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Seeing a World of Difference

Lesson 9

by

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The Lie about Spirituality

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“They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...and worshiped and served the creature.” —The Apostle Paul (Romans 1:23, 25)

“Feed the God Within.” —Phyllis Tickle (Leading a communion service)

The Lie about Spirituality

The Return of the Shaman

When Western Christians, who grew up in church, read Romans 1:23, which speaks of worshiping images of reptiles, birds or men, they may think back to the missionary presentations they heard as children, with slides about obscure tribes doing primitive dances to carved idols. Because such images seemed remote, Western Christians tend to understand idolatry as over-dependence on or love for a new car, a luxury home, a well-paying job or good books. Ah! That made sense. Idolatry could be condemned as the inner life of selfishness and self-worship, an interpretation which, though valid in one sense, seemed to push the Romans text into the mists of time.

Not anymore! Now eight-year-olds, even in Western countries, are asking, “Mommy, what’s a shaman?”

Can you answer that question? A shaman, through states of trance, acts as a medium between the visible world and the invisible spirit world, practicing magic or sorcery for purposes of healing, divination or control over natural events. The occult shaman has become a model of spirituality in the twenty-first century—for East and West, North and South. The contemporary key to vibrant, authentic spirituality and its promise for the future is the resurgence of *ancient* shamanic traditions. Eastern mysticism, ancient Gnosticism, pre-Christian Goddess worship, channeled messages from the lost mythical city of Atlantis and the mysteries of the Zodiac—all are considered possible answers for our modern plight, based on a sense of continuity with the ancient shamans, who commune with the powers of nature.

But we can look for much better answers in another ancient book, so don’t put your Bibles away yet. Paul’s two-thousand-year old wisdom speaks with pertinence to our present situation. Those living in the apostle’s time, though they rejected the Creator, still wanted and needed spirituality. This is the kind they produced: “[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...[they] worshiped and served the creature” (Romans 1:23, 25).

Fast-forward two thousand years. Dr. Peter Jones, Director of the truthXchange ministry tells of boarding a plane to return home from a speaking engagement. Beside him was an empty seat, but soon a cheery middle-aged lady with long painted nails, fingers covered in silver rings and wrists hidden by countless bracelets, plopped down next to him and asked what he was reading and why. Since he had just been lecturing to college students, encouraging them to speak courageously about their Christian faith, he answered his new seat companion honestly: "I'm reading about global warming because I'm writing a book from a Christian perspective on the spirituality that drives green alarmism." She replied: "You don't know who's sitting beside you!" She didn't resemble Oprah Winfrey, and they were both in economy.

"No, I don't," he said. "Who are you?"

She gave her name and, beaming with pride, revealed that she was the first hypnotherapist to be given an academic lectureship at a recognized university. On cue, she uttered those famous words: "You know, I'm not religious, but I am very spiritual." Everyone is spiritual, she said, and should worship the god of his or her choosing, because ultimately all gods are the same.

How many such conversations have you had? They tell us something profound about our time. To worship all the gods, whoever they might be, is to worship creation, as Paul points out in Romans 1. The gods of our own choosing are in man's image. Of course, the New Spirituality, magnanimous in its non-judgmental unity, cannot accept someone who thinks there is true and a false spirituality, a true God and false gods. Such divisive, arrogant opinions are unacceptable! Sophisticated culture, says sociologist **Robert Bellah**, is beginning to envisage "the unity of consciousness," which rejects "univocal understandings of reality" (one narrow way of belief).ⁱ New Age guru **Marilyn Ferguson** would agree. She is convinced that "everything is one... a coherent unity."ⁱⁱ Bellah's broad view of a "unity of consciousness" (pagan consensus) blurs the true debate, which is not between narrow fundamentalists and tolerant **syncretists**, but between those who believe that reality is One and those who believe it is Two.

