin Palmer, took a leading organisational part, and there were services of 'worship' which involved activities from a variety of religions. Many see these as New Age infiltration into the Church.

Another idea, that one friend of mine holds, is that the New Age is essentially the entry of Eastern religions into the West, and he writes warnings about this. With the disenchantment with traditional Greek-inspired dualistic thinking, with which Christianity has contaminated herself, it is only natural that there should be a reaction towards a monistic, pantheistic view. Lo and behold, such a view exists ready-made in the East, and what's more, it has a three thousand years pedigree: Hinduism. It also allows us to ignore the idea of sin. It also apparently bears a superficial resemblance to some of the modern discoveries of physics. Superficially too, it appears to treat animals and the rest of creation as equal with us, in contrast to the horrible domination and exploitation of the creation by apparently Christian-based cultures. Yes, we can see why eastern religions are very attractive. And this entry of eastern thought into the Western stronghold of Christianity has never happened before. We Christians are fearful; we feel threatened, especially when some New Agers take an arrogantly anti-Christian stance and openly embrace Eastern views.

Similar to this is the idea that the New Age is a resurgence of ancient animist religions, druidism and various forms of paganism. Or perhaps, a combination of paganism with Eastern religions. No wonder Christians feel threatened!

For some, what characterises the New Age is a link with the occult. It is seen by some as a way of making the occult respectable. But ouija boards and seances have long been respectable, so some deeper reason is needed for our strong reaction to the New Age. Perhaps it is that the human race has problems, and science and other products of the Enlightenment have so obviously failed to solve them. While some still think we can solve them on our own, others recognise our need of extra-human help. The interest in Defenders of the Universe etc. links with this. While Christians should be boldly yet humbly offering Jesus Christ as the One to help - and generally failing to do so except on the very personal level - others are offering occult powers as help. Much of the New Age, and especially the branch at Findhorn, takes this line.

3.1 The ETSC?

Lastly, some Christians see the New Age as going further than this. It is not just occult help with problems, but it is THE Great Deception, it is the Antichrist. Livesey tries to show that the New Age is really the devil's last grand strategy, the ETSC: End Time Satanic Conspiracy. His time is short, and so he is making it his last great work. No

human organisation is the hub of the entire strategy, but the devil is working underground, so to speak, weaving his webs of deceit into an overall pattern that only he knows, according to this view. This view rejoices to see the threads mentioned above that may lead to world government: with satan's man at the head.

(Of course, a number of 'spiritually discerning' Christians can see through it all. They make a lot of play of the verses that emphasise that certain things are only 'spiritually discerned', but I fear that many of them do not take enough care to ensure that their spiritual discernment is little more than their own speculation. They show how it all fits into the pattern, given a certain picture of the devil, and certain assumptions about his motivations and principles that he follows.)

It may be true that the New Age is indeed the last great trick of the devil, but many thought that Hitler was, and then that Communism was. And there were other versions before them. It does not encourage me to believe that this is what the New Age is. But does not Paul speak of a 'great delusion' brought upon human beings by satan in the last days, and does not this fit the New Age? It certainly fits some aspects of the New Age, but it also fitted aspects of earlier ages. Last century and early this, evolution and science were seen as a (or the) major enemy of the Christian faith. As is becoming plain now, science - or rather scientism - and its progeny, technicism and economism (see Walsh and Middleton) were something of a delusion in their claim to provide us with heaven on earth; instead their outcome has been to set us on a course for the destruction of the earth. It does not seem to have been the last great delusion, since people are now waking up to its weaknesses. I suspect it is the same with New Age thinking. *Any* idol, anything that is given an overwhelming position in people's thinking, is a great delusion and reaps evil consequences about four generations later. This is what God has declared will happen to idolators (Exodus 20:5).

3.2 Devil-centred?

It has been said that every author should be allowed to make one emotional outburst. What follows is my one.

The ETSC is the very stuff that delights what I call 'devil-centred Christians' - those who spend rather too much time thinking about what the devil likes or hates and acting according to that, rather than in accordance with what their Saviour likes or hates. But I dislike it. It breeds fear and fatalism: we have such an overpowering enemy that there is nothing that we can do except be a tiny remnant separate from the world and hope to keep our salvation and avoid 666. It sometimes acts as a demotivator to effective evangelism. The rest of the world is doomed; has not the book of Revelation prophesied it? So let it be doomed; we will pat ourselves on the back if we 'witness'; the ineffectiveness of that witness is seen to support the idea that the world is so much in the grip of the evil one. It also very effectively ensures that God's people are ineffective in God's world: anything that is not directly God ('spiritual') is likely to be under the power of the evil one. Lastly, it dishonours God, by giving too much credence and honour to the enemy by making the devil and what he likes or dislikes our main guide to living. Such thinking makes me very very sad. God's Kingdom suffers and people are left without light because of the devil-centredness of so many of God's own people!

Unfortunately this attitude seems to be particularly prevalent in many parts of evangelical and charismatic churches and groups at present, and in some intercession and prophecy circles. These groups have a huge potential, partly because, unlike so many in the mainstream churches, they actually take God seriously. But I believe the prevalence of this attitude is robbing them of their effectiveness, and delaying the coming revival that some say God has promised.

It is sad to see that perhaps one of the fastest-selling 'Christian' novels is being used by the enemy to enshrine such a devil-centred view among so many of God's people. Frank Peretti's novels are indeed thrilling, but they convey a view of life as little but spiritual warfare, in which Greens are very much of the enemy.

The fact of spiritual warfare needs to be faced. God's people need to take the reality of 'spiritual powers' seriously, and to be careful to employ 'heavenly weapons' and armour rather than human devices. But this must be done in such a way that we do not become devil-centred, that we do not evade our responsibility to God's world, and do not give more credit to the devil than to God. So, in this article, I am going to emphasise that side of Christian living and action that is not covered by the term, spiritual warfare.

4. How should we proceed?

Faced with this multitude of views about what constitutes the New Age, the ideal approach is to try to select a definition and argue for the supremacy, if not absolute correctness, of that definition over all others. Then we can define our response to it. But that won't work. A thing like the New Age is in fact so amorphous that it defies definition.

So let us start where we are at this point in time: though we do not have a single clear, agreed idea of what the New Age is, it does seem that we already have a single, agreed, almost universal response to it among Christians. The widespread response among Christians, or at least those Christians who know anything about the New Age, is one of strong rejection. Nearly everything that I have seen written by (evangelical) Christians about the New Age has been entirely against it, everything has been a warning. Hardly anywhere do you hear any evangelical Christian saying, "Well, so-and-so is good about the New Age"; you do not even hear "We could learn so-and-so from the New Age." Indeed, you get the strong impression that no evangelical would even dare to suggest such a response, for fear of an evangelical version of excommunication. The response is one of complete rejection of the New Age as entirely evil.

