

ARE NEW AGE'S **NEW** STORY &
CHRISTIANITY'S **OLD** STORY RECONCILABLE?

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Harmon, dear friend:

An open letter to Harmon Bro

1 You are overkind in your praise of my Thinksheets, but I think me not so in lauding your deep, wide, & generous critique of New Age in your chapter 9 ("New Age Spirituality: A Critical Appraisal") of Duncan S. Ferguson, ed., NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY: AN ASSESSMENT (Westminster / John Knox, upcoming). Not only because you are more knowledgeable on the subject than I, but also because more generous, I read you eagerly, in hope of improving both my mind & my spirit, the latter having an acerbitous tendency not always pleasant even to me.

But because I take more seriously than do you our ordination's call to sniff out error & pursue heretics, I am more practiced than you in the hermeneutics of suspicion & in hesitance to suspend disbelief, you could anticipate that I would find you overgenerous toward New Age. But neither would you be wrong in guessing that because of my extensive experience in New Age precursors, especially HPM (the human-potential movement, Esalen, that sort of thing), I'll be as affirmative of New Age as an evangelical can be.

2 As the UUA (Unitarian-Universalist Association) is a halfway house into & out of both Judaism & Christianity (though of course that's not that denomination's only function), New Age is a halfway house for many who'd otherwise abandon the spiritual quest (though this is not the movement's only function). Had it existed $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago, when you & I sat in a course taught by eminent NT scholar Donald Riddle, he might not have fallen into sour cynicism & out of theism & the U. of Chicago, after his divorce. Storms come for everybody, everybody needs a stormcellar. Everybody falls, everybody needs a safetynet. The journey away & toward gets overwhelming, everybody needs a halfway house. So I say yes (though qualified) to halfway houses, safetynets, & stormcellars. Yes to New Age, but not as loud as your yes.

3 Why not as loud? Because you incline to see New Age, as I do not, as more than transitional, the purchase of my three metaphors. You are yourself New Age in seeing the movement as salvific, as preaching a New Story--though you have only one foot in the water: "The admittedly exciting drama of natural processes patiently reaching toward self-aware unity with the divine, in what some are calling the New Story and new myth for mankind, replacing old teachings of the Fall and redemption, does not easily, however, capture the sense of a profoundly personal divine, tenderly or fiercely beckoning to each person" (p.10).

4 New Age, though drinking from Eastern & primitive-tribal wells, is a hybrid whose stock is Western, "each person" in focus. That's one irony, that New Age is a Christian heresy. Another is that while New Age prattles about humanity-earth sustainable symbiosis (a vision I wholly embrace) celebrated communally, New Agers I've known are a lonely lot of anticomunitarian individualists, unsocialized to community, allergic to any commitment that would compromise their "freedom," narcissistically enraptured with masturbatory "meditation" that ain't goin' nowhere toward significant personal or social transformation (the hippies' kids repeating the sins & blindnesses of their parents). "Each person," indeed!

