



Seeing a World of Difference

Lesson 7

by

Dr. Peter Jones

*Director, truthXchange and
Scholar in Residence, Westminster Seminary California*

The Lie about God

Brought to you by the

Blue Letter Bible Institute

www.blbi.org

A ministry of the

Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

“By their unrighteousness [they] suppress the truth...they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

—The Apostle Paul (Romans 1:18, 21)

“The First Peace is that which comes from within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers.”

—Black Elk, Oglala Sioux

The Lie about God

Mother Nature Loves You

In the movie, *Evan Almighty*, Hollywood’s cleverly-titled farce about Noah’s Ark, Morgan Freeman plays God. Freeman’s incarnation of God is one part yoga instructor, one part Vegas magician and one part New Age life coach in **Deepak Chopra** swami pajamas. No part of the character, however, suggests the Old Testament deity who wiped out his creation with a flood and started again—which is the whole point of the story of Noah’s Ark. There you have it—a stark contrast between two types of God: a controlled, rabbit’s foot good-luck charm or the Creator God and Judge of the universe. The choice is not between a cool God and a mean one. The issue goes deeper.

We human beings worship creation in an attempt to fill the gaping hole made by our refusal to worship the true God, who created all things. In Romans 1:18–20, Paul makes a series of earth-shaking statements about human beings who stand before the Creator. They know God, but “by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” about him (Romans 1:18). They know God because “what can be known about God is plain...in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:19–20). They know God exists and long to connect with him, yet deliberately reject him and the evidence of his creative handiwork.

G. K. Chesterton said, “When men cease to believe in God they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything!” The Lie about God is a substitute, taken from within creation. This is Oneism, or paganism (*paganus* comes from the Latin word meaning “of the earth”). In Paul’s words, “they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:23). This description includes not only religions that deny a transcendent, triune Creator, but non-religions that claim human autonomy.

Paul urges the Christians living in Rome (*la citta eterna*) to understand the profound difference between the Christian faith they have espoused and their old pagan ways. There are only two kinds of god we can worship and serve: the gods we create or the God who creates us.

Only Two Kinds of God

Romans 1:25 uses a verb for “worship” that was used in Greek literature for all forms of religious activity in temples and mystery cults throughout the ancient world. When Paul goes to Ephesus, for instance, his preaching clashes with pagan service to the Great Mother, the Goddess Artemis, “whom all Asia and the world *worship*” (Acts 19:27). We ascribe to the object of our worship ultimate power and offer it our devotion. Worshiping and serving the creation turns nature into God. If you worship and serve rocks, trees, animals, stars, human beings, etc., you have made them “God,” and we are back to our Oneism circle in which everything created is divine. God is no longer a personal being, distinct from everything else. “One circle” unity is attractive, though, because it seems to answer the human longing for wholeness and concord.

You doubtless know people with a poor self-identity, who seem to waste their lives in a debilitating haze of personal insecurity. A bad self-image produces all kinds of consequences—psychological depression, illness or violent behavior that can end in a jail sentence. Pagan oneness is, at first glance, intriguingly upbeat. Many who write about the glorious future of the planet or host websites inviting people to save that planet are attractive, optimistic people. The brilliant scholar and world expert of Shakespearean literature at Yale University, **Harold Bloom**, describes his discovery of a “truth” about himself that transformed him. He realized that he was “uncreated, as old as God.” This is a logical conclusion.

When, in 1987, New Ager **Shirley MacLaine** ended her five-hour ABC TV miniseries, *Out on a Limb*, with the words, “I am God,” everyone thought she was nuts. Not any longer. Tree-hugging is logical if you believe that all of nature is divine. The brilliant ex-Christian pagan, **Thomas Berry**, who died in June 2009, called for an Earth community with a common future for all species, including trees. If Bloom is right, that he is as old as God, then he and the trees share divine attributes and *should* be worshiped. Bloom, MacLaine and Berry were transformed in their deepest being by believing in their essential divinity. Trees, if they share in the divine essence, surely merit a hug or two.

