Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson, contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, has been on Probe's radar for over ten years. As Oprah's spiritual advisor and proponent of the New Age "A Course in Miracles," she is a false teacher according to biblical standards.

Here are links to articles that mention her, as well as related articles you may find interesting:

A Course in Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation

> "Is A Course in Miracles Heretical? How Do I Talk to My Friend Who Believes It?"
> "Your Article on A Course in Miracles Is Very Disturbing"

Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique

The False Teaching of "The Secret" – A Christian Evaluation

Christianity, Zen and the Martial Arts

Zen and the Martial Arts

In the beginning of the movie *Enter the Dragon* Bruce Lee admonishes his young disciple to feel, not think! He wants to see "emotional content," not anger, in developing his practice. Technique is like a finger pointing a way to the

moon, but we must not focus on the finger or we will miss the heavenly glory. Lee sends his pupil away after several slaps on the head, convinced he has mastered the lesson.



This scene illustrates the close connection between the martial arts and Zen Buddhism. Lee's lesson was entirely Zen in approach. Its object was the perfection of a kick technique with enthusiasm; a mere mechanical performance was insufficient. The student must feel his art as well as accurately execute it. This means the technique should be as natural and unconscious as breathing. It must become second nature. On the other hand, Lee's object lesson was not really about kicking but feeling as a means to enlightenment or nirvana, a state of realization that the self does not exist.

But does practicing the martial arts mean we must also adopt Zen Buddhist practice as well? Can we separate the martial arts from Zen practice and belief and embrace a Christian approach? In order to do this we must first distinguish the goal of Zen from the martial arts and then see how the martial arts may be practiced from a Christian perspective.

Zen believes that words cannot adequately convey meaning. They are only the sign posts on a map and not the destination, or the finger pointing to the moon but not the moon itself. Zen relies on flashes of insight connected to feelings or intuition. Zen adopts the Taoist view in world religions asserting that "he that knows does not speak and he that speaks does not know." This means that the truth or enlightenment they are seeking cannot be expressed in words. It cannot be found in a book such as the Bible in Christianity, the Koran in Islam, or the Torah in Judaism, or even the sutras found in other forms of Buddhism, but must be experienced. They have little place for theory, but stress

action and encounter with the practical world. Buddha mind transmits only to Buddha mind. They do not just talk about Nirvana but viscerally pursue it.

Zen means a way of meditation, a method for attaining enlightenment, not gradually as in other sects of Buddhism, but suddenly through shock and illogic. Zen practitioners are the shock troops of Buddhism. Zen monks are known for their acts of irreverence by burning Buddhist scriptures or defacing statues of Buddha, all designed to demonstrate their protest against theoretical learning. Truth is found in ordinary life and the practical as illustrated by the movie the *Karate Kid* whose main protagonist must sand the floor or paint the fence and wax the car before he can learn to throw a punch. Karate was not something that could be learned from a book.

Zen in America

In their practicality Zen adherents are not unlike Americans, which explains Zen's popularity in the United States as part of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s. Americans do not like theory, metaphysics, and laborious arguments, but are practical, to the point; action oriented, not cerebral. Americans are pithy in their word usage and prefer axioms and pearls of wisdom succinctly stated as opposed to the long winded arguments of scholars and professors.

Zen relies on dialectical thinking or paradox to frustrate traditional logic in order to shock its followers into realization. Zen uses the *koan*, an insoluble riddle that can only be understood through persistent contemplation and application to one's life. For example, a famous koan asks, "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" The smart-alecky response of snapping your fingers together like Bart Simpson will earn you a smack on the head or a rap with a bamboo stick from the master and a seat at the back of the class.

Zen does not emphasize detachment from life, as earlier Buddhism did, but the embrace of life. People learn not by retreat but through immersion. There is no sacred and secular distinction as in traditional religions, a point a monk may prove by burning a statue of the Buddha and declaring, "there are no holy images."{1}

The koan is learned by intuition and cannot be articulated in words. Koans are not meant to have strict logical answers you can verbalize, but only understand for yourself in meditation. Pointing to a flag waving in a monastery, the monk says, "What is moving, the flag or the wind?" The answer is neither; the mind is moving.{2}

Zen appealed to soldiers in Japan and was adopted by the military creed known as Bushido where it was mixed with the martial arts around AD 1300.{3} It is this Japanese version that is most familiar to Americans. However, Zen originates with the Indian sage Bodhidharma who brought the message that cannot be spoken to China in AD 520.{4} In Zen we see a clear connection between Taoism, the ancient Chinese religion, and Hinduism. Both believe in a similar view of God as ultimate reality or the impersonal principle of the universe. In popular culture we know this as "the force" from *Star Wars*, the active energy of the universe that animates all things. In theological studies we call this pantheism or the belief that all things are God.

Separating Zen and the Martial Arts

Legendary history says Bodhidharma brought the martial arts with him in the spread of Zen across China, but modern scholarship notes that the martial arts were practiced in China prior to the coming of Bodhidharma.{5} The founders of the famous Shaolin monastery were probably military men who retired to monastic life in AD 497, and most monks came from the general population where the martial arts were already

practiced before the spread of Buddhism. Monasteries were sources of wealth in ancient China and required defending. The martial arts scholar Donn Draeger also notes that the martial arts were established in Japan prior to the acceptance of Buddhism, and the joining of these two practices represents a modern innovation.{6} These historical facts lead to the conclusion that the martial arts were practiced centuries before the arrival of Zen.

The martial arts or fighting arts have a long and diverse history in ancient China, India, and Greece that certainly precedes Zen or the founding of Shaolin and long predates the Samurai by thousands of years. These arts include hand to hand fighting, wrestling, boxing, and weapons use such as sword fighting and even gladiatorial combat training.

There is certainly a synthesis created between Zen and the martial arts in Shaolin and later in the Code of the Samurai, but the fighting arts of all kinds precede Zen. Historically speaking there is no intrinsic connection between Zen and the martial arts. People practiced these arts before Zen and will continue to practice them without Zen today.

Also, philosophically speaking there is no necessary connection between Zen and the martial arts. Zen is a method to achieve enlightenment through shock and illogic that awakens followers into the realization of unity of essence with ultimate reality, which means emptying and loss of self. The martial arts, on the other hand, were developed for the practical reason of self-defense, sport and warfare.

Given the austerity, paradox, practicality, and composure of Zen disciples in the face of death, the warrior appears naturally attracted to it as a philosophy. Draeger points out that Zen contributed to the fighting technique of the Samurai by helping him empty his mind of all distractions and prepare him for the rigors of military life. It enabled him to transcend mere physical technique.{7} However, there is

nothing intrinsic to either system that makes their practice necessary to each other, any more than fencing and the fighting techniques of the knights of the Middle Ages must involve Christianity. Zen's contribution to the martial arts is a convenience or incidental and not a philosophical necessity. This means the two can be logically and practically separated without harm or inconsistency to either system. It is possible to engage in martial arts without eastern religious philosophy. What Christians are responsible for, is to find martial arts instructors who teach the techniques without the Zen aspect.

Christianity and Zen

A basic principle of apologetics is finding the common ground between two different systems. This includes similar things such as beliefs and morals. This allows for a conversation and friendship to develop. Do not underestimate the power of friendship and empathy. In the final analysis we are not about winning arguments, or breaking bones for that matter, but winning people, individuals whom God loves; the hardest hearts can be softened by a little kindness and understanding.

There may be many points of contact between Christianity and Zen such as love, truth, realism, and even paradox, but the one I find most interesting is individualism. Both beliefs place a strong emphasis on individuality and respect for individual dignity in terms of self-discipline and self-defense, a common ground where both Christians and Zen Buddhists alike share their interests in the martial arts. And we must make it clear that the martial arts are not the sole province of Zen teachers. Christians and Zen Buddhists simply have a common interest in these techniques for the purpose of self-growth, exercise, and sport. One need not be either a Buddhist or Christian to perform the martial arts, but both may use them for their own purposes.

The second principle of apologetics is to define the differences between the two systems and seek for the resolution in Christ. There are many differences between Zen and Christianity. Zen is a faith that seeks enlightenment through self-realization that there is no self. Christianity does not pursue enlightenment, but salvation. Buddhism believes that the individual self is an illusion, but Christianity believes the self is very real and very sinful. Christianity seeks to reconcile the self to a personal God through Jesus Christ. Christianity does seek to empty the old sinful self and replace it with a new self made in the image of Christ. This is not accomplished through works or meditation or following the Eightfold Path, but strictly by faith.

Buddhists do not believe in a personal all powerful God, but an impersonal force. Christians believe in a personal creator God who stands outside of the created world, making reconciliation impossible in terms of human effort. Buddhism stresses the importance of human works, discipline and right attitude and actions to achieve Nirvana. Christianity says salvation is impossible unless God saves us. Buddhism wants to empty the mind and escape the world of change. Christianity wants to save the world for the glory of God and fill the mind with his word.

“The Buddha” means “one who is awakened,” which suggests that his title is self-earned and self-appointed. All that the Buddha accomplished has come from “within,” from his own abilities and merit.

“The Christ” means “the chosen one,” which suggests that his title was given to him and not earned. It comes from grace and from “without” or “outside” of him. One man leads to a system of works and the other to a system of grace. This point should never be confused.

Christianity and the Martial Arts

The primary problem for Christians in approaching the martial arts is violence. The martial arts are fighting techniques that can be used for several purposes: the most obvious is self-defense, then exercise, and finally sport.

We approach these techniques with the same Christian principle that we use in our approach to any other subject: we are free in Christ! Paul declares that we are saved in Christ and the world is ours. “For all things belong to you, whether . . . the world or life or death or things present or things to come: all things belong to you and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). This means we use the gifts and talents at our disposal not for self-glorification but for the glory of God. Remember the first principle of Christian love: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” (Matt. 22: 37). Practice the martial arts with a commitment that reflects love for God. “We do all things for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Let the two greatest commandments guide your behavior: love God and your neighbor as yourself.

These principles do include self-defense. It is not unloving to defend yourself or an innocent person from an unjust attack. Self-defense has been an accepted point in Christian theology for centuries. This principle has been part of “just war thinking” and simply means Christians are justified under certain conditions to defend themselves and innocent people against aggressive parties who will take advantage of them. In fact, not to defend ourselves or the innocent through inaction when we are capable of intervening to stop or prevent assault is equally considered as wrong as the assault itself.

The martial arts present a much more suitable and even peaceful alternative to self-defense than say a handgun, whose ease of use can be lethal. In the martial arts one has the advantage of training and discipline that act as a hedge to

immature and reckless behavior. It takes years to learn these skills and with it one is taught self-control, discipline, and values, especially the value of human life.