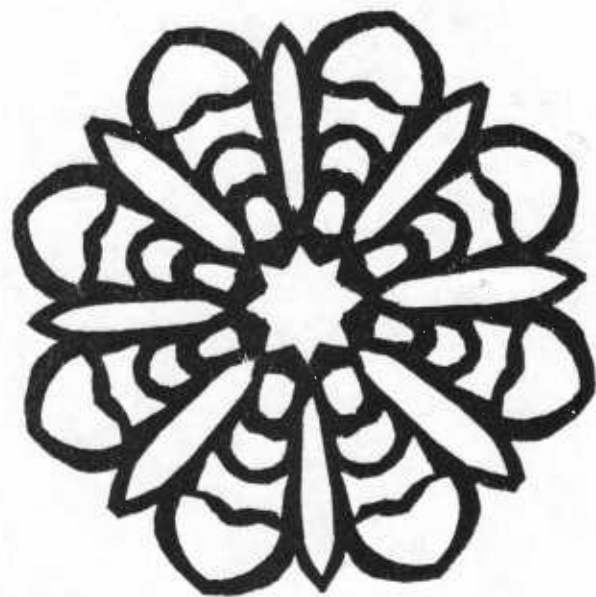
5 Where did we Christians get our "sense of a profoundly personal divine...beckoning to each person"? Primarily, I believe, from the way Jesus treated people: he was himself the others-individuating love of God. Secondarily, from original sin: guilt & shame intensify self-consciousness, self-awareness, "personhood." We sinners (Romans 1-3) personally experience God's grace (Romans 4-8) & personally commit ourselves to live lives of grateful obedience (Romans 12-16). I worry about you, man: you're strong on personhood but weak on original sin, & don't seem to sense the contradiction. In the same ¶ you say New Age is "upsetting centuries-old Christian images of the self or psyche as inherently blighted, needing massive intervention from the divine, even to start growing in a healthy and generous manner." I suspect that the chief difference between us

2555.1a, a brain-relief DIGRESSION

Old Eric, who looked like old Darwin & died soon after we were with him, would have said that New Age began with the voyage of the Beagle: he was a believer in Darwin instead of God, had a first edition of everything in Darwiniana, & was a world collector of butterflies. As you can see here by his art, he had butterflies & world-designs in his head. (As also you can see, he expected Goodwife Joyce to add her name in front of his. They were neighbors of ours in suburban London.)



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To Lovee and Willis

as a reminder of their visit to
London — and especially Petts Wood and
Greenwich — in May 1985

Joyce and Eric Evans

here lies in our specialties: as a psychologist of religion, you are more comfortable with psycho-language; I, as a biblical theologian, with bibliotheo-language. While we share the Christian commitment, our personal stories underlying & informing our specialties & everything else in our lives are different. Our stories are arguing with each other, & we both may learn something by kibitzing as they speak, Horus-like, through the mouths of our specialties.

6 When Carl Menninger asked WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?, he knew very well what'd become of it in his specialty, psychiatry. It'd been repressed (!), to reappear as enough demons to fill a good 20% of any dictionary of psychiatry. In that profession, church-avoiders were glad to follow the lead of synagogue-avoiders, repressing the sin-guilt-shame-redemption-forgiveness paradigm--for short, the sin/grace paradigm. By common & special channels, we sinners, ie we human beings, do need what you seem to sniff at, viz "massive intervention from the divine." Those who conclude we don't have this need have no need, no use, for either of the biblical religions. New Age has supercessionism (that it has superceeded the traditional religions) as a more often implicit than explicit dogma. If you are here an antisupercessionist, I fail to find it in chapter 9.

7 Also on p.10, twice you use "inherently" ("i. blighted" & "i. twisted") in alluding to original sin. Would you say that humanity is "blighted" & "twisted" but not inherently? It's orthodox Jewish & Christian teaching that creation participates in the character of God as good: no shaping of the doctrine of original sin has ever denied that while teaching that sin inheres in our actual-historical humanity. Accounts other than original sin can be given of humanity's interior & external horrors, but they all seem to me to cover the data less well. But I've found that to say "I believe in original sin" excludes you from New Age fellowship as fast as to say "I don't believe in the virgin birth" excludes you from a fundamentalist church! (During the recent L.A. rioting, a New Ager phoned me to say "OK OK, I give up! You're right about original sin.")....Do you badmouth original sin to ingratiate yourself with New Agers, or because you've always been sniffy toward it? Some are saying Christianity won't survive unless it unloads original sin: I say New Age won't survive unless it learns a profounder way of conceiving & resisting evil in soul & society. On numerous occasions I've said that original sin can be a bridge between the biblical religions & New Age, & not all New Agers have been turned off by the suggestion. (This is the first thing I've said in this Thinksheet that might suggest a yes to its title question.)