The Spirituality of Oneism

The encounter with the hypnotherapist illustrates the dramatic change of thinking that has occurred in the West since the 1960s— a change that has taken many by surprise. From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, Western history was the playground of rationalism, often called "**secular humanism**." In the middle of the nineteenth century, **Karl Marx** dismissed religion as the "opiate of the people," and in 1927 **Sigmund Freud** wrote *The Future of an Illusion*, predicting the end of religion, which he considered an illness that needed healing. These

ⁱ Robert Neelly Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 246.

ⁱⁱ Marilyn Ferguson, *Aquarius Now: Radical Common Sense and Reclaiming our Personal Sovereignty* (North Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2005), 127.

predictions came true only by robbing the *Christian* religion of its dominant place in Western civilization. Many predicted the end of religion, but few predicted the death of secular humanism. You might think secular humanism is powerful. After all, isn't there a generation of "new atheists"? The new atheism, however, does not threaten the gods of the New Spirituality, but only the God of the Bible. You might expect atheism to contradict the prediction of Mark C. Taylor, who is a **postmodern deconstructionist** professor at Williams College. Taylor foresees the twenty-first century as dominated by religion in ways that were inconceivable just a few years ago. Part of the reason for the rebirth of religion is that **Postmodernism** has shown atheism to be irrational and ignorant. Atheism is in decline worldwide, whereas forms of spirituality are rising to take its place. You see this in the political realm; Marxist regimes (the political form of secular humanism) have disappeared, leaving a void that spirituality is filling.

Even on the Western campuses, versions of "god" are back. The title of a secular literature conference in 2006 suggests something is afoot—*God is Undead: Post-Secular Notions in Contemporary Literature and Theory*. During the last two hundred years, modern Western civilization worshiped its own rational prowess. Today, the earthly spirits are back, making the Apostle Paul's description of the ancient pagan world applicable to our present situation. How has this happened?

East Meets West

Some younger or foreign users of this curriculum may not know the term "hippie." This was the name given to a generation of (mostly American) students in the 1960s. The movement had some valid complaints about racism and greed, among other things. Their answer to these social problems involved a search for personal, mystical enlightenment. Many student movements fade into history and hardly leave a ripple, but in US culture (which affected other countries as well), the great drug and sex bash known as **Woodstock** and the iconic Beatles' song, **Yellow Submarine**, signaled the demise of secularism as a dominant cultural force. Turning their backs on both Christianity and rationalistic humanism, the Hippies went East on a spiritual trip, to live in ashrams and "find themselves," while the gurus came West to live in mansions and find their fortunes.

The message embedded in the plaintive tunes of **Joan Baez** and the Beatles is now buried in the Western consciousness via satellite communication and globalism. The long-haired hippies and bearded gurus played the first bars of the global symphony. Western secular humanism did not survive the meeting of the East and the West. The hippie seekers of spiritual Oneism finally transformed the Western soul.

Aravind Adiga, author of the novel *The White Tiger*, was born in India, the land of two hundred and fifty million gods. He lived in New York for some time, but then moved back to India. In 2008, he returned to New York and was shocked to see that the psychics and mystics, once familiar only in one particularly "hippie" part of town, Greenwich Village, had moved to mainstream New York City. The many-armed gods of Hinduism, incense sticks, Tibetan scrolls of the Buddha and OM signs had caught the imagination of Western spiritual seekers. Adiga was particularly surprised to find a

friend he had known as an atheist, who had become absorbed in Jewish mysticism, and whose wife was seeing a medicine man in Chinatown for roots and crystals.

But the influence is not one-way. Western pragmatism had a powerful transforming influence on Buddhism. No longer limited to influencing individual meditational practice, Buddhism now sees its calling as a force for change and for social justice on the global stage. Since it has no personal god or dogma, it is the religion of choice for ex-secularists. Albert Einstein would have been thrilled. He saw Buddhism as the one religion that could cope with modern scientific needs. In a word, Buddhism is positioning itself as a cosmic religion for a unified planet.

Going Backwards to Leap Forward

Transformed human consciousness, part of the evolution of the cosmos, becomes the new savior of mankind. But to catch the wave of the future, we must jump backwards—not the usual direction for evolution! The French anticipated our embarrassment, out of their long experience, and kindly invented a sophisticated explanation: *reculer pour mieux sauter*—“back up for a better leap forward.”