In many cases the response is also an emotive one. You may not find emotive responses set out explicitly in books, but you meet in the corridors, in the sermons, in seminars, in Sunday evening conversation. "Oh, I'm surprised that you are buying anything from *that* catalogue; it's New Age," was said to us recently (it wasn't New Age, actually). There is a lot of damning by association, "Oh, he is New Age; don't have anything to do with the organisation he belongs to." The WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) especially suffers from this, and more and more Christians are turning against it. It has done some rather unwise things in recent years, but I think we have reacted overmuch. One Christian had procured a copy of the WWF's newspaper and marked things of interest; one of these was the formation of what the WWF called the New Alliance, and in the

margin was the note, 'New A.', obviously meant to try to show there is a connection through the initial letters used! I discuss the WWF below.

Sadly, the response of most Christians to the New Age is in many ways anti-Christian, anti-biblical and we are in grave danger of bringing the Name of our Saviour into disrepute and of causing many, especially Greens, to reject the way of salvation. It also is, in my view, exaggerated. I recently asked a number of my work colleagues what they knew of the New Age. Out of about ten of them only one had ever heard of it, and he knew nothing. But the response does hold a valid core, which is characterised by strong abhorrence, rejection, warning of contamination and strong dislike. It is also seen as a new phenomenon.

Responses - and especially emotive ones - are notoriously impervious to argument. They are communal rather than individual in nature, and if for no other reason than inertia, cannot be easily changed. Certainly they are seldom changed by a single individual. Suppose, for instance, that we define the New Age to include Greenery, then I would want to say, "We must change our response to the New Age since there are elements of Greenery that are right and good." As I discussed in the first part, Greenery at its core is a long way to being biblical and so should not be rejected. But it is much more likely that Greenery would be rejected than that the bulk of Christians became more discerning in their response to the New Age.

It seems as though response is more impervious to change than is definition. It is easier to alter analytic definitions - especially when none seems to exist - than to alter emotive responses. So, instead of attempting to change our response to fit the definition, I suggest we do the opposite: we change our definition to fit our response. That is, we should take the response as given (perhaps stripped of some of its emotion) and seek to what it is about the New Age that is worthy of this response. And, because of the word, new, in New Age, our answer should address the question of what there is about that is new. So, the question we will seek to answer in this article is, "What is there about the New Age that is historically new and should be rejected and strongly abhorred by God's people?"

To answer this, I will examine the views above of what constitutes the New Age, and discuss what should be our response to each. Those things worthy of the above response could then be seen as a working definition of the New Age, if we want one. By this means we arrive by the same process at both a definition and an idea of how we should respond to each of the categories above.

I discuss a number of problems, each related to one of the characteristics above. Many of the problems, and thus of the responses, actually relate to several of the characteristics above. The form I have chosen below is merely to make it a little more readable. But sometimes one has to demolish before one can build. So let me suggest first a number of common responses that we should avoid.

5. What our response should not be

Just because someone uses words or concepts that New Agers use does not make him or her a New Ager. Walter Martin, sadly, falls into this trap. He gives a list of New Age terms, and so do others. Terms like 'One World', 'global', 'networking' are used by New Agers.

We can easily see why this is so, in that they represent concepts that only have meaning in the new era or for those who are shaking of the shackles of the Enlightenment. But this does not mean that they are exclusively, or even mainly, New Age words or concepts. Though it is true that words carry connotations, these connotations are only what we make them, and we should not treat words and concepts as though they were tainted by the New Age. Especially,

we should not pre-judge people who use such terms.

(Remember: the wisdom from above is free from prejudice, pre-judging.)

Just because someone is liked, admired or quoted by New Agers does not make him or her a New Ager. Several months ago, someone came to me concerned that Gorbacev may be a New Age figure. He had seen in the paper a report that Gorbacev was liked by New Agers and his picture was on the cover of a New Age magazine. But that does not make him a New Ager. New Agers also like Jesus.

Don't assume guilt by association.

I recently came across a statement that the New Age has infiltrated German political circles more than any other country. But we have to ask: do they mean New Age, or do they mean Green? The Greens are probably having more electoral success in Germany than elsewhere, and I suspect that some NABs confuse this with New Age. I sometimes hear it said that "So-and-so is New Age." Again, we have to ask ourselves: do they mean New Age, or do they mean Green? There may indeed be some statistical correlation between Green and New Age, but, as we saw in Part 1, this is due to the world-view crisis that Western humankind is going through and it does not mean that they are the same thing. This type of question is very important, since we are in danger of rejecting good things not only by association but by confusing terminology. Another, related, principle is:

Don't confuse New Age with Green.

Just because an organisation has a number of New Agers among its members, even among its more vocal or influential members, does not make it a New Age organisation. Sadly, where this is true, Christians tend to avoid that organisation, and leave the field of play wide open to New Agers. No: where we see that an organisation, be it the Green Party or Worldwide Fund for Nature, or any other, has New Agers in it, Christians should make every effort to belong to and influence that organisation. With prayer. And with wise effort: the much-quoted verse, "Fight the good fight of faith" really refers to contending publicly for the faith, and we should not shrink from doing so. There are New Age organisations, and Christians should not join these (unless the Lord specifically tells them to), but simply having New Age members does not make the organisation out-of-bounds for Christians.

Don't leave the field open to the enemy.

Just because a certain character trait is liked by New Agers does not mean that such a trait is evil. Conversely, just because a trait is disliked by New Agers does not mean it is good. New Agers like peaceableness and dislike aggressiveness. They like it when

common sense breaks through tradition and caution. They like harmony. They value intuitive thought and distrust hard logic. Christians should strenuously avoid moving to the opposite extreme. One thing that deeply concerns me is many of God's people will end up supporting something that is anti-Christian simply because New Agers dislike it. I am referring, of course, to the thinking that came out of the Enlightenment.

Don't, by reacting, promote the anti-Christian 'opposite' of the New Age.

Just because a New Ager makes an extravagant, arrogant claim doesn't mean that what they say is true. New Agers can be as triumphalistic as Christians, and sometimes make bloated claims that we take as threats. When faced with such claims I find it very difficult not to react in an aggressive and defensive way, but such reaction is devoid of heavenly wisdom. So,

avoid reacting in an emotive way to New Age claims.

Remember that the devil is the father of lies, and he can dupe both his followers and, if we believe them, us. Marilyn Ferguson put forward the idea of an 'aquarian conspiracy', and we Christians have reacted in fear of this. Not all she says is true. Though we do have to take warning. But when New Agers claim that their religion is the up-and-coming one that will sweep all others away before it, we should not be upset.