Once, a Christian lady and a humanist friend visited the astounding Grand Canyon in Arizona, USA. Both were seeing the stunning beauty of the canyon for the first time. The Christian cried and could not help but blurt out praise to God the Creator, in a deep sense of worship. Her friend, though not a Christian, was nonetheless overwhelmed by the power and beauty of the canyon. That sense of worship and awe is often given to the wrong source—creation itself. Creation-worshiping religions replace the Creator of the Grand Canyon with the Canyon itself. They look within and see their own longing for spiritual life and experience; they see the “evolving” life-creating powers of nature; they feel overwhelmed by something much greater than themselves and experience non-physical powers. These are the elements that make up pagan religions that worship nature as divine. The

magnificence and dynamism of creation take the place of a relationship with a real, transcendent personal Maker of heaven and earth.

Ex-rationalists and ex-secular humanists who have abandoned materialism for spirituality see biological evolution not as the chance intermingling of atoms, but as *the proof* of nature's divinity. "God" is just the name for the ceaseless creativity in the natural universe, in the biosphere and in all human cultures. This ceaseless creativity, beyond human rational control, demands some kind of faith that nature will be kind to us in the future. Mother Nature surely loves us, they believe. The postmodern spiritualist, having concluded that reason alone is an insufficient guide for living, will use reason as a helpful tool but no longer allows it the last word. Faith, in the all-powerful goodness of nature, now functions as the organizing principle for the future.

Robert Müller, who was assistant secretary-general of the UN under U Thant, Kurt Waldheim and Javier Perez de Cuellar, is a leading "earth spiritualist." From his long-held position of enormous authority and influence, he promoted, as a model for the future planetary community, the holistic worldviews of the Aztec, Mayan and Incan civilizations.ⁱ These South American civilizations worshiped the powers of the earth and produced amazing art and architecture. However, their worldview involved unspeakable cruelty (including self-inflicted blood-letting, masochism and human sacrifice) to placate their nature gods. Their much-admired "holistic" cosmology had, like Obiwan Kenobi, a light and a dark side, but such moral ambivalence hardly inspires confidence as a model for the future planetary community. Alas, people with a worldview like Müller's continue to dominate the utopian thinking of UN bureaucrats and powerful NGOs in international gatherings. As we have seen, optimistic, utopian hopes have been with us since Eden.

A Babylonian text from around 1125 BC, called the Marduk Prophecy, shows such hopes, as it predicts the coming of the warrior god Ningirsu,

A king...who will rule. The rivers will carry fish, the fields and plains will be full of yield. The grass of the winter (will last) to summer...He will set evil aright. He will clear up the disturbed...The clouds will be continually present. Brother will love his brother. A son will fear his father as if he were a god...The bride will marry. She will fear her husband. He will be compassionate towards all people. The man will regularly pay his taxes. That prince will [rule all] the lands.ⁱⁱ

In spite of such well-meaning dreams, the Babylonian empire was soaked in violence.

Eighteenth-century Western Enlightenment appealed to the same optimistic, Oneist premise. A generation before Darwin, the great evolutionary philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), believed that God was not beyond the creation, but *was the creative process itself*. By the same token, man was not the passive spectator of reality, but its active co-creator. Hegel set the

ⁱ scp-inc.org/publications/journals/mayan/index.php.

ⁱⁱ Tremper Longman III, "The Marduk Prophecy," *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed., William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 481.

philosophical context for the German Romantics (Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Coleridge and Steiner), all of whom believed that the relation of the human mind to the world was participatory, that is, Oneist.