Twenty-first century “progressives” tell us that for cultural blessing, we must return to pre-modern, pre-Christian cultures and their notions of oneness with nature. So the “progressives” are also “regressives.” They criticize Christianity as old and worn out, but exhort us to sit at the feet of ancient Andean and American Indian shamans or Eastern gurus, who alone understood the mystery of the human relationship with the earth. Materialistic rationalists have “desouled the Earth,” so we must go to Black Elk, Sitting Bull or the **Aymara** medicine men of South America to learn deep spirituality from the earth. Against all expectations, twenty-first century Westerners are turning to witch doctors for the spiritual secrets of the future universe. As we saw earlier, *paganus* means “of the earth,” or “those who work the earth,” a “person of the place” (whether town or country) who preserved local customs. “Pagan” is contrasted with *alienus*, the “person from elsewhere.” Physical place includes geosacred concentrations, the place for earth-based divination. In other words, physical place is the source of spiritual life. That place can be a clearing in a wood, a bloodline, or the entire physical cosmos—nature. Inasmuch as the local customs were associated with gods or spirits, paganism was associated with the worship of the earth as a spiritual entity. That is precisely what contemporary spiritualists say and do.

Thomas Berry, an ex-Roman Catholic priest and theologian, has had enormous influence in international gatherings, such as the UN. He rejects the term “theologian,” claiming to be a “geologian.” He doesn’t teach geology, mind you, but about how to experience the innate spiritual and occult powers of the earth. Berry’s approach (summarized in his book, *The Great Work*) sees “God” not as someone distinct from the earth, but as the spiritual essence of the earth, the true object of worship. A better example of what Paul is describing—worship and serve creation—you could not find, and this from an ex-Christian theologian who knows precisely what he is doing. Berry admired his mentor Jung, who said that the belief that God is outside of man is “systematic

blindness.” In his therapy, Jung tried to get clients in touch with their “inner deity,” revealed from the depths of the soul, the “unconscious.”

Berry admired the spirituality of the ancient peoples of the American continent, who believed that animals and humans are relatives and that worship should be directed to “totemic carvings.” This teaching may sound quaint and harmless, but Berry names it as shamanism. Such ideas are far from harmless. Marcus Toole, who works as a chaplain with the Cree Nation knows shamanism first hand. He notes that in the ceremony of the sun-dance “as many as forty people will neither eat nor drink and will bounce up and down from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, blowing whistles, shaking rattles and channeling their prayers to the Thunderbird Spirits, the Buffalo Spirits, the Sun Spirit, etc., seeking visions and spirit helpers.” Marcus adds that “the point of the sun-dance is to sacrifice one’s body [often to the point of making oneself ill] to the spirit world for the purpose of receiving answers to prayer, spirit power and cleansing from wrongs done.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Berry’s recommendations remind us of those violent South American tribal practices in religions admired by Robert Müller. The cruel side of nature worship is conveniently passed over in favor of the cleaned-up version, which speaks only of “green” care for Mother Nature. People now seek healing by “harnessing the consciousness of a dolphin” or by “vortex experiences,” in which participants experience the “human energy system interacting with the earth.” Mind manipulation erases the God-made distinction between human beings and the rest of nature. A website called Healthy and Green Living promotes indigenous spirituality, proposing five simple, happy thoughts.

- The earth is sacred, and so is everything which lives in or upon it.
- Everything is alive and has spirit.
- Everything is related.
- It is vital to connect with others through group ritual.
- You can experience spirit directly and with joy.