Don't believe all that New Agers say, even if they believe it themselves.

While on the subject of what people say, it is important to remember that there is such a thing as metaphor. This is particularly important considering the terms people use. If people use apparently New Age terminology, not only should we avoid damning by association, but we, who are people of the Truth, should respond to the actual meaning that lies behind statements, and when metaphor is being used, this differs from the surface meaning. So we should always

seek to determine whether they are using metaphor.

Finally, when dealing with people who are attracted by, or even caught up in, the New Age, we should always

ask searching but gentle questions.

Many New Agers are groping for truth and answers, but have latched on to one aspect or another that they like without realising the inherent contradictions in the New Age. Pressing gently for reasonable answers will help some of them to see some of them.

Having demolished a number of responses to avoid, let us now build a number of responses that we should adopt. As mentioned above, I will relate each of them to one or more of the characteristics above. One response that I will not mention below is prayer. This is because I take it for granted that prayer will be an integral part of whatever response we make.

I will go through the views outlined above of what the New Age includes, in what I believe to be the order of increasing concern. For each I will try to probe just what is

wrong with each, and hence what our response to each should be. As above, suggested responses are on separate lines.

5.2 Human Green concern

The groundswell of Green concern is not wrong. Nor are attempts to rectify some of the problems by political means. But in the long term humankind will achieve little of lasting value if we do not build upon the Lord's foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Human beings are incapable not only of saving themselves but also of promoting lasting justice for the world. We need the saving power of Christ Jesus. And he is the only answer. I discuss this in more detail below.

So our response should be twofold. One is to

bring the gospel to those who are concerned

- and what a tremendous opportunity we have in these days when the hard casing of Enlightenment thinking that has so long resisted the gospel is crumbling. But we must take the trouble to ensure that the gospel we bring them is expressed in ways that Greens can truly understand; there is much to be said on this, but it is not the topic of this article. The other is to

ensure that God's people are at the forefront of Green concern,

rather than being suspicious of it. Charismatics and evangelicals seem to be divided about this. *Restoration* magazine seems to be increasingly concerned about issues of justice to the planet and the world's people in what I think is a biblical way, but many NABs keep their distance. The people of the world expect us to be concerned, if we really believe that this world is created and rightfully owned by God.

But there is perhaps a prior response that we should make before those two: repentance. If we as God's people had been as active and committed to our Lord's kingdom, as we should have been down through the centuries, and had adopted our Lord's manner in dealing with people instead of a worldly arrogance, triumphalism and hardness, then I do not think that we would today be facing the environmental crisis, nor would we have a world view in society so distorted by the Enlightenment and the Renaissance. Some give the impression of seeing the present evil as inevitable ("Was it not prophesied?"), but, in the light of the many promises of victory, we cannot do so. All God's prophesies carry an implicit condition, made clear in Jeremiah 18:7-10, that if we repent then the evil shall not come (and conversely, if we turn from our good ways then the promised blessing will fail). So, before any other response,

we Christians should take a genuinely repentant stand.

Repentance leads to action: and in this context, Green action. Our being at the forefront of Green concern, mentioned above, should not be just for a witness, though it is important as that, but it should be out of repentance that we, God's own people, have for so long acquiesced to the destruction of our Father's wonderful creation. (Remember, from Part 1, the difference between repentance and reaction; some Green Christians - myself included - are in danger of reaction rather than repentance, and thereby causing divisions among God's people.)

There is one pernicious trap that many Christians seem to fall into: reversing good and evil. It goes something like this: The devil is the deceiver and counterfeiter. He wants to trap people. Most people would not fall for something obviously evil. So he often

appears as an angel of light and good. Therefore whatever appears good among (unsaved) humankind must be suspected. In particular, current Green concern is probably a cloak worn by the devil to lure people into the New Age. We end up calling good evil and evil good. This is an aspect of devil-centredness that is perhaps but one step removed from the unforgiveable sin of calling the Holy Spirit evil. Good is good, and justice is justice, even if carried out by non-Christians. When God finds fault with the apparent good done by people, it is because their good is done out of pride or rebellion, not because it is non-Christians who are doing it; pride is discussed below.

5.3 Human inability

The next thread of the New Age is a human-centred approach to solving problems. There would seem to be three main problems with this. First, apart from small or localised problems, human beings are not capable of solving them in a sustainable way without the help of God. It may be that for a short while god-less schemes may show some apparent success, but it seems to be always the case that in the longer term the very solutions to one problem lead to other problems, and often a plethora of hidden ones at that. Thalidomide gives an obvious example. So do those erstwhile wonder substances, CFCs: completely non-toxic, non-flammable, non-reactive. The architects of the monstrous tower blocks of the 1960s were not evil-minded villains; most of them had the best of motives, of cleaning out the filthy and disease-ridden slums. Where they failed was in having a narrow view of people and what they needed. The developers and initiators of these mistakes were spurred on by the relentless clamour of our materialistic society. Our democracy made no rules to guide, only demanded more. The guilt is everybody's. It is always the same with human-centred solutions. The only sustainable way of solving problems is with the only wise God.

It is not wrong for people to want solutions to problems, nor even wrong for people to attempt solutions. So I believe our response to this should not be one of fear or a sense of rivalry, nor even a sense of superiority. It should be that of Jesus in Matthew 9:26, seeing people as sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless, whether they realise it or not. It was in response to that that Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom of God with words and power, and asked them to plead for extra workers from their Father. Solving problems, such as ecological problems, is very much the business of the Kingdom of God. What this means is that, when we meet a situation where people are taking a human-centred approach to problem solving, we should

first seek the attitude of Jesus, who saw such people as sheep without a shepherd,

second pray for Christians to get involved, and

third get involved ourselves in the problem solving.

Not just for a 'witness' but to do the work of the Kingdom. But as a bonus there will be much witness, and many chances to lead people to the relationship with the Father that is the ultimate requirement for true problem solving. This response is the very opposite to the fear-laden response implied by many NABs.

5.4 Human arrogance

The second problem with a human-centred approach to problem solving is pride and arrogance. But this will not always be the case. So we should not always adopt the following response. Sometimes people see a problem and out of goodwill seek to solve it; since they know nothing about God, they adopt a human-centred approach. This is not to

be treated as arrogance, and it is a great shame that usually Christians do not see the difference between an arrogant approach and one of goodwill. But sometimes the human-centred approach is adopted out of arrogance, and the perpetrators stand out against any idea that they are incapable and need God's help. Or they may see their very attempt at solving the problems as part of their tactics for ego-boosting, career-building or party promotion. Worst of all, perhaps, is the attitude that some atheists adopted a few decades ago: I am as good as any so-called Christian; by my good works I will show there is no God nor any need for God.

