

WORLD RELIGIONS AND OTHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

CLASS 3: NEW AGE / EASTERN MYSTICISM / ANIMISM

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this series is not just to look at all the religions which are out there, but to look at what others believe and how it has infiltrated the church.
- There are many subtle beliefs which have come into the church and have been believed and practiced without regards to their origin or consequence.
- As we look through these various beliefs and systems which are put in place, it would benefit us to notice why they came about, when they came about and what is the overall goal.
- It is by having a better understanding of where people are coming from and where they think they are going that Christians can show them the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ.
- Just like Paul, we can go to the unsaved world, not agreeing with them but acknowledging their desire for religious or spiritual things.
- **Acts 17:22** “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”
- From this observation, Paul was able to show them who the true and living God was.
- From the onset, it is vital to understand that one cannot be “reasoned” into heaven.
- It is not upon their agreement with you that they are wrong that their standing before God will change from enemy to friend.
- We know that the only truth which can rescue people from their sin is the truth of the gospel.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
 - March 2nd: Introduction and New Thought / Progressive Christianity
 - March 9th: PNG Mission Update
 - March 16th: Deism (God exists but is more of a clockmaker than an involved God)
 - **March 23rd: New Age Movement / Eastern Mysticism / Animism**
 - March 30th: Universalism / Annihilationism (all are saved and there is no hell)
 - April 6th: Moralism / Humanism (as distinct from religion) **Matt Tomlinson teaching*
 - April 13th: Hyper-dispensationalism / ultra-dispensationalism / KJV only
 - April 20th: Resurrection Sunday Celebration–No Class

MYSTICISM¹

- A person who claims to attain, or believes in the possibility of attaining, insight into mysteries transcending ordinary human knowledge, as by direct communication with the divine or immediate intuition in a state of spiritual ecstasy. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
- Mysticism can be found in many religions. Often it involves asceticism of some type and seeks union with God. It is certainly right to want to draw close to God, but mystical union with God is different from the type of intimacy with God to which Christians are called. Mysticism tends to seek out the experience and is sometimes seen as secretive or elitist. Christians are aware of and engaged in spiritual realities ([Ephesians 1:3](#); [6:10–19](#)) and biblical Christianity involves spiritual experience, but intimacy with God is intended for all Christians and is not veiled by any sort of mysterious practice. Drawing near to God is nothing mysterious or elitist but involves things like regular prayer, studying God’s Word, worshiping God, and fellowshiping with other believers.

Eastern Mysticism²

- Eastern mysticism is a broad term that encompasses various spiritual and philosophical traditions from Asia, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and certain forms of Zen and Sufism. While each tradition has its unique teachings, they share several core beliefs:
 1. **Interconnectedness of All Things** – The idea that all existence is interconnected and that separateness is an illusion (e.g., Hinduism’s *Brahman*, Buddhism’s *dependent origination*, Taoism’s *Tao*).
 2. **Inner Enlightenment and Self-Realization** – The goal of spiritual practice is to awaken to one’s true nature, often through meditation, self-inquiry, or devotion (e.g., Hindu *moksha*, Buddhist *nirvana*, Zen’s *satori*).
 3. **Transcendence of the Ego** – The ego or individual self (*atman*, *anatman*) is seen as a construct that must be overcome to experience ultimate reality or unity with the divine.
 4. **The Illusory Nature of Reality (Maya)** – Many traditions teach that the material world is a temporary or illusory manifestation, and true reality lies beyond ordinary perception.
 5. **Karma and Reincarnation** – Actions in this life affect future experiences, either in this lifetime or the next (common in Hinduism and Buddhism).
 6. **The Middle Way and Balance** – Many Eastern traditions emphasize balance, whether it is Taoism’s *yin-yang*, Buddhism’s *Middle Way*, or Confucian harmony in social order.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-mysticism.html>

² From an AI search engine... ChatGPT

7. **Direct Experience Over Dogma** – Mystical traditions emphasize direct personal experience (e.g., meditation, intuition, or altered states of consciousness) over intellectual understanding or religious dogma.
8. **Non-Duality (Advaita/Voidness)** – Many teachings point to an ultimate state beyond duality (e.g., good/evil, self/other), often described as *Brahman* (Hinduism), *Sunyata* (Buddhism), or *Tao* (Taoism).

Before you start imagining monks in saffron robes chanting mantras on mountain peaks, let's cut to the chase. **Eastern Mysticism** isn't about escaping life; it's about *seeing* life as it truly is. It's the art of experiencing reality without the filter of your neurotic mind running commentary on everything. It's less about achieving something and more about unlearning all the nonsense you've been conditioned to believe.³

What is Christian Mysticism?