Shamanism for Beginners

Such “joyful direct experience with Spirit” is Shamanism 100 for beginners. By the techniques of mediums and shamans, people today can have direct (but not always joyful!) encounters with the deities or spirits. Bolivian President Evo Morales is not the only one to consult shamans. So does Western apostate Christian, Alison Leonard, a contemporary religious feminist. In the void she felt when she threw out her Christian faith, she experimented with earth-based, feminine-oriented

ⁱⁱⁱ Marcus Toole, “The Red Road to Despair,” *Global Wizardry: Techniques of Pagan Spirituality and a Christian Response*, ed. Peter Jones (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010), 87–97.

experiences and with spiritual encounters with non-human life forms. She now says she has had an experience of the divine feminine in its pre-Christian and post-Christian shamanistic forms.

The Prince Charming of Modern Day Paganism

These practices are not reserved for the lunatic fringe in expensive workshops or faerie forest clearings. Some influential world leaders are on the pagan path to spirituality. We discussed Prince Charles' fascination with the Perennial Philosophy. As a young man, Charles went to Africa and struck up a friendship with the South African explorer, Sir Laurens van der Post. A mystic, sage and personal friend and follower of **Carl Jung**, Sir Laurens influenced Charles for the rest of his life. He took the Prince to spend time with the Bushmen of Botswana. Having visited there in 1987, Charles spoke of the sense of wonder that the Bushmen inspired in him by their inner spirituality and wise understanding of how nature worked at a deeper, mysterious level. Charles does not go into more detail, but another Westerner does.

In his book, *Bushman Shaman: Awakening the Spirit through Ecstatic Dance*, Bradford Keeney describes his research into the spirituality of the Bushmen and his initiation into their shamanic power. "You are danced until your body collapses from fatigue. At that moment you fall into a deep state of relaxation and inner stillness, receiving the same benefits as classic **meditation**." How interesting that Charles has already publicly refused his role of "Defender of *the* [Christian] Faith," and has said he will be "defender of *faiths*." Perhaps one day we will see an interfaith, spiritual Britain, ruled by a Shamanic king! Bolivia, move over.

Stanislav Grof

We have discussed Carl Jung's influence on our post-Christian world, as well as that of a few of his disciples, like Thomas Berry, Sir Laurens van der Post, and **Stanislav Grof**. The latter is a "transpersonal, neo-Jungian," who describes the deep experiences of the transpersonal realm—in which Prince Charles was dabbling. Jung called this the "collective unconscious," whereby we are aware of the spirit-world. Using shamanistic techniques, Grof shows how to create "altered states of consciousness." Here is a list of his "technologies of the sacred," each of which is capable of introducing people into the transpersonal or paranormal realm:

- Breathing techniques (that produce "non-ordinary states of consciousness...to unleash the inner healer within the psyche")
- Sound technologies (drumming, rattling, use of sticks, bells and gongs, music, chanting, mantras)
- Dancing (Sufi whirling dervishes or Bushmen trance dancing)
- Social isolation and sensory deprivation (vision quest, desert or cave isolation)
- Sensory overload (super physical stimuli, extreme pain)

- Physiological means (sleep or food deprivation, purgatives, laxatives, blood-letting)
- Meditation, prayer (Hatha, Kundalini or Tantric yoga, Christian mysticism, exercises of Ignatius Loyola)
- Psychedelic stimulation (hashish, peyote, LSD).

Grof says his approach is “essential shamanism,” the only real hope for solving “the psychospiritual roots of malignant aggression and insatiable greed.” Greed and aggression are not seen as moral problems, but as a failure to be in touch with one’s divine self. Grof, a highly respected researcher and psychologist, published by New York University Press, organizes conferences on psychological theory. He believes that our only hope for the peace and prosperity of the planet is the radical inner transformation of humanity and its rise to a higher level of consciousness through paranormal states.