What is completely unacceptable is the idea of training remorseless killing machines, like the sensei from the *Karate Kid* movie who taught his pupils to crush their opponents and "show no mercy." Such a view will only lead to your own destruction. For it is not without reason that Jesus said, "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). But, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5: 7). Mercy is the hallmark of the Christian. We learn in order to serve, just as Jesus said, "The Son of Man has not come to destroy life but to save it" (Luke 9:56). Those pursuing martial arts should use their skills in the service of life to achieve discipline and protection and to offer themselves as role models of dignity and responsibility to the younger generation.

Notes

1. John Lewis, *Religions of the World Made Simple*, rev. ed., (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 49.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 50.

4. Houston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 128.

5. Salvatore Canzonieri, "History of Chinese Martial Arts: Jin Dynasty to the Period of Disunity." *Han Wei Wushu* (February-March 1998), 3 (9); Ibid., "The Emergence of the Chinese Martial Arts." *Han Wei Wushu* (23).

6. Donn F. Draeger, *Modern Bujutsu and Budo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 128.

7. Donn Draeger and Robert W. Smith, *Comprehensive Asian*

Fighting Arts (Tokyo: Kodansha International, LTD, 1980), 95.

© 2011 Probe Ministries

Avatar: New Technology, Old Message

James Cameron's hit movie *Avatar* presents dazzling new animation technology and special effects yet an old message and a familiar story: when mankind embraces the pantheist worldview, there will result a oneness with nature. This enlightened union will lead to a life of peace and paradise upon the planet. The title of the movie itself gives its message away—an avatar in Hinduism is an incarnation or the descent of a deity to earth.

One of the most popular gods to appear as an avatar is Vishnu, the preserver god and one of the three main gods in the Hindu Pantheon. There are ten famous manifestations of Vishnu in the sacred writings of Hinduism [Jonathan Smith, ed. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of* Religion (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 96.].

In this movie the alien race, the blue-skinned Na'Vi, live in a forest paradise. Although they are technologically primitive, they are superior in their understanding of true reality and nature itself. They live an enlightened existence for they are in communion with Eywa, the "All Mother." Eywa is not a personal being, as with the Christian view of God, but an impersonal force made up of all things. Her force is concentrated in a large sacred tree in the middle of the sacred forest. The Na'Vi become one with Eywa when they attach their pony tails to one of her vines. In one scene, the hero

of the movie attempts to warn Eywa of the battle soon to come and asks for her help. However, he is told by his alien wife that Eywa is neutral and does not get involved in issues of justice. In the movie, death is encountered several times and the message is that at death, one's immaterial essence becomes one with Eywa. This is a clear presentation of the pantheist worldview and follows the same theme of such movies as *Pocahontas, Dances with Wolves,* and *Fern Gully*.

The conflict occurs when humans arrive on the planet and they, in contrast to the Na'Vi, are ignorant of Eywa and destroy the forest for monetary reasons. The army is portrayed as evil as they attempt to seize the sacred forest by force and mine the valuable minerals under the sacred tree. With primitive weapons, the alien beings defeat the well–armed humans and rescue their planet from destruction.

This movie is an evangelistic call for mankind to embrace the pantheistic worldview and attain oneness with the universe. As a result, peace will come and a harmonic paradise will be created. However, we must seriously question this message of hope. Pantheism is embraced in several countries. We must ask ourselves, have these countries attained a harmonic paradise? One nation that embraces the pantheistic worldview is India. Few would confidently state that Hinduism has brought a beautiful paradise in that nation.

Another important facet of pantheism is that nature takes precedence over human life. In India and Nepal, I have witnessed cows, monkeys, and even rats receiving better care than humans–and many are even worshipped while human beings remain secondary. Pantheism also denies the reality of this physical world and promotes the belief that the spirit world represents true reality. Thus, it in fact denies true reality. Finally, pantheism denies our humanity because it fails to acknowledge our individuality and sin nature. As a result, true transformation of human nature cannot occur through pantheism.

One of the valuable messages in *Avatar* is the value of caring for nature. This is one of the reasons many are attracted to this movie. The popularity of this pantheistic message points out a shortcoming of the Christian church in modern times. As Christians, we are taught in Genesis to care for creation and not exploit it. However, unlike pantheism, we do not worship nature; instead, we are called to be stewards of what God created. We are to value what God has created and use the earth's resources responsibly, not in a destructive, uncaring manner. We are to develop technology to improve our lives and use it in a manner that reflects care for the creation around us. Scripture provides a clear exhortation to the church to articulate the biblical view of the environment.

Avatar is another apologetic for pantheism, perhaps the favorite worldview of Hollywood. However, it presents a false hope for peace and paradise. The Christian message of hope must be proclaimed in a compelling manner if we hope to gain the attention of our culture. The challenge before us is to demonstrate that Christianity offers the true message of hope. First, the miraculous, sinless life of Christ and His resurrection demonstrates He is the Creator, not an impersonal force. The true message of eternal life and forgiveness of sin is found in Christ alone. This message must be defended. Second, the biblical principles of responsible use of technology and care for the environment must be demonstrated.

Finally, creation is in a fallen state as the Bible teaches. Romans 8:20-21 states, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Creation and mankind await the day nature will be restored fully and the curse of sin will be taken away. This will happen not as a result of embracing the false ideas of pantheism but with the coming of the king of creation, Jesus Christ. Since God will restore

creation, we should move in the direction of God's future restoration and carefully manage and restore areas we have destroyed.

© 2010 Probe Ministries

Confucius – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Patrick Zukeran considers the teachings of the greatest Eastern philosopher from a Christian perspective, analyzing their commonalities and differences.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Life of Confucius

Born in 550 B.C., Confucius is considered the greatest of all Eastern philosophers. His teachings are foundational to Asian cultures. His writings, *The Five Classics,* a collection of ancient Chinese literature, and *The Four Books*, a collection of his and his disciples' teachings, were for centuries the standard curriculum for Chinese education.

Confucius' teachings and biography were written many years after his death and were edited by his disciples. Although historians present various accounts of his life, there are some basic facts about which we are reasonably sure. From these basic facts, it is possible to outline the major events of his life.

Confucius lived during the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 256 B.C.) He was born in northern China in the Lu province into a

family of humble circumstances. His father died at a young age. Confucius began studying under the village tutor and, at the age of fifteen, devoted his life to study. He married at twenty but soon divorced his wife and had an aloof relationship with his son and daughter. In his twenties, he became a teacher and gathered a group of loyal disciples.

At this time, the land was divided among feudal lords. The moral and social order was in a state of decay. Confucius sought a way to restore both cultural and political order. He believed that reform would be accomplished by educating the leaders in the classics and his philosophy. He therefore sought a political position of influence, from which he could implement his principles.

When Confucius was fifty years old, tradition teaches that the Duke of Lu appointed him to a cabinet position. Several historians believe he eventually ascended to higher positions of public office. Due to political disagreements and internal conflicts, he resigned his post at fifty-five and left the province of Lu. He then traveled from state to state for thirteen years, seeking to persuade political leaders to adopt his teachings. Although many lords respected him, no one gave him a position. Discouraged by the lack of response, he devoted his final years to teaching and writing. Before his death in 479 B.C., he expressed his discouragement and disillusionment regarding his career.

However, his disciples were able to gain significant positions in government after his death. They modified his teachings and added their own insights and centuries such that Confucianism later shaped Chinese culture by becoming the official religion of China. The values he espoused of education, family loyalty, work ethic, value of traditions, conformity to traditional standards, honoring of ancestors, and unquestioning obedience to superiors remain entrenched in Asian culture.

There is much to appreciate regarding the life and teachings

of Confucius. Christians would agree with his philosophy of ethics, government responsibility, and social conduct on several points. These similarities provide bridges upon which we can build meaningful dialogue with those in East Asian Cultures. These values make East Asian people open to the message of Christ. Despite the similarities in ethics, there are some major differences between Christianity and Confucianism that are important to identify. This work will highlight these differences and provide ways we can effectively share Christ with those in East Asian cultures.

The Metaphysics of Confucius

Confucianism, as its founder taught, is not a religion in the traditional sense; rather, it is an ethical code. Chinese culture was steeped in the religion of animism, a belief that gods and spirits dwelt in natural formations. Along with an animistic worldview, there was a belief in ancestor worship. The spirits of the dead needed to be honored and cared for by the living family members.

However, Confucius avoided spiritual issues in his teachings. Although he believed in spirits and the supernatural, he did not feel the need to devote extensive efforts in teaching about them. Rather, he was humanistic and rationalistic in his outlook. According to David Noss, author of *A History of the World's Religions*, Confucius' "position on matters of faith was this: whatever seemed contrary to common sense in popular tradition and whatever did not serve any discoverable social purpose, he regarded coldly."{1} The answer to the cultural and social problems was found in humanity itself, not in anything supernatural. This is further exhibited in the following three references:

1) A disciple of Confucius wrote, "The master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits"{2}

2) Confucius himself stated, "To devote oneself earnestly to

one's duty to humanity, and while respecting the spirits, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."{3}

3) In the Waley translation of the *Analects*, Confucius stated, "Our master's views concerning culture and the outward insignia of goodness, we are permitted to hear; but about man's nature and the ways of heaven, he will not tell us anything at all."{4}

In the Confucian system a divine being does not have a significant role; his philosophy is man-centered and relies on self-effort. Man is sufficient to attain the ideal character through education, self-effort, and self-reflection. His system articulated the proper conduct in relationships, ceremony, and government. The core problem of mankind according to Confucius is that people are not educated and do not know how to conduct themselves properly in their societal roles. The chief goal of life is to become educated and live a moral life.

However, Confucius acknowledges a supreme power which established the moral order of the universe. This he refers to as the "Mandate of Heaven." The "Mandate of Heaven" may also refer to fate and events occurring in life which are beyond the control of the individual. The just rule and the virtuous man live in accord with this moral order. This is the moral order that lies behind the Confucian ethical system. One must be careful not to violate the will of heaven. Confucius wrote, "He who put himself in the wrong with Heaven has no means of expiation left."{5} Some scholars believe the uses of the term reveals that Confucius was referring at times to a supreme being.{6} After his death, Confucianism evolved, combining with Chinese traditional religions and Buddhism to add a spiritual component.

In contrast, Christianity is God-centered. It is built on a relationship with a personal God who is involved in the world. Confucius focused on life here on this earth. Jesus focused on

life in eternity. For Jesus, what happens in eternity has ramifications for life here on earth. In Matthew 6:19 Jesus stated, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Here we see a contrast in the perspectives of Jesus and Confucius.

The Ethics of Confucius

Three key principles are emphasized in the teachings of Confucius: the principle of Li, the principle of Jen, and the principle of Chun-Tzu. The term Li has several meanings which are often translated as propriety, reverence, courtesy, ritual, or the ideal standard of conduct. It is what Confucius believed to be the ideal standard of religious, moral, and social conduct.