Right through the Bible we see the message that is best-known in James: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." What does God oppose? Is it attempts at doing good without him? No, it is pride and arrogance. So, human arrogance should be opposed, but it is God and not we who do the opposing. When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them; they were like sheep without a shepherd. But when faced with the arrogance of those who thought they were OK, he was firm and even scathing.

The response to the arrogant should be firmness and perhaps even a prophetic word. But always there should be love and the invitation to repent.

When faced with godless people, we should have the same attitude. Though every person has a basic sinful pride, it is only some who have the type of arrogance which needs opposing. Even some who are apparently arrogant in their speaking or writings are, deep down, really issuing a cry for help. We should be sensitive to it.

5.5 Ignoring of sin

The third problem with the human-centred approach is that, usually, it is based on the assumption that there is no such thing as sin. This is actually a problem with several other characteristics above as well. "People are basically OK, and this OKness will flourish given the right conditions." Of course we know that this is not true, but what should our response be? First, we should realise that a human-centred approach might not always make this assumption, and in such cases - usually cases of goodwill above - we should not adopt the response below.

In the time of Martin Luther, sin abounded and the Church emphasised the penalty and badness of sin. Doing this did not work, and sin got worse. The more Luther tried to avoid sin the more he found himself embroiled in it. "Love God? I hated him!" he once exclaimed. The more sin was preached about the more people engaged in it, in spite of the penalties. But God, rather than the church, had the answer, and it is always his answer: grace. When Luther found the meaning of grace, of free forgiveness, he was freed from sin and came naturally to love God. We should beware of adopting the wrong approach. When people deny the reality of sin, we tend to respond by trying to convince them. They deny sin and so we argue that sin exists and is important. We are always pushing sin, so we justly get the reputation of being sin-centred. But there is no need to. Deep down in their hearts, people know the reality of sin and guilt (Romans 1) more than we realise and usually more than they are prepared to admit. What they need is forgiveness, not arguments. Our approach therefore should definitely not be to argue about sin, but to

gently deal with people's deep awareness of sin in their own lives.

It requires patience; it may take a long time before a person is made aware by the Holy Spirit, and even longer before they trust you enough to admit this conviction to you. This

will be especially true if you are known as a sin-basher. I have found that few people, and especially few Greens and New Ager, are aware of the difference between the sin and the sinner that we take so much for granted, and so when we come out against sin, they hear us rejecting them as people.

But are there not times when we do need to explicitly argue the reality of sin? Yes, there probably are, especially in my case when dealing with some Green Party policy pointers on such things as prison reform. But in my experience these times are much fewer than one might think, and even then we can bring out the concept that human beings do not always act altruistically without using the connotation-loaded word, sin. We must beware that we do not get trapped into trying to score intellectual points.

5.6 Maximising human potential

Many today are into maximising their potential. There is little wrong with maximising our potential as such; are we not required to use our talents rather than burying them? But there are two problems. One is that it is hugely individualistic. It leads to people ignoring others; if I am so intent of maximising my own potential, I will divert resources into this that should perhaps go to helping others. Call it selfishness, if you like. Christians, and especially those of a charismatic bent are particularly prone to this problem. So it is ironic that it is sometimes those very same Christians who bash the New Age.

The response to this should be positive: Jesus came to maximise human potential (John 10:10). The fact that people want to do this is not of itself bad. But

we should focus on the true source of that potential,

and at the same time

emphasise the self-giving and suffering of various kinds that are part of the gospel's message.

Jesus took this line with Saul/Paul (Acts 9:16). It is sometimes the opposite of what people seem to want that actually attracts and challenges them into the kingdom. Sometimes the approach can appear to fail, though, as with the rich young ruler.

I have been looking at a series of notes from a course a couple of friends of mine had attended at work. It is called New Age Thinking (though I hear they have changed the name now owing to the rise of the New Age cult). It is largely about maximising your potential. Is it New Age? I think not - and discuss why in more detail at the end.

The second problem is self-worship. This is not just an extreme version of the above problem, but it is also idolatry. What should be our response? We often assume that the proper response is a tirade of one sort or another against such idolatry; after all, Isaiah gave many tirades (Isaiah 1 to 5). There is a place for strong speaking, but it should be remembered that his style became much gentler after he had met the Lord in the temple (Isaiah 6). When the OT prophets vented the Lord's spleen on idolatry it was on idolatry in God's own people, not so much in the nations round about. In those, the sin the prophets concentrated on was injustice, even though they worshipped other gods. What this suggests to me is that

we should not often tackle self-worship explicitly, but rather the injustice of various kinds that come from it.

Idolatry always leads to injustice - against the poor, the defenceless and against God's creation - and this is one reason why God hates it.

But what about so-called visualisation? Some claim that this is irredeemably occult, and should never be practised. (We deal with occult below.) Others think otherwise. For me the question is still open. We should be wary, but not so wary that we refuse to use some of the natural processes that God has given us, some of which are yet to be discovered. There was a time when the ideas behind science such as causal explanations were seen to be anti-God, but today we take them for granted. The big question to be answered here is whether there may be undiscovered natural processes in the psychic realm, or whether all such phenomena are demonic.

5.7 Human-centred spirituality

Now we get nearer to things that are specifically New Age. At one stage I thought the New Age could be best defined as a human-centred approach to spirituality, but now I believe the New Age is more than this. Merely having a human-centred approach to spirituality is wrong from a Christian point of view, but it does not make one New Age.

What is wrong with a human-centred spirituality, and what should our response be? I think that it depends on attitude, as it did above. If the attitude is arrogant, "I am determined to work out a spirituality without reference to God" then the response should be firm but gentle. If the attitude is not arrogant, then the response of Jesus (sheep without a shepherd) is more appropriate. The danger is that in the latter case the person concerned might, in their genuine search, be led into occult forms of spirituality. So our job is to prevent this. We do *not* prevent it by focussing attention on the occult, even negatively. Nor do we prevent it by dealing with the person as if they were of the arrogant kind; that would more likely drive them into the occult. There is no simple answer, except that it means great patience, love, and an ability to gently explain things with clarity at the right time.

We have to lead them to see that true spirituality is to be found only in God.

I find an observation by Christian philosopher, Hendrik Hart useful. We are used to thinking of spirituality as some kind of essence or property that we have, a bit like an ethereal blood on the one hand, or a bit like intelligence on the other. New Agers also think like this. But Hart suggests, in his book, *Understanding Our World: an Integral Ontology*, that spirituality refers to the fact that we are not functionally bound, to the fact that we are open to the Source and ultimate End of all reality (God). Spirituality is to do with our role and purpose, not just a property that we have. (This avoids problems of whether animals, plants, rocks, etc. have souls.)