Grof’s workshops are no Sunday School. His shamanistic methods produce bizarre psychic phenomena, such as visions of divine light, encounters with various blissful and wrathful deities, communication with spirit guides and superhuman entities, contact with shamanic power animals, direct apprehension of universal symbols and episodes of religious and creative inspiration. He believes that the spirit beings that appear are “ontologically real...not products of metaphysical speculation or pathological processes in the brain.”^{iv} Grof describes these experiences as “shamanic crises,” in which deep connections with animals, plants and elemental forces of nature are created. Presented to the twenty-first century with optimistic enthusiasm, such techniques go right back to Romans 1:23: “[E]xchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

Joining the Opposites

The goal of Oneist spirituality is an irrational trance-like state, called variously: a “unitive” experience of nature, “inner stillness,” “unity and wholeness,” “genuine mysticism” or “timeless unity with Spirit.” All experience must be unencumbered by dogmatic religion. The Hindu guru, Rajneesh, known for his many Rolls Royce cars and his even more numerous sexual adventures, taught that good and evil are only two aspects of the same reality. In the make-believe world of Oneism, distinctions are *anathema*.

All distinctions, like true and false, right and wrong, good and evil, Creator and creature, Christ and Anti-Christ, are considered relative, meaningless notions. The goal of the mature spiritual person is to “join the opposites,” to create unity out of difference and so to take control of life. True spirituality means creating your own reality by making an amalgam of your dark and the light side.

^{iv} Stanislav Grof, *Psychology of the Future: Lessons from Modern Consciousness Research* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 68.

In the “peak experiences” of spiritual transport, the fragmentation of the mind and body is overcome and a sense of oneness occurs. The person who “goes within” via trance states succeeds in silencing the mind and its conflicting messages of objective reality, as well as any troubling judgments of conscience.

Both interfaith movements and hard-core pagan spirituality reject religious dogma for two main reasons:

1. Doctrine in its ultimate form involves divine revelation from a transcendent God, a source of knowing that must be rejected utterly.
2. Doctrine requires thought, which is the enemy of mystical states of wholeness/irrationality. Both the ancient Gnostics and the Hindu gurus exhorted believers to “flee the mind.” One-ism abhors the mind, doctrine and the distinctions they make. Zen Enlightenment is “understanding the unity of man and universe...as a state of Oneness in which all distinction of ‘I’ and ‘Not I,’ ‘Knower’ and ‘Known,’ ‘Seer’ and ‘Seen’ are set aside.”^v

Such thinking is associated with Buddhism, yet similar views are held by Emergent leaders. **Doug Pagitt**, pastor of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis calls for a re-examination of “the idea that there is a necessary distinction of matter from spirit, or creation from creator.”^{vi} To reject that distinction means to adopt pagan Oneism, even if some “Jesus” still walks the halls of his church. Pagitt’s writing, unfortunately, seems to show that he has indeed decided the issue in favor of Oneism. The English Emergent, **Kester Brewin**, espouses Carl Jung’s idea of the ability to hold opposites together in a single frame, and exhorts believers to adopt a spirituality that “rejects simplistic, monochrome, flat answers and embrace the multi-dimensional, full-color complexity of our situation.”^{vii} Is he embracing interfaith spiritual Oneism? There seems little love lost on Twoism.

Playing with Fire

This Left edge of evangelicalism is playing with fire. **Phyllis Tickle**, mentioned in lesson 3, is a lay leader in an Episcopal church led by a gay vicar. She was promoted at the National Pastors’ Conference by InterVarsity Press, Zondervan and **Youth Specialties**, as a “wise woman.” At that conference, pastors were encouraged to spend time with her and gain from her great wisdom, which includes her total acceptance of homosexuality as a valid life style and her dabbling in religious syncretism. The latter is evident in her description of the contemporary movements of spirituality in *all* the religions as “the Great Emergence.” Tickle sees in this interfaith revival a new work of the Spirit and “a new reformation” (without *sola scriptura*). This “evangelical” spirituality promotes the same doctrine-free mysticism promoted by pagans. It is little wonder that Rob Bell, a

^v Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work and Art in the Far East* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 121.

^{vi} See Doug Pagitt’s contribution to *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 142.

^{vii} Kester Brewin, *Signs of Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 86.

colleague of Tickle, says “[W]e’re rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion.”^{viii} No kidding! Tickle’s epithet for McLaren, “a new Martin Luther,” is peculiar, since he makes little use of the Bible, and hopes for “Buddhist followers of Jesus.” As oxymorons go, this “oxy” is more moronic than “military intelligence” or “educational television.”