The second key concept is the principle of Jen. It is the fundamental virtue of Confucian teaching. Jen is the virtue of goodness and benevolence. It is expressed through recognition of value and concern in others regardless of their rank or class. In the *Analects*, Confucius summarizes the principle of Jen in this statement often called the silver rule: “Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”{7} Li provides the structure for social interaction; Jen makes it a moral system.

The third important concept is that of Chun-Tzu, the idea of the true gentleman. It is the man who lives by the highest ethical standards. The gentleman displays five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence.{8} His relationships are described as follows: as a son he is always loyal, as a father he is just and kind, as an official he is loyal and faithful, as a husband he is righteous and just, and as a friend, he is faithful and tactful.{9} If all men lived by the principles of Li and Jen

and strove to the character of the true gentlemen, justice, and harmony would rule the empire.

The Christian would find himself in agreement with many of Confucius' ethical principles and virtues. A Christian would also agree with many of the character qualities of the true gentleman and seek to develop those qualities.

What accounts for the similarity in ethics in Confucianism and other religious systems is that which Paul states in Romans 2: within every man there exists a God-given conscience or natural law that guides our moral conduct. This is because we are created in the image of God, and thus we reflect His character. However, similarity in ethical codes does not mean the religions are the same.

The key difference can be identified by examining the silver rule of Confucius in contrast with the greatest commandment of Christ. Confucian law is summarized by the silver rule; however, Jesus summarizes his teachings this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:38.) Confucius believed that in order to truly achieve the principles of Li, Jen, and the character of the true gentleman, one must look within oneself. Jesus takes His teaching a step further. All His principles revolve first around a relationship with God. We only truly love our fellow man and live the righteous life God calls us to after our nature is transformed by the work of God's Holy Spirit which comes to indwell all who trust in Christ.

Nature of Man

The Confucian philosophy is built on the foundational belief in the goodness of human nature.{10} The *Analects* state, "The Master said, 'Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it was at our side.'"{11}

He further taught that all individuals are capable of attaining the highest virtue. He stated, “Has anyone ever managed to do Good with his whole might even as long as the space of a single day? I think not. Yet I for my part have never seen anyone give up such an attempt because he had not the strength to go on.”{12} In other words, all individuals are capable through self-effort to attain the ideal goodness.

Confucian disciple Mencius further develops this stating, “Man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward.”{13} This innate goodness can be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and discipline. Study in the six arts, which include ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics, develop one’s character.

However, despite man being naturally good, Confucius faced reality honestly. He questioned whether it was possible to ever truly attain to the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, “I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness.”{14} He said of himself, “As to being a divine sage or even a good man, far be it from me to make any such claim.”{15} He further stated, “The master said, the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them.”{16} However, if man by nature is good, why can we not attain that which should be natural to us?

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God and was thus originally good. However, because of the fall in Genesis 3, man is now sinful and in rebellion toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God, and he is driven to please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, “I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out.” As Confucius observed, no man is able to live up to the standards of the “True Gentleman” or God’s commands because man’s nature is sinful and in need of transformation.

According to the Bible, good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One's nature is transformed because God's Spirit indwells an individual. Although the Christian is not capable of living out the principles of God's law flawlessly, he is not left to live a holy life on his own strength. God provides man the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to enable man to live in obedience to God's law.

Relationships

Central to Confucius' teaching are relationships and social roles. There are five great relationships.{17} If these attitudes are practiced, there will be harmony among all:

1. Kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son

2. Gentility in the eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger

3. Righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife

4. Humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors

5. Benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects

The most important relationship is the family as it is the basic unit of all humanity. Consistent with the pantheistic world view, he did not believe in an individual self or soul. Rather, roles and relationships define a person. The goal of living is to achieve harmony by acting appropriately within those roles and relationships because the harmony of relationships within the family can extend into the life of the community and the world. The way individuals relate to their family members influences how they treat members of the community. This, in turn, affects relationships beyond the community. Thus, harmonious family relationships lead to

harmonious relationships in the community. If there is discord in the family, this will likewise carry over into the community.

In the family unit, the father is the key figure. He must be a good example to his sons. It is the son's duty to obey without questioning and honor his father even after his father's death. When the father dies, obedience is then given to the oldest brother. Confucius stated, "Meng I Tzu asked about the treatment of parents. The Master said, 'Never disobey! . . . While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to ritual.'"{18}

Confucius taught that government should be for the people. Feudal lords are to be responsive to the needs of the people they govern. If the rulers lived by the highest principles, the people would then follow, and there would be reform from the greatest to the least. The duty of those in subordinate positions is to be unquestioningly loyal to their superior. Confucius stated, "It is said that if good people work for a country for a hundred years, it is possible to overcome violence and eliminate killing. This saying is indeed true."{19} Confucius believed that a good society would be achieved through education.

There are points of agreement between Confucius and the Bible. Confucius believed the virtues he espoused are lived out in relationships. The same is true for Christianity; our relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with one another. The truth of the Christian life is lived out in a community, not in isolation. The family is the key social unit, and the father is the leader of the family. However, Christianity takes relationships one step further than Confucius. Not only can we have the five relationships espoused by Confucius, we can also have a personal relationship with God. It is from this connection that our earthly relationships find their greatest meaning.

A Final Critique

There is much in the teachings of Confucius that I have found commendable. His moral values often parallel those taught in the Bible. As previously mentioned, the Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God, and, therefore, we reflect His moral character. His moral law code is embedded on our hearts (Rom. 2). Most people of Asian descent may not be strict adherents to Confucianism, but they are all influenced by his philosophy. Anyone seeking to serve in Asian cultures would find it worthwhile to read his works. Confucianism is very adaptable and fluid in its structure. That has been a weakness, but it has also a strength of the system since it allows Confucianism to join other inclusive religious systems. There are several significant differences, and, I believe, deficiencies within Confucian philosophy.

First, Confucianism falls short as a comprehensive life view because it fails to address several key issues. The Confucian system does not answer the key questions such as, Why does the universe exist? How do we explain its origin? What is the meaning of mankind's existence in the universe? What happens after death? These are universal questions that must be addressed. Man is a spiritual being, and this philosophy leaves one spiritually void. The Bible teaches that God has set eternity in the heart of men (Eccl. 3:11.) The longing for spiritual answers is a universal need. For this reason, Confucian philosophy eventually combined with Chinese Folk religion and Buddhism. Nonetheless, it still fails to provide complete answers.

Second, Confucius taught there was an overarching morality and will called the "Mandate of Heaven" which guided the universe. The Mandate of Heaven is the moral order established by heaven. Some believe Confucius was referring to an impersonal force; others believe he was referring to a personal being. In either case, Confucius felt the heavens (or the one in heaven)

do not communicate with people. Confucius stated, “Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby, the hundred creatures, each after its kind, are born thereby. Heaven does no speaking!”{20} in contrast, the Bible teaches that we can have a relationship with the one who established the moral order. God is involved with creation and has made the way for a relationship with Him possible through His son (Jn. 3:16). The creator of all things has communicated with us through His Word and His Son. He also invites us to commune with Him in prayer and intimate fellowship. The imagery of the Shepherd and His sheep found in Psalm 23 and John 10 reflect His desire for a close relationship with us.

Third, Confucius built his philosophy on the belief that man is basically good. However, despite this, Confucius honestly admitted that no one had attained the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, “I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness.”{21} He said of himself, “…the Ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them.”{22} If man is good by nature, we must ask why we cannot attain what should be natural to us.

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God but fallen in sin and rebellious toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God and please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, “I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out.” Good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God and God’s Spirit transforms one’s nature through the indwelling and enabling power of His Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Confucius teaches many valuable ethical principles that are consistent with Biblical teaching. This offers Christians a good way to build bridges with many in East Asian cultures. However, the spiritual void in Confucianism is a great weakness; however, it provides a wonderful opportunity to present the case for Christianity.

Christianity offers a comprehensive life view, for it explains the nature of God, our relationship to Him, the origin of creation, and what happens after death. In Confucian teaching, one cannot communicate with the creator, but in Christianity, the Creator invites us and makes the way possible for a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus. Finally, true transformation of one's nature will not occur through education, but rather through the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer in Christ.

Notes

1. David Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 298.

2. *Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 7:20.

3. *Analects* 6:20

4. *Analects* 5:12

5. *Analects* 3:13.

6. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 1 (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57-8.

7. *Analects* 15:23.

8. *Analects* 17:6.

9. Noss, 297.

10. Stephen Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), 80.

11. *Analects* 7:9.

12. *Analects* 4:6.

13. Mencius XI:2, trans. David Hinton, (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 197.

14. *Analects* 4:6

15. *Analects* 7:33.

16. *Analects* 14:30.

17. Noss, 293.

18. *Analects* 2:5.

19. *Analects* 13:11.

20. *Analects* 17:19.

22. *Analects* 4:6.

22. *Analects* 14:30.

Bibliography

Analects of Confucius. Translated by Arthur Waley. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

Anderson, Norman. *The World's Religions*. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

Chung, Tsai. *Confucius Speaks*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

Cleary, Thomas. *The Essential Confucius*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

Halverson, Dean. *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996.

I Ching. Translator: Richard Wilhelm. New York: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Noss, David. *A History of the World's Religions.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *World Religions*. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983.

Schuhmacher, Stephen & Woerner, Gert. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion.* Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994.

Smith, Jonathan, ed. *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion.* San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Wilson, Epiphanius. *The Wisdom of Confucius*. New York: Avenel Books, 1982.

Yamamoto, Isamu. *Buddhism, Taoism, and Other Eastern Religions.* Grand Rapids, MI.:Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

Yu-lan, Fung. *A History of Chinese Philosophy, Volume 1*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A

Christian Critique

Steve Cable looks at the teaching of Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey and finds it far removed from a Christian worldview. From a biblical perspective, their teaching is in line with that addressed by Paul in Colossians where he points to false teachers who are "taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

Over 2,000,000 people from 139 countries have participated with Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle in a live Web-based seminar covering each chapter of Tolle's book entitled, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*{1}. Why is this book so popular? Will it lead you deeper in your walk with Christ? Or is it counterfeit spirituality promoting a false view of God? In this article, we will address these questions as we embark on an exploration of Tolle's "new earth."

The underlying premise is that all material things (from planets to pebbles to flowers to animals) result from a universal, immaterial life force expressing itself in material form. Humans are a part of that expression. However, we have evolved to the point where we have the potential to become Aware of our oneness with the universal life force. The purpose of all mankind is to become aware that their Being is an expression of the One Life Force.

However, the vast majority of people are unconscious and unaware of the source of their being. Every human being has an illusory self image or ego which is completely conditioned by the past, always wanting and never satisfied. We also have an individual and collective accumulation of old emotional pain Tolle calls the "pain-body." Our ego and our pain-body are actively trying to keep us away from true awareness. When we identify ourselves with our ego, our thoughts about the past and future, our wants and our hurts, we cannot experience our true Beingness.