One modern version of the Babylonian prophecy comes from the British medical researcher, James Ephraim Lovelock (1919–). A consultant for NASA, he “developed” the Gaia Hypothesis, named after the Greek earth goddess. He speculated that living and non-living parts of the earth form a complex interactive system that can be thought of as a single organism. Humanity is the evolving nervous system and brain of the planet, the instrument by which Gaia (nature personified) becomes self-aware. Through evolution, **Gaia** seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for the planet, so the future is rosy, as long as humans cooperate.

“Spiritual” science now vies with rationalistic science for the attention of the brilliant. Quantum physics has been brought as evidence for the old magical and shamanistic teachings once dismissed as nonsense. Just as good and evil are part of the same spiritual unity, it is argued, so on a physical level there is no ultimate distinction between particles and waves. Modern day mystics conclude that science corroborates what spiritualists of all kinds—animists, Hindus, Buddhists, even materialistic atheists—have claimed for millennia: all is one; the universe is self-creating and evolving into better and better forms.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Kick it up a notch,” says TV cook, Emeril Lagasse, as he lavishly spices one of his excellent dishes. Contemporary, evolutionary spiritualists have spiced up the theory of evolution. Goddess Nature herself is the final arbiter of the evolutionary process and will ensure the mutation of human consciousness. The present human mind, be it ever so spiritual, is not her last word. Though biological evolution may reach an endpoint, we must be ready for an evolution of consciousness into “a new terrestrial species.” This evolutionary goddess is roaring toward us with the power of a hurricane, and the first winds are felt through the cracked walls of the Church.

- “Evangelical” **Richard Foster**, for example, endorses the ideas of the spiritual evolutionist, Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Teilhard, who was excommunicated by the Roman Church, saw the world as a form of Gaia. It is the divinity-infused, body of God, the “one world-womb” from which a “new humanity” will arise through the evolution of consciousness into “the all-inclusive One.”
- **Spencer Burke**, once a megachurch Fundamentalist pastor, whose website is called “The Ooze,” endorses the book, *Thank God for Evolution*, by the Rev. Michael Dowd. On another site (spencerburke.com), he says of the book: “Like orphans united, spirituality and evolution come face-to-face in this daring book.”
- **Michael Dowd** began his spiritual pilgrimage as a Pentecostal, but has since married a **Unitarian Universalist**, with whom he travels, empowering people of all ages and theological orientations to know real freedom, to live in deepest integrity and to fulfill their

ⁱⁱⁱ See Frank Stootman, “The Spirituality of Quantum Mechanics,” *On Global Wizardry: Techniques of Pagan Spirituality and a Christian Response*, ed. Peter Jones (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010).

mission through the liberating notion of biological and spiritual evolution. Such teaching is dangerous for Christians, who can easily begin to see spirituality as defined by those who do not take seriously the teaching of the Scripture concerning God's creative power and authority over the earth.

Ken Wilber

Into this spiritual mess steps **Ken Wilber**, whose influence has caused many left-wing Emergents to "ooze" into evolutionary spirituality. Wilber has produced a world philosophy, "weaving together...science, morals, ethics, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world's great wisdom traditions." He concludes that all major worldviews are "basically true." Postmodernism is "so yesterday," he argues, and critiques it for being itself "culturally situated."^{iv}

Wilber has a powerful, upbeat message: "[T]he universe is winding up, not down." Deep religion and global consciousness will descend on humanity until we all realize the truth of the "*holon*—every entity and concept shares a dual nature: as a whole unto itself, and as a part of some other whole." He creates a system that affirms everything as it is, yet still hopes for a better, richer future. His catch phrase is "transcend and include." To show our progress toward utopia, Wilber charts nine phases of spiritual evolution through human history.^v The most primitive system is listed first in the chart below. Wilber places Twoism in Phase 4 and his own system in Phase 7, the "integrative" vision of reality. He predicts two more mythic-spiritual states to come before humanity will be totally identified with the divine. His final phase is "Integral Spirituality," the *non-dual* joining of matter, consciousness and spirit into an undifferentiated One. Wilber's theory is a perfect description of Oneism. Wilber's tiers and phases are as follows:

First Tier

- **Phase 1** Archaic-Instinctual
- **Phase 2** Magical-Animistic
- **Phase 3** Power Gods (Magical-mythical)
- **Phase 4** Mythic Order (an All-powerful Other: Twoism (Theism))
- **Phase 5** Scientific Achievement (Enlightenment Rationalism)
- **Phase 6** The Sensitive Self (Green Egalitarianism)

Second Tier Consciousness

- **Phase 7** Integrative

^{iv} Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).