How does this work? Since Buddhists do not believe in God, to be followers of Jesus, they would have to believe in Jesus’ God, but then they would no longer be Buddhists, since Buddhists do not believe in God. Hmm. Very confusing, to say the least! Well, then, suppose Jesus could be like a Buddhist who did *not* believe in God. (The ancient Gnostic heretic said he didn’t believe in God, but then the whole notion of God has disappeared and the term evangelical means nothing. And, of course, Jesus would no longer be worth following.)

Evangelicalism and “Sacred Contemplative Technologies”

McLaren, in a popular blog, admits his fascination with “ancient practices” because such spirituality “becomes a part of a much deeper movement in our culture.” In the evangelical “contemplative” movement, terms like “**spiritual formation**,” “**soul care**,” “**spiritual direction**,” “*lectio divina*” and “**contemplative prayer**” are now commonplace and seem to parallel the Easternization of spirituality in the culture at large. Having rejected the Reformation’s return to Scripture (from medieval mysticism and folklore), contemplatives consciously go behind the Reformation precisely to **medieval monasticism**, seeking techniques for the realization of states of ecstatic union. In one sense, it all sounds very “traditional” and pious, but such a move is naïve at best.

Medieval spirituality was highly influenced by pagan Eastern mysticism, especially in the thought of **Pseudo Dionysius**, a sixth-century Eastern church father, who taught inward, mystical experience as the true reality that transcends all intellectual knowledge of God. He encouraged leaving behind “the operations of the intellect...in order to arise by unknowing towards the union...with the super-essential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.”^{ix} This is not what the Reformation emphasized, in shining the bright light of God’s spoken and written Word into a dark spiritual period. The Church is awash in “sacred technologies,” but at sea regarding theological certainties. Not all the pagan sacred technologies mentioned above are yet employed, but some are, and the connection is not innocent. Note the following practices common in some evangelical circles:

- Irrational mysticism — the search for non-ordinary states of consciousness as the sign of true spirituality.
- “Christian” mantras — repetition of biblical phrases or words.

^{viii} Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today* (Nov 2004).

^{ix} I am indebted for this citation and other insights on contemplative spirituality to my dear friend, Pam Frost. See “Pagan Contemplative Techniques,” *Global Wizardry*, 186–202.

- **Centering prayer** — developed in the 1970s, derived directly from *The Cloud of Unknowing*.
- **The enneagram** — a psychological paradigm derived from the Egyptian mysteries, Pythagoras and the Sufi mystics.
- **The labyrinth** — a circular prayer-walk, found in many religious traditions, to produce union with the divine.
- **Lectio divina** — meditative reading that awakens contemplation beyond the text.
- Yoga — “yoked to god” in Sanskrit.

Not every Christian who has walked a labyrinth or gone to a yoga class is a pagan! But all Christians need to understand that these techniques, no matter what Christian twist is put on them, view reality from a Oneist perspective. Evangelical leaders of the contemplative movement have ditched the theology of the Bible to cite Roman priests known as mystics and devotees of religious syncretism: Fathers **Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, Basil Pennington, Bob Ochs, Richard Rohr** and Anglo-Catholic mystic, **Evelyn Underhill**, as well as the influential modern Buddhist philosopher, **Ken Wilber**. The “New Monastics for a New Humanity in a New World” will not save us from the Lie.

The “Great Emergence” of the interfaith movement assumes that all the religions agree on the inner core of mystical “spirituality.” Is it any wonder that some evangelical contemplative leaders now deny the atonement of Christ as the central truth of the gospel and openly fellowship with all religions? Synagogue 3000, a group of mystical Kabbalistic rabbis invited **Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Dwight Friesen** and **Dieter Zander** to attend their 2006 meeting as advisors. Both groups spoke of deep spiritual fellowship. This trend silences the gospel and draws unsuspecting Christians into interfaith commitments that lead to Oneist heresy.