In Tolle's view, this lack of awareness of our true essence and false identification with our egos has the world and the human race on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, the universal life force is manipulating this crisis to create an opportunity for many people to move from an unconscious state to consciousness. In order to become conscious, we must recognize that we are not our thoughts and/or egos. We must learn to accept and be present in the Now, because the past and the future exist only as thoughts. When most people are operating from their true essence rather than their egos, we will have drastic social and physical upheavals on this earth resulting in a whole new world order—that is, "a new earth."

If you are thinking this sounds a lot more like Eastern mysticism than a deeper walk with Christ, you are on the right track. So why is this message so popular even among many regular church attendees?

Why Is *A New Earth* a Significant Issue?

Since *A New Earth* is clearly incompatible with Biblical Christianity, why is it being read and recommended by many people who profess to be Christian?

First, the pervasive influence of post-modern tolerance continues to undermine commitment to the truth of the gospel even in evangelical circles. We are constantly assailed with the message that it is hateful and intolerant to believe that Christianity is true and other religions fall short. According to this viewpoint, the loving Christian will accept the validity of all religious traditions encouraging us to partake from the smorgasbord of spiritual guidance available from other religions. Thus many people forsake Paul's warning in Colossians to not be taken captive by the traditions of men rather than the truth of Christ and thereby open themselves up to false teaching{2}. An immature Christian may say to themselves, "*A New Earth* offers a way to greater personal peace and an escape from unhappiness so why not find a way to

glue it onto my Christian tradition." Tolle and Oprah cleverly encourage them by saying, "How 'spiritual' you are has nothing to do with what you believe, but everything to do with your state of consciousness."{3}

Second, *A New Earth* contains nuggets of truth about the nature of the body, soul and spirit and some practical ideas which may often prove helpful in dealing with anxiety, anger and other issues people face. Tolle is correct in pointing out that our individual and collective selfish egos introduce a lot of pain and suffering into this world. In addition, we may be filled with anxiety and discontent with our circumstances because our thoughts are preoccupied with past hurts and future hopes/fears. He encourages us to realize that we are not our thoughts or past pains. If we will affirm our intrinsic spiritual value and observe our ego at work, we can reduce anxiety and be able to accept our present circumstances. In some ways this is analogous to the instruction in Colossians to set our minds on the things of Christ not on the things of this earth because our real life is in Christ not in this earth.{4} It also reminds us of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he tells us that through the Holy Spirit we can "take every thought captive in obedience to Christ."{5} So you can see how thinking this way could be helpful. Unfortunately, this is taught as a part of a broader teaching that will leave non-Christians separated from God and misguided Christians not fulfilling their God-given purpose on this earth.

The third reason for its unwitting acceptance among some Christians is that quotes from Jesus and others in the Bible are sprinkled throughout the book in an attempt to show this philosophy is consistent with "true Christianity." Like so many false teachers, he attempts to make Jesus support his worldview by removing the teaching of Jesus from the clear message of the gospel.

Fourth, and probably most importantly, Tolle found a powerful

proponent in Oprah Winfrey whose endorsement catapulted his first book, *The Power of Now*, onto the *NY Times* Best Seller list. Now, Oprah is enthusiastically promoting *A New Earth* through her web seminar, calling it the most exciting thing she has ever done. Oprah is an evangelist for smorgasbord spirituality. During the first web seminar for *A New Earth*, she was asked how she could reconcile it with her Christian upbringing. Oprah explained that she began to get out of the box of Biblical doctrine in her late twenties when her pastor was preaching on the characteristics of God. When he said that "The Lord thy God is a jealous God," she decided that she wanted to believe in a God of love not a jealous God. Apparently, rather than doing a study to understand what that Bible passage meant, she decided to make up her own Jesus. As she stated (see Appendix A),

> "And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, 'Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done.' These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity…. Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."{6}

Worldview Comparison

Let's continue our exploration of Tolle's new earth by considering some of the fundamental worldview questions. How does the worldview of *A New Earth* line up with a Biblical worldview? (see Appendix B)

God and the Universe

Let's first look at the origin of the universe and the nature of God.

According to Tolle, the material universe is a temporary manifestation of the universal spiritual consciousness. This One Life is impersonal and pervasive, investing itself in all matter not just living things. He states it thus, "Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms."{7} And "Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness"{8} Consequently, the being the Bible calls God is really an expression of this impersonal life force. Since everything is of God and is God, all material things must ultimately return to formless, unidentifiable union with the spiritual life force.

This view of God as an impersonal life force living in all things is directly counter to the Biblical revelation of God. According to the Bible, God is the creator of the universe not a part of the universe. God is an identifiable, personal being characterized by holiness, love, grace and compassion. The creator of this universe is a thinking being as God shares through Isaiah, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth…so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."{9} Paul reminds us, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."{10} God is a communicator, choosing to reveal Himself to us through the attributes of creation, through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ.

Nature of Man

What about the nature and purpose of mankind? According to Tolle, humans are an evolved material manifestation of the spiritual life force. Humans have evolved to the point where

we are capable of being overtly conscious of our Beingness; of our oneness with the One Life force. However, our material manifestation includes the ego (a false sense of identification with our thoughts) and our individual and collective pain bodies which fight our attempts to be conscious of our real identity in the life force. We need to realize that we are not really a unique individual, but rather a material expression on the One Life force. Our purpose for existence is to bring a consciousness of the underlying one Life into this world. He states, "The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world."{11} However, the ultimate end for each human is to return our life energy back into the impersonal life force.

In contrast, the Bible teaches humans were intentionally created by God in His image. We are created with a body, soul and spirit. Our earthly bodies are temporary, but our soul and spirit are immortal. We are, in fact, individuals responsible for our actions with different eternal destinies determined by our relationship with God.

Sin and Evil

In *A New Earth*, the concepts of sin and evil are severely distorted. According to Tolle, original sin is the collective dysfunction which prevents people from recognizing the point of human existence. He suggests that this barrier to true Awareness is built into our DNA. He states, "The collective pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet."{12} In other words, the collective hurts and perceived inadequacies of our parents and previous generations are not only passed on through our interactions with a fallen world, but are actually encoded into our DNA. This, of course, would require our thoughts to be able to modify our DNA so that these experiences are passed on to future generations.

However, since we are not our bodies or our thoughts, we are not responsible for our sins. As he states, “There is only one perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness…. People are not responsible for what they do when possessed by the pain-body.”{13} In fact, we cannot really distinguish good from evil since they all arise from the same life force. As Tolle puts it, “The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily.”{14}

In contrast, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and apart from faith in Christ the result will be eternal separation from God.{15}

Salvation

In Tolle’s worldview, humans are not born spiritually dead, but rather spiritually unconscious. Our real self cannot be separated from God because our real self is a part of God. He states, “You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing the goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness.”{16} We become a new alive person, not through faith in the atoning death and empowering resurrection of Jesus, but rather through a process of becoming aware of our real self which has been masked by our ego. However, when our body dies, we cease to exist as an individual merging back into the universal life force. Tolle states, “the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it ‘eternal life.'”{17} So, regardless of what we do or believe during our earthly existence we all have the same ultimate destiny.

This view devalues the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Tolle’s view is true, Jesus’ death was unnecessary and His

resurrection was an illusion. The Bible clearly states that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."{18}

Jesus Christ and Christianity

For Tolle, Jesus was an enlightened human. He joined Buddha and a few others in trying to communicate this concept to people and societies who were not ready to receive it. Jesus was no more God than any other human, but he was aware that he was a part of the One Life Force which He identified as God.

With this view of Jesus, Tolle clearly rejects the central gospel message: faith in Jesus' atoning death on the cross and victorious resurrection is the only way to move from death into spiritual life.

Truth and Religion

According to Tolle, truth cannot be found in thought, doctrines or narratives which are perceived through our egos. He states, "Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. It cannot tell the difference between an event and its reaction to that event. Only through awareness—not through thinking—can you differentiate between fact and opinion…. Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective."{19} Thus, the only real Truth with a capital T is in my being. "The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth."{20} He even claims that this is what Jesus was really trying to tell us when He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

Tolle writes:

> "All religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. If you believe only your religion is

> the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego."{21} And, "Many religious people claim to be in sole possession of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. Unless you believe exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and they may feel justified in killing you for that."{22}

Like many people, Tolle confuses our inability to fully understand the truth with the lack of truth. As R.C. Sproul said, "Real truth is reality as seen from God's perspective." Real truth can only be revealed by God and is not about our need for identity or a need to create enemies. Truth is central to the Christian faith. Jesus told Pilate, "For this I was born and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the *truth*."{23} As Christians, we are motivated to share the truth God has revealed because of His love for us and His "desire for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the *truth*."{24}

The Bible

In addressing the Bible, Tolle attempts to play both sides of the street. Although he does not directly state it, he clearly does not believe that the Bible is an accurate revelation of the character of God and the nature of the universe. His worldview is totally contrary to the Bible in most areas, so he clearly does not consider it an authoritative source. But, knowing that much of his audience has a Christian background, he quotes the Bible over 25 times in this book. In most instances, he takes the verse out of context and misinterprets it to align with his viewpoint. One example is when he claims that Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" in order to teach us that we are the Truth. Ignoring the fact that Jesus went on to say, "no one comes to the Father but through me."{25} Jesus said that if we lived according to His words we would "know the truth"{26}, not "be the truth."

Conclusion

A New Earth is not so new after all. It is another presentation of Eastern mysticism with a focus on separating your identity from your ego. Although the mind exercises promoted in the book may provide some temporary help with issues such as anxiety and anger, the overall worldview is directly counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. By denying the existence of a personal transcendent God, by denying individual responsibility for my sin, by denying an eternal soul, and the need for the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus, Tolle's spiritual teaching will result in eternal separation from God for non-Christians and fruitlessness for Christians taken captive by this unbiblical worldview.

Appendix A: Oprah Winfrey on reconciling *A New Earth* with her Christian background:

"I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call "God." I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrined. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late 20's…And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, and the lord thy god is a jealous god. And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said "jealous." And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that god is love and that god is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

"And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, "Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was

reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god."

> "And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, "Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done." These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

"Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity."