^v *Ibid.*, 43.

- **Phase 8** Universal Holistic
- **Phase 9** Integral-Holonic

Wilber is illogical, for in the true circle of Oneism, there can be no linear progress. His evolutionary “progress” simply twists the lens of a Oneist kaleidoscope to re-arrange the sparkling bits into a new form. Such theorizing is pure speculation, without a shred of evidence to back it. The chart is also deceptive, because all the systems he mentions exist simultaneously in history. Worst of all, Wilber sidesteps the conflict between Oneism and Twoism. Eight of his nine phases are Oneist, and he presents the only Twoist system (the “Mythic Order,” or belief in an All-powerful Other) as one more primitive stage. In lesson 13, this course will consider Wilber’s huge influence.

Such integrative spirituality merges with a popular movement of upbeat religious unity, known as Interfaith—all religions worshipping the same god. Study of the world’s religions is fascinating, but sooner or later, Paul’s analysis rings true: there are only two basic systems—either creation is divine and self-creating, or creation owes its existence to a Divine Creator. Belief in nature as God is evident in “hard core” paganism, but polytheism and animism share belief in a primary animating force, in which even Albert Einstein placed his faith.

It is astonishing to see how strongly classic Eastern religion and modern liberal “Christian” thinking are inspired by the same basic belief. “Christian-Feminist” theologian **Rosemary Radford Ruether** recommends the worship of pagan goddesses as more beneficial to women than Christianity. She prefers “the nature and fertility religions” of paganism, including the worship of Baal.^{vi} “Christian” bishop, John Shelby Spong, describes God not as an external, supernatural being who rules humanity, but as the power of love flowing through everything. **Lloyd Geering’s** latest book title says it all—*Coming Back to Earth: From Gods to the God to Gaia*. Geering, New Zealand’s prominent Presbyterian apostate, predicts that the global community will return to the worship of nature. Pagan theorists who define God as “a primary animating force,” blend easily with Spong’s notions of the divine as entirely immanent. That is why Interfaith is doing so well and includes both liberal “Christians” and Universalist-Unitarians, who identify God with the future cosmic evolution of the biological universe. The worship of creation comes in many forms, from all the great Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and **Taoism**) to the nature religions of ancient Greece and Rome, to the animism of Africa and South America, and to Western esoterism.

At the 1993 **Parliament of the World’s Religions**, representatives of one hundred twenty-five different religions met in Chicago. They agreed that their religions were fundamentally the same. Eight thousand delegates locked arms and danced to the sound of an American Indian tom-tom drum. Christian Twoism cannot join the dance. As Paul said, “[W]hat portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:15). When you walk into a pitch-black room and turn on a bright light, darkness disappears. The room is not half-dark. Dark and light have no fellowship.

^{vi} Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

Mixing a personal God with an impersonal force does not produce a half-personal God. Interfaith tries to make Christians think they are welcome to join their party. But one question cries out for an answer: “Who is your God?” A Christian who wants to join the “one universal religion,” must first sign the “statement of *faiths*”— all religions are equally true and worship the same Oneist god.