As a member of the Green Spirituality group in the Green Party, I have sometimes found things rather difficult. Many members are New Agers, Pagans, etc. and there is an anti-Christian feeling among these. But there are also Christians in the group. I find myself reacting sometimes in ways that I have said are bad here; such is the power of reaction in our hearts. Once I 'did a Peter' and denied my Lord. But this was turned to good on my repentance. But I do not believe that Christians should avoid such groups - as many do - out of a fear of contamination or demonic oppression. I felt no demonic oppression there, though I did feel the arrogance and hostility of some members, and we

have our Lord's promise of power over the demons. If we are to find the gates of hell falling before us, this implies that Jesus foresaw that we should go to where the gates of hell are. Too often we stay away and hope that the demons will uproot the gates and bring them to us!

So I have made a distinction between those who are genuinely seeking spirituality, usually in order to escape materialism, and those who arrogantly try to establish a God-less spirituality. But there is much overlap, and in any one person, you are likely to find a shade of each. It is up to us to wisely and prayerfully discern what response a person needs. But what about those who teach a human-centred spirituality? Can we assume that they are 100% arrogant? I do not think so. The beliefs of many are in a transient phase, still being actively worked out, and there is a type of person who outwardly shows certainty while inwardly they are still seeking. Often such people become teachers or leaders in what they are still not really sure about. So, while there are some very definitely arrogant and evil teachers, we must be sensitive to the possibility that many are in fact seekers in disguise.

5.8 Syncretism: bringing religions together

There are two ways of bringing religions together. One starts from the premise that really all religions point to the same overall truth, and all religions lead to God, however they describe him. It then proceeds to opine that if only we could merge all the religions, then two wonderful things would happen. We would no longer have all the wars and arguments that are currently fuelled by religious differences. And we would perhaps, in the amalgam, find the true gold, the true truth. One does not need to look very far to see that both of these are very unlikely to materialise. But what exactly is wrong with it? We can only discuss this briefly.

First, it insults God. It throws his costly revelation of himself in Jesus Christ back in his face. How should we respond? The Lord calls himself a jealous God, but it is he who acts to protect his name. Elijah received no brownie points when he told the Lord that he had been very zealous for his Name. We should be very wary of triumphalism (which is a shame, since some of my most favourite songs are triumphalistic ones) and

should not be over-zealous for the Name of God.

But we should act in obedience as he himself acts. While there is indeed a deep humour in the lightning bolt on York Minster a few years ago after David Jenkins was made Bishop of Durham, we should be careful of sniggering too loudly.

Second, it won't work. Simply because of human nature. In fact, the attempt to bring all religions together will bring about horrendous injustices. So, knowing it won't work means that we should not waste too much effort in trying to combat it. Rather, our response to this should be to:

seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness (justice),

and this speaks of positive action rather than negative reaction. We should fight any injustice that might arise.

Third, there is the fear that if we do end up with one global religion, then this will be The Beast or The (false) Prophet of Revelation. Should we fight against syncretism on these grounds? I see an unholy zeal among many Christians to do just this, yet I see

nothing in the Bible that supports this suggestion. No doubt they can pick out a few verses to support their view, but to me it is a distraction and at variance with the tenor of God's revelation. There is nothing wrong with the idea of a global single religion, shared by all the people of the world: it is totally right, if the religion is true Christianity. What is wrong, whether global or not, is false religion.

So we should not be appalled by the idea of a global religion as such.

Fourth, people will be blinded. In seeking a unified religion, people will miss the One who is The Way, The Life and The Truth. Our response should, again, be positive rather than negative:

preaching Jesus Christ in season and out of season.

Even if a one-world religion is a tool of Satan, we should not let our actions be directed by reference to him; see my diatribe against devil-centredness above.

The other way in which religions might be brought together is when people of several religions come together to pursue a common goal, such as peace between two warring peoples. This, I think, can be valid, as long as it does not amount to a seeking to water down God's revelation of himself. I find myself working with those of other religions in furthering the Green cause, and believe this is valid since the Green mandate of Gen 1:28 was given to all of humanity, before the Fall and has not been rescinded. The fact that this is a pre-Fall command is significant. The Lord himself used people of other religions from time to time, such as Cyrus. In working this out, we should look beyond the easily-quoted verse, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers", to those places in the Old Testament especially where there is genuine dealing with people of other religions and cultures. The WWF meeting at Assisi in 1985 is often unthinkingly denigrated by NABs, and taken as evidence that the WWF is really a New Age organisation. But that meeting was fundamentally a goal-directed bringing together; I discuss this below.

5.9 Entry of Eastern religions

The New Age is seen by some as largely the entry of Hinduism and its ilk into the West. Given that the Lord will have the ultimate victory, what is there to get worried about? Someone has suggested that the state of Christianity in the West couldn't be much worse anyway, and having a few Hindus around might sharpen up people's awareness of religious issues, to the benefit of the gospel. While that may be true I think there are three main problems. First, as with syncretism, there is the danger that people will be diverted from the gospel, will be blinded so as to be unable to accept their true salvation. Second, this type of religion brings about much suffering and injustice, especially in the name of karma. The responses to these two areas of concern have been discussed above.

But there is a third problem. C.S. Lewis was of the opinion that the Eastern form of religion is some kind of lowest point, that the human mind, if not enlightened by revelation from the true God, would eventually settle on reincarnation. This kind of Eastern thought is a major barrier to the gospel since it embodies a completely different world-view. In a very real sense this type of religion is far more dangerous than primitive (animist) religions.

Don Richardson has pointed out, in his thrilling book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, that the Lord has all over the world given a revelation of himself and his ways into primitive religions. Even though these religions are bound up with spirit worship, the Living God

has sent messages to prophets in these religions. Such revelation was, of course, only partial, but Richardson is convinced that we should see these religions as allies of the gospel rather than enemies. Among his many examples, he tells of the Lord's word coming to announce the imminent coming of his messengers: missionaries of the gospel. The people were thus prepared ahead of time and received the gospel in their thousands. It is this that explains the revival in places like Korea today.

So perhaps we ought to alter our ideas about primitive religions.

And this includes the religions of the American Indians, as Richardson illustrates.

But when a people is overrun by Hindu-like thought, then they become hardened to the gospel. This is the danger of eastern religions coming into this culture. But I do not believe that an aggressive response is called for, nor a call to prevent immigration.