Appendix B: Comparing A New Earth with Other Worldviews

	Christian Theism	***A New Earth***	**Naturalism (Postmodernism)**	**Pantheism**
God	Personal	Universal life force	Non-existent	Impersonal
World	Creation	Spiritual	Physical	Spiritual
Human Nature	Like God	Is God; corrupted by ego	Like Animals	Is God
Body/Soul	Unity	Spirit is only reality	Body Only	Soul Only
Immortality	Resurrection	Reunite with life force	Annihilation	Reincarnation
Destiny	Glorification	Absorption into grand plan of one life force	Extinction	Absorption

Source of Authority	Divine Revelation	Presence; “I Am Truth”	Culture	Spiritual
Truth	Absolute	Relative and personal	Culturally based	Personal
Jesus Christ	Son of God	Early enlightened being	A product of his/her culture	Enlightened being
Salvation	Redemption	Awareness, consciousness, presence	Whatever is effective	Meditation
Evil	Rebellion	Illusion results from pain-body	Culturally defined	Illusion
Ethics	God-centered	Counter ego	Culturally centered	World-centered
History	Linear	Predestined by the one life force	Culturally defined	Cyclical
Culture	God-ordained / man steward	Unconscious vs. conscious	Language-centered	World-centered

Notes

1. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, Penguin Group, New York, 2006
2. Colossians 2:8
3. Ibid., 18
4. Colossians 3:1-3
5. 2 Corinthians 10:5
6. Oprah Winfrey, transcript of the first *A New Earth* web seminar dated March 3, 2008
7. Tolle., 37
8. Ibid., 4
9. Isaiah 55:9
10. 1 Cor 2:11-12 NASV
11. Tolle., 78
12. Ibid., 143
13. Ibid., 163

14. Ibid., 196
15. Romans 3:23, 6:23
16. Tolle., 13
17. Ibid., 81
18. Romans 6:23
19. Tolle., 69
20. Ibid., 71
21. Ibid., 70
22. Ibid., 17
23. John 18:37
24. I Tim 2:3
25. John 14:6
26. John 8:31-32

© 2008 Probe Ministries

Goddess Worship – A Christian View

Pagan, Wiccan, and practitioners of New Age religion are turning to belief in a Goddess to express their God-created desire to worship. Russ Wise examines goddess worship from a Christian perspective.

"The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time . . . it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born." –Morwyn, *Secrets of a Witch's Coven*

Reverence for the goddess is becoming prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, radical feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a

feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, states that

> It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself.

According to Starhawk, a feminist and a practicing witch,

> The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition, a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

According to those who believe in the Great Goddess, Europe was once inhabited by a matriarchal, egalitarian society. Europeans, they claim, worshipped a matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art- loving goddess 5,000 to 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo- European group of invaders who were patrifocal, mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3)

These Indo-European invaders considered themselves to be superior to the peaceful and art-loving goddess worshippers because of their superior military ability. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these

invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents (symbols of the goddess worshippers) appeared for the first time. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Goddess fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

The Goddess and Witchcraft

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book *Goddesses in Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

> The Great Goddess was worshipped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

Bolen goes on to say that "the Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witches, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth, or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being, as is all of nature. Starhawk, in her best-selling book *The Spiral Dance*, says that "the model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive."(8)

The witch views Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. She attributes consciousness to the earth and believes it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neo-pagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to its practitioners, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct affront against the male-dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity teaches that God is transcendent, is separate from nature, and is represented to humankind through masculine imagery. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature, therefore God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess.

A fundamental belief in witchcraft is the idea that the goddess predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation. “The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be overstressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions.”(9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women’s spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. At the International Conference on Women’s Spirituality in Austin, Texas, Flowers stated that

> The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can’t know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open.(10)

The Goddess and Feminism

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an object of

worship. Those in the women's spirituality movement "reject what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership."(11)

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article by Sonia L. Nazario, "women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives."(12)

To understand fully the implications of the women's spirituality movement, one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that "political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed."

The radical feminist believes that the traditional church must be dismantled. Naomi Goldenberg, in her book *Changing of the Gods*, states that "the feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. . . . It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God."(13) The deity that many in the feminist camp are searching for takes on the form of a goddess. Some in the goddess movement, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, "pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation."(14) The radical feminist sees the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for her long-held beliefs. Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College, agrees that "some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology."(15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is "transformation." Catherine Keller, associate professor of theology at Xavier University says in her essay "Feminism and

the New Paradigm" that "the global feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminists envision that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation."

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states, "To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self-actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it's the same—growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side."(16)

This process sounds more like androgyny or sameness than it does individuality.

This paradigm-shift is nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God, a shift in thinking of God through predominantly masculine imagery to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess, the mother of life.

The Goddess and the Occult

In the world of the occult, also known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking or inviting her presence. Starhawk tells us that "to invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become . . . that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels

power through a visualized image of Divinity."

Starhawk continues, "We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes . . . a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions."(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, answered the question, What ails our society? by saying, "we suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess."(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has done an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility, whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony. So it is the goddess with her feminine aspects of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society, this appears to be the answer to man's dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ's atonement for sin cannot fully meet a Holy God's requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. "The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape culture."(19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective, the focus of which is on the Divine as female. Therefore considerable emphasis is placed on feminine attributes, ultimately focusing on eroticism and sexuality. "Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of

reversing Genesis . . . by validating and freeing their sexuality."(20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the foundation of Christianity. This new spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny through the expression of transvestitism.

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that "both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women."(21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. The rising occult influence in our society seeks to undermine the biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the Bible rings true as it states, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."(22)

The Goddess and the Liberal Church

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of many seminaries. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated."(23) The primary aim of this kind of "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what she perceives as male-dominated religion by castrating the male influence from the religion.

Daly continues by saying, “I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression.”(24)

Rev. Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: the Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of *Sophia* state that “Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition.” *Wisdom Feast*, the authors’ latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing Him with the feminine deity Sophia.

Another example of how goddess thealogy (feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses. One such seminar, “Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths,” was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in February of 1990. Linda Finnell, a wiccan and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of “Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft.” Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one speaker, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced A Course in Miracles, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring individuals who hold a metaphysical world view.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the “higher self.” The higher self, often referred to as the “god

self," is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. This truth or wisdom embodies the basic lie of deification. As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we become deceived.

Notes

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York: Harper & Row 1989), 23.

2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), xiv.

3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Lynnie Levy, *Of a Like Mind* (Madison, Wis.: OALM, 1991), vol. viii, no. 3, pp. 2-3.

4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Womwn's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.

5. See also Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, xiii.

6. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.

7. Ibid., 20.

8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.

9. Ibid., 24.

10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 Mar. 1991, sec. D.

11. Ibid.

12. Sonia L. Nazario, "Is Goddess Worship Finally Going to Put Men in Their Place?" *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 June 1990, sec. A.

13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 4,

25.

14. Nazario, “Goddess Worship.”

15. Deirdre Donahue, “Dawn of the Goddesses,” *USA Today*, 26 Sept. 1990, sec. D.

16. John Weir Perry, “Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of Patriarchy,” *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.

17. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 99.

18. Jean Shinoda Bolen, “The Women’s Movement in Transition: The Goddess and the Grail,” *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 8.

19. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 11.

20. Donna Steichen, “The Goddess Goes to Washington,” *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986): 42.

21. Perry, *Decline of Patriarchy*, 62.

22. 2 Tim. 4:3.

23. Alice Hageman, *Theology after the Demise of God the Father: a Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.

24. Hageman, *Theology*, 138.

Buddhism: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Patrick Zukeran gives a brief overview of the basic beliefs of Buddhism, covering the doctrine of salvation,

eternal state, the founder, and a comparison to Christianity.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

For centuries, Buddhism has been the dominant religion of the Eastern world. With the rise of the Asian population in the United States, Buddhism has had a tremendous impact on this country as well. Presently, there are an estimated 300 million Buddhists in the world and 500 thousand in the United States.{1} It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii, and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California, Jerry Brown,{2} Tina Turner, Phil Jackson (coach of the Los Angeles Lakers), Richard Gere, and Steven Seagal. The Dalai Lama has become a prominent spiritual figure for many throughout the world.

The Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. The founder was Siddhartha Gautama. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama since no biography was recorded until five hundred years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different—and even contradictory—accounts of Gautama's life.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in approximately 560 B.C. in northern India. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler over a district near the Himalayas which is today the country of Nepal. Suddhodana sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth.

Despite his father's efforts, however, Gautama one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls. He saw four things that forever changed his life: an

old man, a sick man, a dead man, and an ascetic. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering.

Gautama left his family and traveled the country seeking wisdom. He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self-realization but merely weakened the mind and body.

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the *Bohdi* tree (meaning, "tree of wisdom"), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called *nirvana*. Gautama then became known as *Buddha*, the "enlightened one." He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world.

As he began his teaching ministry, he gained a quick audience with the people of India since many had become disillusioned with Hinduism. By the time of his death at age 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India.

Expansion and Development of Buddhism

Buddhism remained mostly in India for three centuries until King Ashoka, who ruled India from 274-232 B.C., converted to Buddhism. Ashoka sent missionaries throughout the world, and Buddhism spread to all of Asia.

Even before its expansion, two distinct branches developed, a conservative and a liberal school of thought. The conservative school is labeled Theravada, and it became the dominant form of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Thus, it is also called Southern Buddhism. Southern Buddhism has remained closer to

the original form of Buddhism. This school follows the Pali Canon of scripture, which, although written centuries after Gautamas death, contains the most accurate recording of his teachings.

The liberal school is Mahayana Buddhism, which traveled to the north into China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet, and is also called Northern Buddhism. As it spread north, it adopted and incorporated beliefs and practices from the local religions of the land. The two branches of Buddhism are so different they appear to be two different religions rather than two branches of the same tree. Here are a few differences.

Theravada Buddhism sees Buddha as a man. Gautama never claimed to be deity, but rather a “way shower.” Mahayana Buddhism, however, worships Buddha as a manifestation of the divine Buddha essence. Since Gautama, many other manifestations or *bodhisattvas* have appeared. An example is Tibetan Buddhism, which worships the spiritual leader the Dalai Lama as a bodhisattva.

Theravada adheres to the Pali Canon and Buddhas earliest teachings. Since Mahayana believes there have been many manifestations, this branch incorporates many other texts written by the bodhisattvas as part of their canon.

Theravada teaches that each person must attain salvation through their own effort, and this requires one to relinquish earthly desires and live a monastic life. Therefore, only those few who have chosen this lifestyle will attain nirvana. Mahayana teaches that salvation comes through the grace of the bodhisattvas and so many may attain salvation.

Divine beings do not have a place in Theravada. The primary focus is on the individual attaining enlightenment, and a divine being, or speculations of such, only hinders the process. Therefore, several sects of this branch are atheistic. Mahayana, on the other hand, has many diverse views

of God since this branch is inclusive, and has adopted the beliefs and practices of various religions. Many schools are pantheistic in their worldview while others are animistic. Buddha is worshipped as a divine being. Some schools pay homage to a particular bodhisattva sent to their people. Other schools have a mixture of gods whom they worship. For example, Japanese Buddhism blended with Shintoism and includes worship of the Shinto gods with the teachings and worship of Buddha.

When speaking with a Buddhist, it is important to understand what branch of Buddhism they are talking about. The two branches are dramatically different. Even within Mahayana Buddhism, the sects can be as different as Theravada is to Mahayana.