The Chicago Parliament avoided the problem by not inviting biblical Twoists to its choreographed celebration of religious unity. The left wing of the Emergent movement, still occasionally calling itself evangelical, includes an interfaith component, due to a sad ignorance of basic worldview. Emergent leader Brian McLaren says that the “missional” goal of the Church is not to make Christians out of Buddhists, but to make “Buddhist followers of Jesus.”^{vii} McLaren is putting light and dark in the same room and hoping for dawn. At best, he will bring dusk. Interfaith religious expressions, though self-consciously one, appear different because of their specific ways of describing the nature of the world. Some are world-affirming, others world-denying, some are pantheistic (Hinduism), others atheistic (Buddhism), some are materialistic, others spiritual, some are sexual, others asexual, some are ascetic, others libertine. Western atheism is also a form of creation worship, since it believes in the self-sustaining capacity of material reality and in the power of the human mind to observe the process with no need of a transcendent Mind.

Within a given religion, we see apparently contradictory forms. Hinduism includes both world-affirming and world-denying traditions, expressed, for example, in Vishnu (the preserver of the world) and Shiva (the destroyer of the world). Within the same religion, we also find different attitudes toward the body, especially sexuality. In Hinduism, for example, most Tantrists say there can be no enlightenment without sexual practice, whereas most celibates say enlightenment requires sexual abstinence. In Buddhism, the ascetic **Brahmanic** philosophy is opposed to the joyous, life-loving and worldly notions embraced by **Vedism**. Gnosticism also has both ascetic and libertine forms.

All these variations hold in common the belief that *nothing but this-worldly reality exists*. They are all forms of Oneism that explain the world by the world. To say that the world causes itself is to give it divine attributes and, in one way or another, to give it worship. In such a system, the worshiper worships himself, since he is part of the world, and his thoughts grant to the world this elevated status. Like many others when they hear of Oneism and Twoism, you may wonder how Judaism and Islam can be considered Oneism systems, since they both seem to affirm a God who is “other.” Practically speaking, however, most Jews no longer believe in the Bible, for the god of rabbinic Judaism has become an impersonal force, driving many into forms of pagan spirituality that seek the “god” within. One might well argue that any “theistic” system that is not Trinitarian cannot have a personal God—but more on this later. Allah is a “singularity” and is unknowable—more like an impersonal force. He swears by elements within the creation, as the Quran shows.^{viii} If he swears by creation, can he truly stand above it as Creator of all? Jehovah will only swear by himself (Hebrews 6:13). Muslims are tempted by **Sufism**, a thoroughly Oneist spirituality.

^{vii} Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 264.

^{viii} Allah swears by the sky (SS 86:1), the moon (SS 74:32–34) and the stars (SS 53:1), among other things.

The twelfth-century Muslim Sufi master, Ibn Arabi, a sort of Al Gore of the Middle Ages, stated with poetic flourish:

My soul is a Mosque for Muslims,
A Temple for Hindus,
An Altar for Zoroastrians,
A Church for Christians,
A Synagogue for Jews,
And a Pasture for Gazelles.

Sixty-five percent of Americans believe that “many religions can lead to eternal life,” and thirty-seven percent of that group are self-identified evangelicals. Such figures are surprising to us, but Interfaith has been around for a long time. The Hindu *Rig Veda* states: “Truth is One, but the sages speak of it by many names.”^{ix} A modern historian describes the general religious situation at the time of the New Testament as a worldwide “theocracy,” a sort of universal syncretism. When Paul went to Athens, he noticed altars to all the gods, expressions of an ancient religious interfaith (Acts 17:22–23). In Miletus, a priest advertised himself as a priest of all the gods, and the goddess Isis was known as “the goddess of a thousand names.”

Old Testament prophets constantly denounced the worship of Baal and Asherah, Canaanite male and female gods personifying the powers of nature. Elijah locked horns with King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, a pagan witch, who tried to make God’s people believe that Baal and Jahweh were the same. Shock and awe in the form of fire from heaven put the people right and they all declared: “The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!” (1 Kings 18:39). In our modern world, interfaith unity is encouraged by well-funded groups dedicated to the worship of a Oneist god, for example: the Parliament of the World’s Religions, United Religions, International Interfaith Center, Peace Council, Temple of Understanding, United Nations Spiritual Forum, World Conference on Religion and Peace, World Congress of Faiths, World Faiths Development Dialogue, World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Dialogue, and the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders.