- Christian mysticism is a difficult term to define. It is often thought of as the practice of the experiential knowledge of God. The term can also apply to the mystery of the Eucharist in Roman Catholicism as well as so-called hidden meanings of Scripture, such as in Gnosticism. Although it is true that Christians experience God, Christian mysticism tends to elevate experiential knowledge and revel in the mysterious, *focusing on mysticism for spiritual growth. Mysticism tends to be an individual, subjective practice whereas biblical Christianity is both an individual relationship with God and one that is necessarily lived out in community.* There is no such thing as a solo Christian. Not all of what could be considered "Christian mysticism" is wrong, but much of it is, and a focus on mysticism can certainly lead one into error.⁴
- A **Christian mystic** is someone who seeks a deep, experiential union with God through direct, personal encounters rather than solely through doctrine or ritual. Christian mysticism emphasizes **inner transformation, contemplation, and divine intimacy**, often involving prayer, meditation, visions, and ecstatic experiences.⁵

NEW AGE MOVEMENT

- The expression "New Age" came into existence in the 1970s and 1980s. It was promoted by the circulation of the *New Age Journal* and a book by Mark Satin called *New Age Politics*. Marilyn Ferguson's best-

³ <https://medium.com/@akul.pandove/eastern-mysticism-101-unlocking-the-secrets-of-inner-power-in-a-chaotic-world-37a7d61bbc80#:~:text=At%20its%20core%2C%20Eastern%20Mysticism,your%20labels%2C%20and%20your%20identity.>

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-mysticism.html>

⁵ From an AI search engine... ChatGPT

selling *Aquarian Conspiracy* was a presentation of the social agenda and philosophical vision of the New Age. Ferguson's writing attained status as the unofficial scripture of the movement.⁶

- New Age thinking has its roots, then, in Eastern mysticism, which attempts to bypass the mind. There is a new organ of perception—the third eye—which gives spiritual light. One needs to get to the “psychic self” by training one's self to ignore messages from the mind or to see that the mind is actually achieving “cosmic consciousness.” The mind can create reality.⁷

Distinct beliefs

- All is one...or otherwise called monism (not monotheism). This holds that everything comes from and is the same substance...from man to God to the trees to clouds etc.
- All is God...or otherwise known as pantheism...God is everything and all things (including people) are gods themselves.
- All religions are essentially one...there is no one way to God, no fundamental truth
- Reincarnation...the soul can be born multiple times in varying human bodies and be improving
- Enlightenment...true inner enlightenment comes from mystical experiences with the divine...which is inside each of us...so the greatest achievement is knowing yourself and being fully awakened to what is already in you...

How do we see this in Christianity?⁸

- **Law of Attraction**
 - The thing that we desire the most, if we are positive and have faith, we will be able to manifest that in our own life. Think prosperity gospel (though no gospel at all), word of faith movement.
 - Essentially, they teach that all true Christians have a divine right to good health and wealth. They also believe in our ability to speak our wants into existence so long as we are faithful enough.⁹
- **Follow your heart**
 - When your emotions and/or experiences have authority over what we know to be true from the Word of God.
 - This is probably the greatest appeal to people...they can rely on their emotions to lead them. The dark side of this truth is that the more you move into your experiences and emotions, the farther you move away from Christ.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/new-age-movement.html>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ List taken from <https://dailyshepursues.com/common-new-age-beliefs-church/> ... it has been modified for this study

⁹ <https://thesetapartwalk.com/the-new-age-movement-has-infiltrated-the-church/>

- **We are little or mini gods**
 - Since the Bible says we are children of God, people like Copeland, Osteen, Oprah, etc. say that we too are gods. We can bring things into existence and have control over earthly and heavenly things.
- **All roads lead to heaven**
 - Since we all have some spiritual light in us, we just need to follow our own light and that is what will lead us to our ultimate peace.
- **Holism or Oneness**
 - All things are interconnected and there is a deeper reality which is unseen but that binds all things together. People must look for deeper meanings in all things to find out what the real truth is.
- **New or direct revelation**
 - Someone who has a word from the Lord or any other revelation that supersedes or otherwise does not line up with Scripture.

How popular are new age beliefs in the church?

- According to a 2018 survey¹⁰:
- Most American adults self-identify as Christians. But many Christians also hold what are sometimes characterized as “New Age” beliefs – including belief in reincarnation, astrology, psychics and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects like mountains or trees. Many Americans who are religiously unaffiliated also have these beliefs.
- Overall, roughly six-in-ten [Christian] American adults accept at least one of these New Age beliefs. Specifically, four-in-ten believe in psychics and that spiritual energy can be found in physical objects, while somewhat smaller shares express belief in reincarnation (33%) and astrology (29%).
- Another interesting fact...8 out of 10 Christians who “believe in God as the Bible describes.”
- The New Age Movement is similar to a death by a thousand cuts. I don’t believe we can identify one deathblow. It is more like small compromises and questionable influences creeping into our churches that is turning believers away from biblical Christianity and in a full embrace of New Age thinking.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/#:~:text=But%20many%20Christians%20also%20hold,unaffiliated%20also%20have%20these%20beliefs.>

¹¹ <https://thesetapartwalk.com/the-new-age-movement-has-infiltrated-the-church/>