The Way of Salvation

The main question Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, sought to answer was, “Why is there pain and suffering?” His belief in reincarnation (the belief that after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower form of life according to his good or bad deeds) prompted a second question that also needed to be answered: “How does one break this rebirth cycle?” The basic teachings of Buddhism, therefore, focus on what Gautama believed to be the answer to these questions. These basic tenets are found in the Four Noble Truths and in the Eight-fold Path. Let us begin with the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means to encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.

The Second Noble Truth relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish

enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance.

The Third Noble Truth is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the extinguishing of all desire by following the Eight-fold path. “The Eight-fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving.”{3}

Here are the eight steps in following the Eight-fold path. The first is the Right View. One must accept the Four Noble Truths. Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty, and must harm no living creature. Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk. Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing.

Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one. Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained. Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow. The eighth is the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self-effort one can attain the eternal state of nirvana.

In Buddhism, ones path to nirvana relies on the effort and discipline of the individual. By contrast, Jesus taught our goal is not a state of non-conscious being, but an eternal relationship with God. There is nothing one can do to earn a right relationship with God. Instead, we must receive His gift of grace, the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ and this restores our relationship with our creator.

Karma, *Samsara*, and *Nirvana*

Three important concepts in understanding Buddhism are *karma*, *samsara*, and *nirvana*.

Karma refers to the law of cause and effect in a person's life, reaping what one has sown. Buddhists believe that every person must go through a process of birth and rebirth until he reaches the state of *nirvana* in which he breaks this cycle. According to the law of karma, "You are what you are and do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations."{4} For a Buddhist, what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in this present life. Unlike Hindus, Buddha believed that a person can break the rebirth cycle no matter what class he is born into.

The second key concept is the law of *samsara* or *transmigration*. This is one of the most perplexing and difficult concepts in Buddhism to understand. The law of Samsara holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddha taught that people do not have individual souls. The existence of an individual self or ego is an illusion. There is no eternal substance of a person, which goes through the rebirth cycle. What is it then that goes through the cycle if not the individual soul? What goes through the rebirth cycle is only a set of feelings, impressions, present moments, and

the karma that is passed on. “In other words, as one process leads to another, … so one’s human personality in one existence is the direct cause of the type of individuality which appears in the next.”{5} The new individual in the next life will not be exactly the same person, but there will be several similarities. Just how close in identity they will be is not known.

The third key concept is *nirvana*. The term means “the blowing out” of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven, but rather an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering; a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end. Although to our Western minds this may sound like annihilation, Buddhists would object to such a notion. Gautama never gave an exact description of nirvana, but his closest reply was this. “There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill.”{6}

In contrast to the idea of reincarnation, the Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:27 that “man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment.” A major diverging point between Buddhism and Christianity is that the Bible refutes the idea of reincarnation. The Bible also teaches that in the eternal state, we are fully conscious and glorified individuals whose relationship with God comes to its perfect maturity.

Jesus and Gautama

There is much I admire in the life and teachings of Gautama. Being raised in the Japanese Buddhist culture, I appreciate

the ethical teachings, the arts, and architecture influenced by Buddhism. As I studied the life and teachings of Gautama and of Jesus, I discovered some dramatic differences.

First, Buddha did not claim to be divine. Theravada remains true to his teaching that he was just a man. The idea that he was divine was developed in Mahayana Buddhism 700 years after his death. Furthermore, Northern Buddhism teaches that there have been other manifestations of the Buddha or bodhisattvas and some believe Jesus to be one as well. However, Jesus did not claim to be one of many manifestations of God; He claimed to be the one and only Son of God. This teaching was not the creation of his followers but a principle He taught from the beginning of His ministry. In fact, the salvation He preached was dependent on understanding His divine nature.

Second, Buddha claimed to be a way shower. He showed the way to nirvana, but it was up to each follower to find his or her own path. Christ did not come to show the way; He claimed to *be* the way. While Buddhism teaches that salvation comes through Buddhas teachings, Christ taught salvation is found in *Him*. When Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life” (John 14:6), He was saying He alone is the one who can give eternal life, for He is the source of truth and life. Not only did He make the way possible, He promises to forever be with and empower all who follow Him to live the life that pleases God.

Third, Buddha taught that the way to eliminate suffering and attain enlightenment was to eliminate all desire. Christ taught that one should not eliminate all desire but that one must have the right desire. He stated, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.” Christ taught that we should desire to know Him above all other wants.

Fourth, Buddha performed no miracles in his lifetime. Christ affirmed His claims to be divine through the miracles He

performed. He demonstrated authority over every realm of creation: the spiritual realm, nature, sickness, and death. These miracles confirmed the claims that He was more than a good teacher, but God incarnate.

Finally, Buddha is buried in a grave in Kusinara at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. Christ, however, is alive. He alone conquered sin and the grave. His death paid the price for sin, and His resurrection makes it possible for all people to enter into a personal and eternal relationship with God.

After a comparative study, I came to realize Buddha was a great teacher who lived a noble life, but Christ is the unique revelation of God who is to be worshipped as our eternal Lord and Savior.

Notes

1. Isamu Yamamoto, *Buddhism, Taoism and Other Eastern Religions,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), p. 23.
2. Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House 1985), p. 261.
3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, (1977) p. 35
4. Davis Taylor and Clark Offner, *The World's Religions,* Norman Anderson, ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975), p. 174.
5. John Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 182.
6. Taylor and Offner, *The World's Religions, p. 177.*

©1994 Probe Ministries.

Reiki: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as "energy medicine":

> Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.{1}

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means "universal," and *ki* means "life force energy." But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that "Rei" is more accurately understood to mean "supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self." Thus, according to the Center, "it is the God-consciousness called Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we

call Reiki."{2}

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.{3}

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But "Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way."{4} In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open "subtle mental and physical energy systems" that prepare the recipient "to channel Universal Life Force Energy."{5} Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let's look at the evidence.

Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).{6} Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be

identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same. After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be "a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being."{7} Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person's aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it's one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. "Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them."{8} Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven't auras been photographed? One author claims, "Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras."{9} However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so

far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now, scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that "the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client's actual experience."{10} In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

What About Reiki's Success?

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki's effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain!{11}

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki's healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex's pain. "With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful…evidence available to judge medical therapies."{12}

This isn't just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a "hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom."{13} Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex's pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex's pain. After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex

felt relief. However, it's crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the "placebo effect."

"The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action."{14} A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) "of the improvements found with any therapy."{15} But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why,* the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if, how,* and *why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.{16} Under circumstances such as these, I suspect that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as "spiritually guided life force energy."{17} After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as "a powerful spiritual experience" that "is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness." What's more, this experience "is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings

who help implement the process."{18}

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they're doing God's work? After all, doesn't *all* healing come from God?

Does All Healing Come From God?

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God."{19} But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of "God." This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates "God" with man's Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the "God" of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exodus 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of

a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."{20} Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

Notes

1. Donald O'Mathuna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 193.
2. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html. 3. Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What*

is Not? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 61.
4. "Reiki FAQ: How Does Reiki Work?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html.
5. David F. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners: Mastering Natural Healing Techniques* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 41-42.
6. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 195. I have relied heavily on the chapter on "Energy Medicine," pp. 193-99, in this section.
7. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
9. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners,* 106.
10. Libby Barnett, Maggie Chambers and Susan Davidson, *Reiki Energy Medicine* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1996), 15.
11. Ibid., 29.
12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine,* 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
13. Ibid., 116.
14. Ibid., 118.
15. Ibid., 124.
16. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 487.
17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.
18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.
19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.
20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.

© 2003 Probe Ministries.

Martial Arts – A Christian View

Dr. Zukeran looks at the popular activity of marital arts from a biblical worldview perspective. He determines that Christians may safely participate in martial arts as long as they distance themselves from the Eastern philosophical ideas associated with most forms of martial arts.

The Origins and Popularity of the Martial Arts

Gliding across the Pacific, the Asian martial arts have become part of the mainstream of American culture. Today there are an estimated two to three million practitioners in the United States, 40 percent of which are children between the ages of 7 and 14.{1} The martial arts industry generates annual revenue topping the $1 billion mark.

Why this rise in popularity? For one thing, people today are interested in and more willing to accept Eastern ideas. What was once considered "foreign" is now embraced as old, and thus "tried and true." Advocates extol the physical benefits and self- discipline that result from its practices. Movies further popularize martial arts with films such as *Enter the Dragon*, *Rush Hour,* and the Oscar winning *Crouching Tiger-Hidden Dragon*. The rise in crime also has people seeking to learn ways to protect themselves and their loved ones.

There are few written records regarding the origin of martial arts. These are interwoven with myths or verbal traditions that make it difficult to accurately trace the record. Archaeological evidence indicates that the martial arts may

have begun as early as 2000 BC in the Fertile Crescent.{2} From there it traveled eastward to India and China.

The father of the Asian martial arts according to the most popular tradition is an Indian Buddhist Monk named Bodhidharma who arrived in China in the late fifth century A.D. Settling in a monastery in the Songshan Mountains located in the Kingdom of Wei, he developed a series of mind-body exercises designed to improve the health of the monks and assist them in meditation. Based on the movements of different real and mythological animals and incorporating concepts from Taoism and Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma taught a style of combat known as Shao-lin gung fu. Gradually, Shao-lin gung fu migrated from the temples to the Chinese populace. It was adapted and refined as it spread across the country and eventually, to the world.

Martial arts have been very popular among Christians. Scot Conway, founder of the Christian Martial Arts Foundation, estimates between 50 and 70 percent of American martial artists – and roughly 20 percent of all instructors – consider themselves Christians.{3} But other Christians argue that the philosophy of Asian martial arts is wholly incompatible with biblical teaching. They point to the origin of Eastern mysticism as reason for Christians to avoid any level of participation. Still others say Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek" shows that using force is wrong.

How should a discerning Christian respond? Can we participate in the martial arts and be consistent with our biblical convictions?

Differences in the Martial Arts

Should Christians participate in the martial arts? In order to make an informed decision, it is helpful to recognize that there are two basic categories for martial arts. It is important to note that the division is not rigid; in some

cases, values from one type may be blended or subtly integrated into the other. But for simplicity and clarity, we will use the two main groups.

One type, called “internal” or “soft” martial art, focuses on inner spiritual development, balance, form, and mental awareness. This soft art emphasizes two principles – that the mind dictates action and that the opponent’s own force is used to defeat him or her.{4} Students are taught Taoist and Buddhist philosophical principles such as the “chi” force and the “yin and yang” concept. Through breath control, soft art practitioners seek to “collect, cultivate, and store” this chi force which is located in the body. Some believe they can use the chi force to strike down opponents from a distance. Examples of internal or soft martial arts include the Chinese Tai-chi Chuan and the Japanese Aikido.