5.11 Link with the occult

There is a kind of scale in the minds of Christians, one end good and the other, bad. While other religions are towards the bad end, the occult is firmly planted at the very end. Other religions are mere tools and fabrications of the enemy, while the occult is the enemy himself. So we tend to fear it, shy away from anything that might possibly be tainted with it, and treat it as the vilest of the vile. We see the occult as the devil proudly vaunting himself against God, and naturally we want to fight this. This is not the response that I see in the Bible, in spite of occasional references to withstanding principalities and powers.

What we need is a more reasoned approach: precisely what is wrong, dangerous, vile, about the occult?

It is not sufficient simply to say, "God says it's wrong, and it's the devil's work." People *are* involved with the occult, and especially in the New Age, and we urgently need examination of our response to it. I do not remember ever having seen a serious explanation of what it is about the occult that is wrong, in my 30 years of being a Christian (though I have since been told of a couple). I am not sufficiently versed in the occult to provide an authoritative statement, but from what I have seen and read, what is dangerous and evil about the occult is that it binds people, misleads people, blinds people, and brings about gross injustices. If this is true, then our response should be to

free people, bring truth and light to people, and work to overcome injustices.

Many Christians, especially of the devil-centred sort, tend to have a response to the occult that is one of fear, "Keep away from that, it's far stronger than you are; you may get tainted, oppressed or even demonized." While there is absolutely no doubt that God's people should never engage in occult practices, such as seeking knowledge through mediums, this kind of thinking goes too far. It is guaranteed to place many valid things out of bounds for Christians. If the occult is so mysterious and powerful, so this thinking goes, then you must stay as far away from it as possible. Anything that has any association with occultists, however slim, is out of bounds. So keep away from it.

I do not see Jesus keeping his distance from the occult. He was right in there, delivering people. So should we be. He has promised us power over all kinds of evil spirits, and we should not be so afraid.

(Kevin Logan also makes this point, very forcefully.)

The occult is not wrong just because God says it is; our God, unlike most false gods, is reasonable. One reason the occult part of the New Age is dangerous, in addition to

the above, is that it promotes a false spiritual answer to the problems that we now face. It offers a new type of false answer to the groundswell of concern. This wrong answer we must resist, but gently and firmly. We have the answers to the problems, we can speak to the groundswell of concern if we so choose, and we must do so. Or the devil will have the field to himself. Our first goal must be the kingdom, the beautiful and just reign, of God.

How sad that most Christians are absent from this battlefield of the world views today! Rather than distancing themselves from Green things, from world-view discussions and radical living and thinking,

we should be in there.

5.12 The ETSC, etc.

Just suppose the New Age is in fact the Beast, the Anti-Christ, or any major part of the devil's last strategy; what should be our response? Fear it! Keep away from it! Bolt your spiritual doors! Store up corn against the last days! Speculate about it! Try to work out who the Beast is and what 666 refers to! Try to work out the pattern of events as we approach the year 2000. And all the while sing triumphalistic songs and go on marches with banners!

I sing those songs, and I go on marches with banners. But not out of a sense of separation from the world. For me, there is the kingdom of God to work for, and I haven't time to speculate on what 666 means (though I do have my ideas on the topic). I do not fear the devil, because my Lord told me not to. I do not try to fit patterns together, but trust myself to him who judges justly. I do not fear for my own life, but want to extend God's kingdom here on earth. It may be that the Second Coming is not for another thousand years yet.

What should be our response to the possibility that the New Age is the devil's last great strategy? Need I say more?

6. What is the New Age?

So, with this kind of reasoning, what is the answer to our question above, "What is it in the New Age that is new and that should be strongly rejected and abhorred by God's people?"? To my mind the answer is,

"It is the existence of the current world view crisis and the adoption of Green concern that makes the New Age historically a new phenomenon, and it is the offering of occult and false religions as the answer that makes it worthy of a strong response by Christians."

As shown in Part 1, the response that the New Age has to the Modern World View is largely biblically valid; it shares much of it with biblical Christianity. But it offers a different solution. While the revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Anointed Saviour, the solution proposed by the New Age is occultism and false religion. The other aspects often associated with the New Age, such as human potential, Green concern and activity. Green concern is new but is largely biblical. Human potential can become an idol, but it should not arouse the response that we have for the New Age. Only an occult answer to the current world view crisis is both new and worthy of a strong negative response.

Lastly, I want to illustrate the above ideas by looking at some of the organisations, concepts and people that various people have claimed to be New Age, and discuss what our response should be to them.

6.1 The Findhorn Community

As most readers will know, the Findhorn Community is an explicitly New Age community up near Inverness. In their early days various miracles occurred, such as huge vegetables, and many aspects of the story of Findhorn (as told by Paul Hawken in *The Magic of Findhorn*) parallel Christian thinking and happenings. But it is a spirituality without Jesus, and without repentance, and with various devas (spirits etc.). It is undeniably what Christians would call occult, and is offered as an answer to the problems now facing us. Our response to Findhorn should be our response to the occult. But we should separate this from our response to people who have visited or been impressed with Findhorn. Many of these are seekers after truth, and our response to such should depend on their level of arrogance, as discussed above. For those not arrogant, we should see them, not as enemies, even potential enemies, but as sheep without a shepherd.

Kevin Logan's book describes his visit to Findhorn, and is a good introduction to the place from a Christian point of view.

6.2 The Iona Community

The Iona Community is a Christian community set up by George MacLeod. It is, in the words of one person, 'surrounded by New Agers', but is not itself a New Age community. I was speaking recently to one who knows the situation, and his view is that evangelical and charismatic Christians should not avoid it, but rather take part in it. But they should do so with a pure heart, that is, not secretly attracted by nor curious about the New Age.

6.3 The Green Party

The Green Party has many New Age members. But it also has many more members who are not New Age; indeed, I recently heard that the branch in one of our major cities has more Christians than New Agers. But all are (more or less) Greens. It is a political party, and, as Paul Marshall points out in his book, *Thine is the Kingdom*, we should not think political parties wrong or evil for not being explicitly Christian. Given that humankind is commanded of God to steward the creation ('greenly'), there should be many more Christians in it than there are. Not just to be a 'witness', as discussed above, but out of repentance and out of a genuine desire for God's kingdom and to fulfil his command. In the Green Party I seek to play a genuinely positive role, bringing my biblically-oriented view of justice and politics to bear on various issues, from human rights to economics. The biblical view is the one that works, and, unless put off it, people do see the sense of it. My input has been genuinely appreciated, and one example is that it has helped to move the Green view of Rights along the route of responsibility and relationships, and away from the conventional individualistic view. I firmly believe that this is work for the kingdom of God. But it can be very tough, especially when there is very little fellowship. Most of the Christians in the Green Party tend, unfortunately, to be of a liberal persuasion, and to distance themselves from me.