One pastor was concerned about the use of pagan worship techniques, including the labyrinth, in some State Conventions of Southern Baptist churches. When he warned the larger group of leaders about the dangers of such techniques, he was assured that they were only used to “go deeper with God.” This pastor is seeing straight, and large sections of Evangelicalism are being seduced by religious Oneism.

The Power of Modern Religious Syncretism

Syncretism is facilitated by the “global village” in which movements on one side of the globe instantly affect the other. The East brought mystical spirituality west not only to ex-secularists, but also to mainline churches. In modern ecumenism, Eastern spirituality is the motor and means of global interfaith programs. “Doctrine divides, the spirit unites,” now defines “spirit” as the animating force of all religions.

As a specific example, a group called the **International Council of World Religions & Cultures** includes representatives of all races, religions, nationalities and socioeconomic strata. Their logo depicts Mother Nature as a winsome wench, exactly as ancient religions depicted the Goddess. Who can resist a global union of nations, peoples and religions for the “common good”? A hyped-up description of planetary crisis is combined with an apocalyptic optimism for a dawning spiritual utopia. The argument goes like this: the world is in a mess; economies are desperately uncertain; the globe is warming to infernal levels; cataclysmic ecological disasters threaten our survival; we are overpopulated and spinning out of control. Only spiritual transformation will save us. But never fear. The “human factor” is here! Spirituality and human potential now embrace all dimensions of the cosmos.

Pagan Power Conspiracy?

Is pagan ideology intent on taking control of planetary life? Perhaps the changes are due to the flow of history, in which each generation hopes for a better life, with a dash of scientific advance to help it along. The leaders at pagan conferences hope to take over organizations and political structures in order to impose Oneist spiritual principles. They are believers who truly think such an approach will solve the world’s ills. But Oneism and Twoism cannot be blended, so one approach will win out. It is no longer foolish to imagine a vast network of pagan thinking, based on Oneism, face-to-face with the only other antithetical possibility, Twoism, which, like its champion, Jesus, does not take up the sword in its own defense.

From its baby days as a marginal cult, this spirituality is morphing into a new civilization. Listen to what futurists say. Futurist historian **Theodore Roszak** makes a revolutionary and deeply spiritual prophecy about the major direction of world culture:

We can discern...a transformation of human personality in progress which is of evolutionary proportions, a shift of consciousness fully as epoch-making as the appearance of speech or of the tool making talents in our cultural repertory.^x

Futurist **Alvin Toffler** believes that “We are witnessing the sudden irruption of a new civilization on the planet.”^{xi} Thomas Berry says, we live in the ecological era whose secrets are revealed by “philosophers and gurus of the earth,” who are developing *a new cosmology for a new planet*, from new revelations of the spirit. We need the insight of the poet, the skill of the artist and the power of the shaman.

Berry’s book title, *The Great Work*, was inspired by a term he found in the writing of Alice Bailey, who speaks of “God’s great and glorious unfolding plan for the destiny of the nations,” known “in esoteric traditions as ‘the Great Work.’”^{xii} This “divine” occult plan will help humanity evolve and

^x Cited in Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), ix.

^{xi} See his book, *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave* (Nashville: Turner Publishing, 1995).

^{xii} Alice Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978).

prepare teachers to guide it, with the help of the UN (where Bailey's **Theosophical** Society oversees the Meditation Room).

Lloyd Geering (referred to in lesson 7) takes the prize for clarity among the futurists. He sees our time as critical for tomorrow's global culture. Promoted by the *Jesus Seminar*, Geering's books are essays for the future earth community. Having totally rejected his Christian past, he states that the universe cannot be explained from sources outside itself, because the universe *has* no outside. He offers a precise prediction of this new civilization: it will not be "Christian" or "dualistic" because Christianity is destined for extinction. The new global world will be monistic (his term) and its spirituality "psychosomatic," based on "mystical union" with the earth. One cannot get more pagan than Geering.

Such is the future of our world if nature-worshiping visionary shamans get their hands on the levers of planetary power to solve the human problems of "malignant aggression and insatiable greed." To reject worship of the Creator is to worship creation. But there is another kind of spirituality, so take heart.