The second category of martial arts is called the “external” or “hard” art. This type teaches that physical reactions precede mental reaction. It also promotes the idea that an opponent’s force should be met with an equal but opposite force. While the hard martial art system also uses breath control like the soft arts, the emphasis is on developing strength and quickness through the use of straight and linear body motions.{5} The hard arts include certain forms of Chinese kung fu, and Shao Lin boxing. The Japanese arts were adapted from Chinese kung fu. The hard arts include Ju-jitsu, Judo, Karate, Ninjitsu, and Kendo. The Korean martial arts include Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do.

While there are religious concepts in the martial arts, few schools would qualify as religious movements, and few seek to meet the religious needs of the student. However, a little exposure to Eastern mysticism may lead to greater involvement in the future. So as a general rule, Christians should avoid the internal or soft martial arts because of the concentration on the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. Several schools even utilize the occult techniques of

meditation and altering consciousness. External or hard martial arts, on the other hand, concentrate primarily on physical training. These physical lessons usually do not conflict with our biblical convictions.

Before joining a dojo or martial arts gym, one needs to know the worldview of the instructor. Even some hard martial arts teachers incorporate Eastern ideas and occult practices into their styles. Look for instructors who teach the physical movements but exclude the Eastern ideas.

Eastern Concepts in the Martial Arts

Since martial arts are traditionally based on the Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, several key concepts can be prominent in the classes. Let’s look at three of them.

The concept of “chi” or “ki” is central in some martial arts. Chi is believed to be the impersonal life energy that flows throughout the universe and pulses through the human body. By harnessing the chi in individuals, martial artists believe they can perform at higher levels of ability or can release chi power resulting in devastating effects. Chi is controlled through specialized breathing techniques, gymnastics, and meditation.

Another common martial arts teaching is the Taoist (pronounced “dow-ist”) concept of yin and yang, that nature consists of conflicting elements which function in perfect balance to one another. As mankind should live in harmony with the Tao, so the martial artist must strike hard with firmness at times, but at other times accept the energy of the opponent, then reroute the energy, causing the opponent to defeat himself. This redirection allows a relatively gentle resolution, and brings one into harmony with the opponent and the flow of nature.

A Christian must also avoid the practice of Eastern

meditation. The goal of this type of meditation is to empty one's mind, alter one's consciousness, or unite with the impersonal divine. Scott Shaw writes, "Meditation is a sacred process. It is the method used by the spiritual warrior to calm the mind and to connect the body and mind with the infinite."{6} This greater awareness supposedly enables the martial artist to increase his or her performance. In many schools, the combined use of Eastern meditation and the chi are essential to mastering the art. (Not all martial arts use meditation for this purpose. Some use it to focus on the lesson or task at hand such as picturing the action in your mind before physically carrying it out.)

But the mysticism of Taoism and Buddhism is not compatible with Christianity; neither is Eastern meditation the same as biblical meditation. The Bible does not teach altering our consciousness or emptying our minds. Instead, the goal of Scriptural meditation is to *fill* our minds with God's Word. (Psalm 1:2) Another danger of Eastern meditation is that it can open our minds to the occult, a practice the Bible prohibits. The Bible does not teach the Eastern idea of chi, that there is an impersonal life energy of the universe within us. Rather, the Bible says that each individual has an eternal soul that will either go to heaven or to hell based on whether or not they have a relationship with Christ.

Self Defense or Turn the Other Cheek?

Besides concerns about the role of Eastern religion in the martial arts, some people think martial arts encourages violence. Martial arts teach fighting, and so are contrary to the Bible's instructions about pacifism. Is there ever a time when Christians can use force?

Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure another person. Many interpret Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:38-48, where he states, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other

also . . .", to mean never use violence. This is exemplified in the life of Christ who suffered silently and did not retaliate while enduring torture even unto death.

Despite these arguments, the proper interpretation of the Matthew 5 passage does not teach pacifism. In Jewish culture, to be struck or slapped on the cheek was an insult (2 Corinthians 11:20). Jesus was teaching that when a disciple is insulted for being a follower of Christ, the disciple should not retaliate with force. However, being insulted is a very different situation from being attacked by a mugger or your wife being attacked by a rapist.

In the Gospels, Christ did not resist violent attacks because of His unique mission to be the sacrifice for our sins. However, in the Old Testament, the preincarnate Christ judged wicked nations with the sword. (Judges 6:11-16). Not only did He smite His enemies, He aided Israel in being an instrument of judgment as well. Revelation predicts the glorified Christ coming to judge the nations with a sword. Also in the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples did not teach military leaders to withdraw from the military (e.g., Matthew 8:8-13, Luke 3:14). In Romans 13, Paul writes that the government has the right to "bear the sword." In other words, a righteous government can use capital punishment when an offender is worthy of death.

Therefore, complete pacifism is not the spirit of Christian teaching. In fact, the most loving thing to do when a friend or family member is attacked by a harmful foe is to risk one's life and use force to restrain the enemy. If a man is attacking a child, or a woman is being raped, it would be morally wrong not to sacrifice your life and restrain the assailant even with deadly force if necessary.

The Bible allows a Christian to use self-defense and force when confronted with a criminal act. Force may not be used for revenge or out of unjust anger. Christians who engage in the

martial arts should have a clear understanding of this. The use of martial arts must be for self-defense and protecting loved ones from acts of evil. One should never use their fighting system to instigate combat or seek revenge.

Should Christians Participate in the Martial Arts?

To summarize what I have covered so far, I believe that the physical aspect of martial arts can be separated from the Eastern religious and philosophical teachings. Also, I believe the Bible teaches us that there is a time when we are called to use force, even deadly force to halt acts of evil.

Here are some practical guidelines if one is deciding to participate in the martial arts or if one is selecting a school. First, a person should check his or her motives. One should not engage in martial arts if one's motives include becoming a tough guy, showing off, or gaining revenge. Parents should make it clear to their children that the martial arts are never to be used for affectation or for instigating conflicts. Unworthy motives are detrimental to one's walk with the Lord and witness to others. Positive reasons include physical conditioning, discipline, and self-defense. Develop parameters for limiting the use of force. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Force is used in defensive purposes only.

Generally speaking, Christians should avoid the soft or internal form of martial arts because they tend to emphasize Eastern philosophical and religious ideas. External or hard martial arts emphasize the physical training. However, it would be wise to be on guard because many instructors of external martial arts may incorporate Eastern mysticism in to their system. Also, one should be careful to avoid the possibility of being enticed to learn about Eastern spirituality as they advance.

Find out the worldview of the instructor. The role of religion in the martial arts depends mostly on the instructor, so choosing a proper instructor is the most important factor. Some instructors claim to teach the physical aspect only. However, as students advance, instructors begin to incorporate Eastern religious ideas to help students attain a higher level of performance. Observe advanced classes to see if they incorporate Eastern practices. There is also helpful information through Christian organizations such as Karate for Christ and the Christian Martial Arts Foundation.

The Christian life involves caring for the nurture and growth of our mind, spirit, and our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I have benefited greatly from my time in the martial arts. It has provided me great exercise, discipline, and opportunities to witness for Christ. There were times in my life when I had to use force to restrain hostile persons or protect loved ones. I believe that the martial arts can be beneficial to Christians who are informed and mature.

Notes

1. Glenn Rifkin, "The Black Belts of the Screen Are Filling the Dojos," *The New York Times*, 16 February 1992, 10.

2. Howard Reid and Michael Croucher, *The Way of the Warrior,* (Woodstock, NY.: Overlook Press, 1983), 16-17.

3. Erwin Castro, B.J. Oropeza, and Ron Rhodes, "Enter the Dragon? Wrestling with the Martial Arts Phenomenon Part I," Christian Research Institute, http://www.equip.org/free/dm066.htm, 2.

4. Reid and Croucher, *The Way of the Warrior*, 229.

5. Ibid., 61 & 227.

6. Scott Shaw, *The Warrior is Silent* (Rochester, VT.: Inner Traditions International, 1998), 53.

Bibliography

1. Ankerberg, John, and Weldon, John. *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996.

2. Musashi, Miyamoto. *A Book of Five Rings*, trans. Victor Harris. Woodstock, NY.: Overlook Press.

3. Partridge, Christopher. *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

4. Reid, Howard and Croucher, Michael, *The Way of the Warrior*, Woodstock, NY.: Overlook Press, 1983.

5. Shaw, Scott. *The Warrior is Silent*. Rochester, VT.: Inner Traditions International, 1998.

6. Smith, Jonathan. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

7. Suzuki, D.T. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. New York: MJF Books, 1959.

8. Tzu, Sun. *The Art of War*, trans. Gary Gagliardi. Shoreline, WA.: Clearbridge Publishing 2001.

Web Articles

1. "Should a Christian Practice the Martial Arts?" *Christian Research Institute.*
http://www.equip.org/free/DM065.htm

2. Castro, Erwin, Oropeza, B.J., and Rhodes, Ron. "Enter the Dragon? Wrestling with the Martial Arts Phenomenon, Part I" *Christian Research Institute*.
http://www.equip.org/free/DM066.htm

3. _____. "Enter the Dragon? Wrestling with the Martial Arts Phenomenon Part II" *Christian Research Institute*. http://www.equip.org/free/DM067.htm

©2003 Probe Ministries.

See Also:
"Martial Arts and Just War Theory"

Alternative Medicine – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran applies a biblical worldview perspective as he assesses the rise of alternative medicine in the mainstream of American culture. He points out the types that a purely fraud and those which may be useful for some people.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Rise of Alternative Medicine

Alternative medicine has blazed its way into the mainstream of American culture while also making significant gains in the medical community. Nearly half of all U.S. adults now participate in some kind of alternative therapy.{1} A recent study showed that Americans spend almost $30 billion a year on alternative treatments.{2}

Alternative medicine remains a controversial issue. Do these medicines actually work? Do these alternative therapies embrace an Eastern religious system? Should Christians be involved with alternative treatments? How do we evaluate a particular practice that is unconventional?

The sudden rise of alternative medicine can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction with conventional medical practices. Modern methods have mainly focused on the physical symptoms. However, we are spiritual, social and emotional creatures as well. Healing improves when all of these components are addressed. Conventional medicine has also been criticized for

its impersonal approach. Overworked doctors may spend only a few minutes diagnosing the problem without much follow-up.

The main reason people may be flocking to alternative medicine is that it offers hope when conventional medicine has failed. The frightened and discouraged look there as a last resort. Many therapists profess to heal cancer or know the secret to prolonged youth. For example, Hollywood guru Deepak Chopra writes that his therapies can take us to ". . . a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply." Through his methods we can ". . . become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal, creativity, joy, fulfillment, and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist and are not even entertained as a philosophy."{3} These are attractive temptations to those without hope.

As discerning individuals, we must not be enticed by such claims. The Bible teaches that we live in a fallen world. Despite our best efforts people get sick, and sometimes they die. When faced with a serious illness, we first must accept the consequences of the Fall. God can heal any time He chooses using whatever method He wills. However, He does not work contrary to His nature or revealed truth. If an apparent healing leads someone to embrace teachings contrary to Scripture, we should question whether that healing came from God.