6.4 Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Earth is a pressure group with similar aims, ultimately, to that of the Green Party. Walter Martin is wrong in saying it is a New Age organisation. It is a Green one. Our response to it should be those linked to Human Green concern, Human inability and, sometimes, Human arrogance. But there is no inherent link with the occult nor with false religion, any more than a supermarket chain would have.

6.5 GreenPeace

GreenPeace, on the face of it, is slightly different. It is claimed that GreenPeace is New Age because it links itself with an American Indian prophecy of a tribe of 'Rainbow Warriors' who will one day arise and save the earth. But two things must be said here. The first is that there are three attitudes that GreenPeace or any other organisation might take to this type of prophecy. The first attitude is that they see it a nice metaphor, and perhaps as an idea that inspires people. In this sense, it is similar to some of the ideas that Sir Winston Churchill used during World War II. The second is that they also wonder if there might not be some truth in it. The third is that they are convinced of the actual truth of it, and are religiously committed to it. The first two are not of themselves wrong, and I suspect that GreenPeace really takes the first attitude. Only the third is actually wrong, and would make GreenPeace part of the New Age. Of more concern to me is the fact that GreenPeace is rather a centralised organisation, compared with Friends of the Earth.

The other thing that must be said is that, as Don Richardson has made clear, not all prophecies even of the American Indians are evil or wrong. God has indeed spoken through prophets in the primitive religions, even though they are at the same time steeped in occult and pagan practices. He points out that there is a general recognition among such peoples of the difference between 'spirits' whom they fear and to whom they are in bondage, and the 'genuine God'. The Indian prayer, "Oh, Great Spirit of the Universe, let me never condemn my brother until I have walked a mile in his moccasins," is one example, and it should be no surprise that it bears a striking resemblance to what Jesus taught. But we cannot argue the case more fully here. What this means for us, however, is that even the third attitude may not in itself be wrong. We have to be very careful.

6.6 WWF: The Worldwide Fund for Nature

Is the Worldwide Fund for Nature a New Age organisation, as quite a number of Christians are now claiming? After all, it organised both the Assisi meeting and the multi-faith 'celebration' at Canterbury Cathedral in September 1989, and a number of prominent people involved with it are claimed to be New Agers. The answer again must be, "No". Even if it has major players who are New Agers, this does not make the organisation itself New Age. Should Christians avoid helping it or joining it? I sense a strong reaction amongst Christians about keeping away from - and certainly not joining - the WWF. As discussed above, this is the very opposite of the response we should have; it is leaving the field open to the enemy. It will not necessarily be easy for Christians to work effectively *as Christians* within the WWF, but we are nowhere promised that our task will be easy. As with the Green Party, we should be involved, and with a genuine motive, not just to 'infiltrate' or 'witness' but to help build God's kingdom for him, which includes caring for his creation.

I see the WWF's increasingly high profile in recent years, not as the devil's ploy in using a 'respectable' organisation as a cloak for New Age work, but simply because of the urgency of the situation today. A thousand species are being lost every year now; their Creator will require them at our hands. They were his in the first place, and we have destroyed them. Why? When you analyse it, most of the reason is because we idolize convenience and money. The situation is urgent, and requires that organisations like the WWF do not fiddle about with trivialities. In such an organisation, God's own people should be deeply involved.

This has shed for me fresh light on the Assisi meeting. In contrast to atheistic thinking emanating from the Enlightenment, which assumes that religion is of no real importance, the WWF realised that religion is of vital importance. If the aim is to do as much as possible to save wildlife, then one major route to this is to ensure that in all the world's major religions there is a strong theology of nature. Or, at least, it is important to see which religions should have such a theology. The WWF wanted to focus attention in each of these religions on our responsibility to and our relation to nature. So it organised the Assisi meeting for this main purpose. It asked five of the world's major religions to prepare statements about their attitude to nature. To me, this is not wrong, and not something that Christians should keep away from. The sad thing was that the 'Christian' statement left much to be desired, being little different from a Jewish view, and so His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh set up a series of consultations at St. George's House, Windsor, to try to work out a better Christian view, in some of which I took part. While the outcome left much to be desired, in my opinion, some good emerged, especially by way of clarification.

However, I think the WWF made a grave blunder in holding inter-faith worship. It seemed to be completely misled by the liberal establishment view about what Christianity is, and as such has alienated those sections of christendom that are more motivated and more thoughtful.

While I believe there can be no valid inter-faith worship, perhaps there can be inter-faith working, inter-faith celebration and inter-faith dialogue. That is, we can work towards a goal of common-grace justice with those of other religions and none. We can enjoy, though not worship, things in the creation. Celebration is not worship, even if Christians sometimes use one word for the other. And it is useful to enter into discussion with those of other faiths, not just to proclaim the gospel, but to listen and seek to understand.

However, true understanding will not come about by trying to minimise differences, as syncretists are wont to do, since the differences that exist are fundamental, but only by being open about and exploring them. Further, I believe that none of these three things should be done by those who are merely curious or of a syncretistic temperament, and they should always be done with much prayer backing.

6.8 The Gaia Hypothesis

A few years ago James Lovelock came out with what he called the Gaia hypothesis. This hypothesis is that one could see the whole earth as an organism, with the self-correcting mechanisms that most living organisms have. As a way of seeing things and as a basis for

research programmes and analysis, I see little wrong with it. Most science is based on the idea of proposing hypotheses and testing them. But what upset many Christians was the use of the name of a Greek goddess, Gaia. For them, including Walter Martin, this put James Lovelock irremediably into the New Age. But I have spoken to James Lovelock and asked him directly whether he was meaning anything spiritual by the name. He wasn't; he was merely using it as a metaphor, and as mentioned above, we should carefully discern to what extent people are using a word metaphorically. Whether he is involved in the New Age in the sense that I have defined above I do not know, but James Lovelock should not be consigned to the devil's dustbin simply because of the name he gave to his hypothesis.

6.9 The concept of Mother Earth

Another concept that annoys many Christians but which is popular among some Greens is that of Mother Earth. The Earth, the planet on which we live, can be seen metaphorically as a 'mother' in the sense that we are nourished by her and come from her and are dependent on her. I see little wrong with this; in fact the Bible is clear that these are facts. I also see little wrong with using the term Mother Earth as a metaphor to express this idea, just as most Christians seem quite happy to proclaim that the middle day of the week belongs to an Anglo-Saxon god of war and magic, Woden. But what I think has made many Christians suspicious of this phrase is that it has been gleefully adopted by neo-pagans and their ilk; our response has been largely emotive.