ANIMISM¹²

- Animism is the belief that all things—animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and even inanimate objects—possess a spiritual essence or consciousness. It is often considered one of the oldest spiritual perspectives, found in indigenous and tribal cultures worldwide.
- **Spiritual Presence in Everything** – Everything in nature has a spirit or soul (*anima*), including rocks, trees, rivers, and celestial bodies.
- **Interconnectedness** – Humans, animals, nature, and spirits are interconnected in a web of relationships. Respect and harmony with nature are essential.
- **Communication with Spirits** – Shamans, elders, or spiritual leaders often act as intermediaries, communicating with spirits through rituals, visions, or offerings.
- **Ancestral Reverence** – Ancestors continue to exist in a spiritual form and can influence the living world. They are often honored through rituals and ceremonies.
- **Sacred Places and Objects** – Certain locations (mountains, rivers, trees) and objects (totems, masks, talismans) are believed to hold special spiritual power.
- **Balance and Reciprocity** – Animistic traditions often emphasize living in harmony with nature and giving back to the spirits through rituals, respect, and sustainable living.

How has this come into modern Christianity?

1. Belief in Sacred Objects and Places

- Some Christians believe that certain objects (crosses, anointing oil, prayer cloths) carry **spiritual power** beyond symbolic meaning.
- Pilgrimages to places believed to have divine presence (*e.g., Lourdes, France; healing revival sites in the U.S.*).

2. Spiritual Warfare and Territorial Spirits

- Many **Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians** believe certain locations or objects can be spiritually “charged” by either good or evil forces.
- Practices like "**prayer walking**" (blessing land by walking around it) or **casting out territorial spirits** reflect animistic influences.

¹² From an AI search engine...ChatGPT

3. Healing and Protection Rituals

- Some Christian traditions, especially in **Appalachian folk Christianity**, use prayers, amulets, and charms for healing.
- The **laying on of hands** for healing in Pentecostalism resembles animistic healing rites.

4. Ancestor Veneration and Spiritual Communication

- While not mainstream, some African-American Christian traditions (e.g., in Hoodoo or Southern Baptist churches) honor ancestors by speaking their names in prayer.
- Some believe that deceased relatives act as spiritual guides or intercessors, similar to Catholic **saints**.

Animists generally believe that the ultimate goal of life is to achieve as much peace and prosperity out of this life as possible and to promote harmony between the material and spirit worlds. The way they go after this is to do all they can to appease the gods who are able to affect their earthy lives. They do this by learning what makes the gods happy, and performing the deeds to accomplish it.¹³

WHAT IS A BIBLICAL RESPONSE AND HOW SHOULD WE THINK?

- The Christian should desire a direct experience with God. Your daily walk with the Lord must be more than just acquiring and keeping knowledge in your head. There must be some of that knowledge making its way into your heart and into your actions.
- The Bible is full of truth that once ingested must come out in the reality of our daily lives.
- **James 2:20** “But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”
- **Romans 6:5-7** “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”
- **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
- **Philippians 4:13** “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”
- **2 Peter 1:8** “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **2 Corinthians 3:18** “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

¹³ <https://www.marketfaith.org/animism-in-todays-world-2/>

- **2 Corinthians 4:16** “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”
- By experiential or experimental theology, we mean Christ-centered theology which stresses that for salvation, sinners must by faith have a personal, experiential (that is, experienced) Spirit-worked knowledge of Christ, and, by extension, of all the great truths of Scripture. Thus we must emphasize, as the Puritans did, that the Holy Spirit causes the objective truths about Christ and His work to be experienced in the heart and life of sinners.¹⁴
- We should not read our Bibles and pray and have fellowship with one another and expect to see or feel nothing. Our faith and journey with the Lord are not based upon our feelings but they are not absent either.
- We should be measuring our experienced knowledge against what the Bible has to say. Our lives should be changed and in the process of changing more into the image of Christ.
- This is done through our spiritual disciplines or how our life is centered around God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, other believers, prayer, etc.
- **Psalms 1:1-3** “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.”
- As we delight ourselves in the Word of God and meditate on it, keep it in our minds and hearts, we are going to experience and see fruit in our lives.
- Christian meditation is not about emptying our minds of all things but about filling them with the truth of God’s Word.
 - **Psalms 119:11** “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”
 - Treasure means hiding or store up. Heart here means inner man, mind, will, understanding...
 - What is the hopeful outcome of the one who keeps his mind on God’s Word...He will not be sinning against God in the future...that is his desire.
- There is a tangible reality that comes from knowing and actively submitting to the Word of the Lord.
- This is done in both our private life before God and our community or public life with other believers.
- Robert Burns defined such religion as “Christianity brought home to men’s business and bosoms,” and said the principle on which it rests is “that Christianity should not only be known, and understood, and believed, but also felt, and enjoyed, and practically applied.”¹⁵

¹⁴ <https://joelbeeke.org/what-is-experiential-theology/#:~:text=By%20experiential%20or%20experimental%20theology,the%20great%20truths%20of%20Scripture.>

¹⁵ <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/what-experiential-preaching>