Religious agreement about an interfaith nature god is a prerequisite for global utopia.

The Oneist God of the Future: The New Global Man

Neale Donald Walsch claims he has constant “conversations with God” and has sold millions of copies of a book by the same title, *Tomorrow’s God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge*, which informs us that such a god is not a singular super Being, but the extraordinary process called life. This is one more example of “cosmic humanism,” which is no longer focused on individual expression, as it was in the 1980s. Pagans seldom talk about New Age, chakras, crystals, LSD, and expensive weekends to get in touch with the higher self and to find inner peace.

^{ix} Quoted in Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), xiii.

The nature god, as Wilber shows, has bigger plans for the planet—to save it, organize it, unify it and perfect it. Yes, the so-called New Spirituality has a heady, fantastic vision of global utopia. Hundreds of websites and international organizations are devoted to the realization of this goal. A few examples must suffice. Notice how thoroughly Oneist are the titles and concepts.

- Link TV proposes a series of films called, “The Journey toward Oneness,” produced by Global Spirit and sponsored by the Alliance for a New Humanity. These programs illustrate the optimistic vision of “unity consciousness,” expressed in the teachings of the Dalai Lama, the Sufi poet, Rumi, the indigenous people of North America, the wisdom of the labyrinth, African ancestor worship and the Kogi people of South America.
- The World Foundation for the Discipline of Peace bases its notion of global peace on “oneness.” International Peace Centers teach a *Living Peace Curriculum* based on the ancient earth wisdom teachings from North America. Oneness with divine nature is the essential inspiration for this animistic definition of world peace.
- An Interfaith movement called One, promoting social justice, is gaining a following among evangelical churches that want to engage in acts of mercy. Many world leaders speak of “a new world order” based on oneness and of “world citizenship,” freed from the disruptive influence of national sovereignty and promoted by a re-invigorated UN, capable of governing our planet. A movement called Renaissance 2 captures this optimistic apocalyptic fervor. They declare that in the next decade we will be challenged by the convergent economic, ecological and cultural crises that mark a great shift in our culture and biosphere. They ask the world, “Are you ready for what comes next?”

What comes next is the secret that lies behind the holy books and spiritual techniques—the pagan, Oneist divinized Humanity. This unifying global god will be worshiped and served in an attempt to realize the diabolical design of the original Lie in Eden—a human utopia liberated from the Creator’s control. The closer we come to this ultimate fantasy, the closer will be our final nightmare. When Man is God, then so is the State, for do we not need wise leaders who know what is best for us? Welcome, tyranny.

Pure Fantasy

The apostle Paul calls “Oneist” views of God “the Lie,” clever as it may be, to feed on our innate desire for utopia. In the light of the evil embedded in our history and in our hearts, our self-created utopian dreams are illusory. Like poor Michael Jackson, who died such a sad death, after trying all his life to create Neverland, we go on choosing fantasy over reality. The utopian theme song could well be the 1960s pop song: “This Is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius.” A less well-known stanza of this ode to the god/goddess Aquarius, Bringer of Spiritual Water, begins:

Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
Angelic illumination

Seeing a World of Difference: Lesson 7

Rising fiery constellation
Traveling our starry courses
Guided by the cosmic forces
Oh, care for us; Aquarius!

These lyrics from the 1960s have become the blueprint for a planetary religious and political community now in final dress rehearsal mode. Guilt has been wished away and evil is no threat, since final accountability and divine judgment are dismissed as useless, primitive notions. Paul's words, uttered two millennia ago, address our twenty-first century, besotted with utopian notions of newness and change. We have been taken in by one more version of Oneism. There are still only two options, as Paul so rightly saw: worship of the creation or worship of the Creator. In the next lesson, we will have the pleasure of considering that Creator.