6.10 Homeopathy

A couple of years ago I read two articles about homeopathy in, I think, *Christian Woman*, one pro and one anti. I do not know where I stand on this, but I do know that the anti article far from convinced me. It reasoned that since there was no scientific way of understanding how it works, it must therefore be of the devil. Not only was the 'therefore' not justified (there may be some causality that we have yet to discover), it showed that the writer was trapped in rationalism. He seemed to be completely oblivious to this. It is funny how Christians now take as their friend what once many of them saw as an enemy: science! Just because something is not scientifically understandable does not mean it is occult, of the devil, New Age. It is vital that Christians do not make this mistake.

6.11 'New Age Thinking'

Let me close with a longer look at one apparently New Age thing. I have in front of me a set of notes for a course called *New Age Thinking*, which had been used to train managers in a local large firm. Initially I was rather wary, but am now convinced that this is not really 'New Age' in the sense I have defined above and poses no threat out of the ordinary to people that partake of it. Indeed, I have heard, they have changed the name, probably because they do not wish to be associated with the New Age cult.

But what is this *New Age Thinking*? First, it is American. It is largely about human potential, and if things like this are calling themselves New Age this explains why many American Christians see the New Age as largely about human potential. I want to go through some of the things it said as a case study. There are many things written there about which Christians could find fault. But I am not convinced that we should find fault any more than with other 'secular' things which we tend to tolerate. Let us look at some of them.

First, one section, prints the words, "I AM", in capitals at one point. Blasphemy? Perhaps, but I think not, since the phrase is being used as an adjective and seeks to emphasise being as opposed to doing, and potential as opposed to limitation.

Later on it says, "Only YOU can change your picture." This is, of course, strictly untrue, in that God can, and perhaps only God can. But let us look at the context: what is it trying to speak against? Answer: a dependency attitude, of waiting for others to change our picture. It is trying to emphasise the responsibility each of us has and the ability to do something about our situation rather than take a fatalistic or dependency view of life. But the very thing that many Christians have disliked in Socialism is the fostering of a dependency attitude among people made in the image of God. So, what they are saying is not in itself wrong.

The problem is that, since it is called *New Age* I find myself reacting against this type of thing in the text in a way I would not react if I met it in a Christian writing. I am being hypocritical there - and suspect that a large amount of Christian reaction to apparently New Age things is likewise hypocritical.

Later still it talks about us becoming 'wizards' - and again I react. But again I look to see what it is actually saying, and find that the use of the term, wizard, is purely metaphorical, the writer drawing thoughts out of the pantomime, *Wizard of Oz*, in much the same way that many Christian preachers use a biblical text as a launch pad for an idea they want to get across.

So one key to dealing with this kind of writing is to try to see just what the writer is trying to say, in context.

I have dealt with response to human potential teaching above. I reacted to the fact that the course omitted God - but rather more than I react to when parliamentary debates, or Daily Mail leaders, or business studies textbooks, or whatever, leave out God. Again, this is hypocrisy. I reacted to the emphasis on mechanisms (Do such and such, and you will have a successful business or home life), since mechanisms without the Holy Spirit are dead. But mechanisms as such are not evil, and with the Holy Spirit can be fruitful. So some of these mechanisms could even be of great use to Christians, if used wisely and with prayer. (There was no hint of occult in the mechanisms.)

What I think the writers had discovered was part of what the Reformers called God's Common Grace: the blessing he pours out in his grace on all people. These blessings are available to all who will access them since they are part of the way the Creation has been designed, though they find their full meaning, of course, in the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. So, as long as they are not occult activities or involve the worship of other gods, many of these activities are valid for Christians.

The danger of this type of writing is not that it is New Age but that, in leaving out God, it may distract people away from God. If they find they can solve their problems without God, then surely people will be less inclined to come to God. Others have dealt with this kind of argument at greater length: but basically it seems to be centred on the idea that we should keep people in suffering in the hope that they turn to Christ as a way out of their sufferings. I don't really agree with that line. On the contrary, if people do try the human potential route, then sooner or later most will find it does not fully meet their needs

and, like the rich young ruler, they will know there is still something missing. Since they have tried all the world has to offer, perhaps they will be more inclined to seek God.

So, as I suggested above, we should not believe all that claims to be New Age is in fact New Age. Much is not that which we should react strongly against. What I am asking for is not acceptability for the New Age, but a discerning attitude among God's people, which does not react hypocritically but responds with heavenly wisdom.

7. Conclusion

Much Christian response to the New Age so far has evidenced more heat than light. I have sought to bring a little light to bear, by first suggesting, in Part 1, that we are entering a new era that the world has never known before, and showing that there is a very valid groundswell of concern (Greenery) that recognises this fact and also recognises the evils inherent in the Modern World View. In this part we have examined the New Age itself. The New Age cannot be defined, but it can be characterised by asking ourselves, "What is there about it that is historically new and is worthy of the strong reaction that Christians have towards it?" On examining the views that a number of Christian writers have about the New Age, my answer to this question is, "The New Age is the offering of occult and false religion as an answer to the world-view crisis in this new era in which we find ourselves."

We have also considered what our response to the New Age should be. First I have suggested that a number of common responses should be avoided, since they are negative and some of them are based on fear rather than faith. Then I have suggested a number of positive responses, each one appropriate to a specific situation. The article ended with a number of case studies.

Lesslie Newbigin puts forward the idea that there are three ways to see the universe: as billiard balls, as an ocean or as a net. In the first, we see the universe as composed of a large number of individuals; this is classic liberalism and is the main assumption of the idolatrous Modern World View. Each person is a law unto himself, and the highest ideal is to escape all constraints. The second is a reaction against the billiard ball view, seeing all things as part of one vast endless stream of life and existence, without individuality. This is the view of Hinduism, and is that which the New Age tends to adopt. The net is the relational view: there are individual things in the world, but they are in close relationship with each other. This is the Christian view, and is also the Green view. It is because of these relationships that we have responsibility for other things and people - and humankind has been made steward of all there is by a loving God.

I am no expert on the New Age, though I am a Green. What I have offered is my own personal view, so I do not claim that these suggestions are complete, nor even correct. I offer them merely as an example of the type of clarification of thinking that is urgently needed in Christian responses to the New Age, and also to Greenery. If this article stimulates others who are more expert into thinking more clearly along the lines I have suggested then I will be content.

We alone have the ultimate solution. The creation waits with eager longing to see the sons of God revealed and active, since they are the ones who will bring it its healing. And they are the instruments by which all things will be brought together under their

rightful head, even Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:19, Eph. 1:10). But so few of us are engaged in the Green activity that will help to bring this about. Instead many of us flee from anything Green, fearing tainting with the New Age. How sad! May God have mercy on us.

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