So when the test results are bad, we should not panic in fear, but trust God's sovereignty and control over our lives. We should seek wise counsel from doctors and our pastors. Then, if an alternative medicine is recommended, we should make sure it has been medically tested and does not promote a false teaching or false hope. In dealing with illness, we can honor God or we can blemish our testimony. In the following sections, let us consider how to wisely evaluate alternative medicines.

Getting a Handle on Alternative Medicines

Today there are hundreds of therapies labeled “alternative medicine,” but what exactly does that mean? A broad definition would be any therapy that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment of our culture. There are several characteristics of alternative medicine. For example, these therapies are not practiced in hospitals or physicians’ offices. They focus on natural methods of healing with an emphasis on preventing disease. They are also more likely to treat chronic ailments after conventional medicine has failed.

Alternative medicine originates from the traditions of ancient cultures, particularly China and India. For instance, 370 different healing drugs were used in Mesopotamia while 600 were common in India. The Chinese had 2000 herbs, metals, and minerals as ingredients in 16,000 different preparations.{4} Despite the variety, many historians agree that these ancient medical practices had little success in actually curing disease. The real effects are still under scrutiny today including comparisons with the strides made by modern medicine. Despite the shortfalls of conventional medicine, we live longer and are healthier than people of long ago.

Ancient alternative medicine was greatly influenced by Eastern religions. That is why today’s users of so-called “rediscovered” alternative medicines can still see those religious concepts interwoven with the treatments. Many alternative medicine proponents approach holistic health from a pantheistic worldview. Central to pantheism is the idea of monism—the idea that everything in the universe is one ultimate reality. If all is one, then man is divine. Since we are divine, we are without sin. Sin is merely an illusion that creates false guilt. This guilt is what leads to illness.

Deepak Chopra writes, “. . . the seeds of God are inside us. . . . When we make the journey of the spirit, we water these divine seeds. . . . In the eyes of the spirit, everyone is

innocent, in all senses of the word. Because you are innocent, you have not done anything that merits punishment or divine wrath."{5}

Some advocates of alternative medicine would point out that the biblical view of health is also considered holistic. Indeed, God made man a complex being with physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, and He cares about every aspect of our personhood. (You can see these aspects in Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.) Contrary to pantheism, the Bible teaches God is a personal being and we are His created beings. We were meant for a personal relationship with Him, but we are separated from this by sin. Biblical health begins with a right relationship with a personal God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather than ignoring sin, it must be dealt with through repentance and restoration. Finally, a Christian must acknowledge that God may have a purpose for suffering, and that there is value to yielding to His plan.

Should a Christian Use Alternative Medicine?

When it comes to selecting an alternative therapy, there is a smorgasbord of choices. How can a Christian discern an acceptable alternative medicine from one that is unacceptable? In making a decision, it is helpful to identify the different alternative medicines. The authors of *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not?*{6} give five categories of alternative therapies.

The first category is *complementary* therapies. These deal with lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise and stress. The next category is *scientifically unproven* therapies. These have undergone scientific research, but with little evidence for their effectiveness. Herbal remedies would be an example of scientifically unproven therapies.

A third category is *scientifically questionable* therapies.

These are therapies which contradict basic scientific principles or that cannot be easily verified. An example is Chinese acupuncture that teaches a contradictory understanding to what is known about human physiology. A fourth category is *life energy* therapies. These assume life energy called "Chi" or "Prana" that can be manipulated using a variety of techniques. Maybe you have heard of "Reiki" and therapeutic touch. The final category of therapies is *quackery* and *fraud*. These are therapies that have been shown to have no reasonable benefit.

Before deciding to use an alternative medicine, a Christian should consider first under which category the particular therapy falls. Generally speaking, complementary therapies provide important insights into maintaining good health. Scientifically unproven and questionable therapy must be studied and decisions made on a case-by-case basis. Many of the proofs for alternative medicine are based on controversial interpretations of scientific theories or testimonies of users.{7} The wisest approach is to only use cures endorsed by sound medical research and controlled testing. Christians should avoid therapies that fall under the life energy and fraud categories.

Consult your physician and pharmacist. Too often individuals will engage in alternative treatments without informing their physician. Proponents of alternative medicine try to discourage their clients from using conventional medical methods, claiming their way to be the best. This can be a dangerous concept. An alternative therapist may prescribe approaches contrary to your doctor's recommendation, or give you medicines that may react negatively with your prescribed medications.

Finally, be a wise steward. Don't spend your resources on therapies that have been proved ineffective or questionable. Watch out for practitioners of a false religious system. In my pastoral experience, I have witnessed Christians turn to

shamans and Chinese folk medicine when diagnosed with a serious illness. In all cases the alternative therapy did not help the situation and cost the family monetarily. More importantly, it impaired their witness for Christ. Make your lifestyle, especially the way you handle illness, a testimony for Christ.

Life Energy Therapies

As mentioned earlier, there are five categories of alternative medicines. Christians should avoid *life energy* and *quackery* and *fraud* therapies.

Let us take a careful look at life energy therapies. Although there are over 60 different names for these therapies, they are all based on six fundamental principles.{8} Practitioners believe that life energy flows throughout the universe. There are numerous names for this impersonal energy. Traditional Chinese medicine calls this energy "Chi" while Indian Ayurvedic medicine titles it "Prana." Some Christians mistakenly equate this with the Holy Spirit. The two are not the same.

Life energy therapists believe that humans are composed of energy surrounded by a material body. Life energy therapy directs this energy so that it flows throughout the body unhindered. Disease is believed to be the result of an imbalance or blockage in the energy flow. Traditional Chinese medicine describes an elaborate system of channels within the body called meridians. To cure an illness, the body must be manipulated to restore the flow of energy through the meridians.

Traditional Chinese and Indian practitioners believe they can determine one's energy flow by looking at the skin color, symptoms, tongue, and pulse. Therapeutic touch practitioners say they can sense the energy flow by moving their hands above the skin. Supposedly there are now high tech machines that can

measure this energy flow. Many of these machines, for example the Vegatest and its spin-offs, have been deemed fraudulent and are illegal.{9}

It is said that life energy can be re-directed to treat an offending illness. Life energy therapists believe they can adjust the flow of energy through physical manipulation or invisible transfer from healer to patient. In traditional Chinese medicine, needles are used to unplug holes or stimulate the flow of this energy. Massage, exercise, and herbs are also believed to restore Chi as are breathing and meditation techniques.

Miracles are believed to occur by altering the life energy. This is the message presented in *Star Wars*. In the movie, the Jedi masters could control the life energy, or Force, to perform miraculous feats. The concept of God and energy are used interchangeably. From this we can conclude that life energy is, in essence, God. Since we are energy, we are divine because we are of the same essence as the Divine.

Christians should avoid therapists who expound life energy therapy. Many ideas are built on a pantheistic worldview, causing these therapies to embrace or at least acknowledge Eastern mysticism. Also, their teachings have drifted far from objective knowledge of the human body. Finally, God is not an impersonal force, and He cannot be manipulated by formulas or healing rituals. God will not heal through any practice that is contrary to His Word.

Herbal Treatments

Wherever you look, it seems like there is an infomercial or ad for herbal products. According to a 1998 study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, between 1990 and 1997, there was a 380 percent rise in herbal remedies and a 130 percent increase in high dose vitamin use in the US.{10} Current estimates say 60-72 million Americans use herbal

supplements.{11} Many herbal treatments make remarkable claims of healing cancer, arthritis, depression, and other illnesses. What are we to make of the herbal craze?

Be discerning if you choose to use herbs. *Natural* does not guarantee *safe*. There are many natural herbs that can produce dangerous, and even deadly, side effects. Be wary of the marketing hype. Despite the ads, the truth of the matter is that research has concluded that the effectiveness of herbal use is questionable at best. You also need to consider quality control. Unlike prescription and non-prescription drugs that are tightly regulated by the FDA, no organization is directly responsible for monitoring the quality or concentrations of herbal products. Be skeptical of "a pill for every ill" mentality. Finally, be sure to avoid anyone who claims to have a secret formula, especially if he reports to have been persecuted by the American Medical Association or Federal Drug Administration. Avoid any retailer, radio ad, or person who is bent on selling his product as a cure-all.

Some herbal treatments are costly and provide no enhancement. However, some herbal supplements *have* shown some promising benefits. Herbal treatments may prove to be helpful additions to conventional treatments. Herbs like ginseng have shown to be beneficial for Type 2 diabetes, for example. Herbal preparations are sometimes less potent in dosage than prescriptions drugs and may be less toxic.

It is important to thoroughly research the product you are considering using. Inform your doctor and pharmacist. They know your medical history and can alert you to any potentially dangerous interactions between herbs and pharmaceutical drugs. Be leery of thinking that if taking a little is good, a heavier dose must be even better. Find out whether the herbs are for long or short term. Check the quality of the product and be aware of the possible side effects. Don't assume that if the product has been used for a while, even for centuries, it must be better.

There is no biblical admonition forbidding the use of herbal products. However, Christians should approach the herbal market from an informed perspective. Some excellent books on the subject are *The American Pharmaceutical Association Practical Guide to Natural Medicines* and *Alternative Medicine: A Christian Handbook*. Excellent Web sites include herbalgram.com and naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com/.

In times of health and especially in dealing with illness, our goal is always to honor the Lord.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Cowley, "Alternative Care," *Newsweek* Magazine, 2 December 2002, p. 47.
2. Ibid., p. 47-48.
3. Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old,* (New York: Harmony, 1993), p. 3.
4. Dónal O'Mathúna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2001) p. 31.
5. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents* (New York: Harmony/Random House Publishing, 1997), p. 20-21, 31, 57, 68.
6. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not? BioBasic Series* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998).
7. O'Mathúna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine,* 22.
8. John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Can You Trust Your Doctor? The Complete Guide to New Age Medicine and Its Threat To Your Family* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991) p. 46.
9. Paul Reisser, Dale Mabe and Robert Velarde, *Examining Alternative Medicine* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 85-86.

10. Reisser, Mabe and Velarde, *Examining Alternative Medicine,* p. 127.
11. Ibid.

Bibliography

1. BioBasic Series. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998.

2. Chopra, Deepak. *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old.* New York: Harmony Publishing, 1993.

3. Cowley, Geoffrey. "Integrative Care." *Newsweek Magazine.* December 2, 2002, pgs. 47-53.

4. OMathna, Dnal & Walt Larimore. *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2001.

5. Reisser, Paul, Dale Mabe, and Robert Velarde. *Examining Alternative Medicine.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

6. Underwood, Anne. "Learning from China." *Newsweek Magazine*. December 2, 2002, pgs. 54-57.

©2003 Probe Ministries.