8 New Age, in its nouveau enthusiasms, is even more apt to be an enemy of humility than are (p.11) "those church people gripped by an image of fallen humanity, fixed upon original sin more than on what Matthew Fox has called original blessing." Submitting myself as a guinea for the U. of Cal. Psychophysical Laboratory, I found a naive eagerness to jump to New Age conclusions, without the epistemological sophistication that humbly grants the impossibility of disengaging interpretation from experience-experiment. You're well aware of the harmonic convergence of sainthood & science on the spiritual-moral-intellectual virtue of humility. Yet I find little of it among my evangelical friends, & even less among New Agers. Recently, after he'd charmed an audience with his personal New Age story & package, I confronted Baba Ram Das (nee Rich. Alpert, deracinated Jew) publicly then privately with his facile leaps from drug experiences to Eastern metaphysics, leaps spring-loaded with arrogant rejection of Christianity (while coopting to his gnosticism many terms from the biblical vocabulary). His fumbling responses showed he's not been much called, confronted, on his verbal behavior.

9 Why the New Age animus against "sin"? One reason is the sons' struggle for respectability against the father: deracinated Jews like Freud & Alpert (dismissed, for drug experimentation, from his Harv. post in psychology), deracinated Christians like Jung & Jones. (A deracinated Jew-&-Christian, Marx, fathered the original-sin-less ecopolitical philosophy that fathered communism: the doctrine of original sin is a prophylaxis against monstrous perversions of soul & society.) Of course original sin can be overstressed: I can sympathize with celibate-priest Matthew Fox's "original blessing" as a corrective to his earlier life-experiences;

but often he lets his corrective hypertrophy into a rejective of the other side of the biblical balance, viz original sin. (Yes, "original sin" is an Augustinian, not a biblical phrase. But while he gave pagan-ascetic elaboration to it, the heart of his doctrine was biblical.)

A deeper reason for the animus is that the biblical doctrine of sin is both an insult to, & an expression of deep distrust in, human nature. You are sufficiently informed of the biblical wisdom that your chapter has demurs against a fatuous belief in Rousseau's "noble savage," a durable doctrine partly appearing in Freud but now full-armored in New Age (such as the current PBS/TV's "Millenium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World"). Contributors to this naivete are various ex-theists--such as renegade-Jew Erikson (who took a Swedish name), renegade-Roman-Catholic Campbell, & renegade-Lutheran Bly, not to name the media-touted love-panacea lecturers. All these humanistic God-evaders irritate me only because of their success in seducing Americans inclined to quick fixes, cheap grace, & low-intensity communal commitment....What! isn't Eriksonian "basic trust" a good thing to get at life's stage-one? Depends. What's it become at life's later stages in this culture? Not only is the history of human creativity-achievement full of folks who missed childhood "basic trust," but also note how neat a fit multitudes who got it are for Galbraith's "culture of contentment." Besides, to put it reflexively, reality corrects, often painfully, those who avoid it. We theists believe & teach that Reality does not forever delay retribution for God-amnesia (as the OT puts it, "the nations that forget God"). The Fall story (& original-sin sequels) is a cold bath of reality when we're tempted to jacuzzi ourselves in a species-flattering view of humanity. (Happy note: New Age is, in one direction, viz biospheric sustainability, a divine corrective to hypertrophied humanity, to our basic trust in ourselves to master the hell out of everything & everybody.)

This is not a hopeful point of tangency between Bible & New Age. Bible says (Is.64.6 NRSV) "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth," & the Prayerbook since 1549 has been intoning "...and there is no good in us." A cold bath, yes, but more: a slap in our self-congratulatory face. Our religion, yours & mine, prepares for our praise of God by calling on us to dispraise ourselves: we can confess this faith only after we have confessed our sin, our willful wandering from God. Wilderness preparation before the promised land. Bunyan's pilgrim making only such progress toward the Celestial City as he's willing to self-divest....Here the Stories, Old & New, are irreconcilable, indeed enemies: commitment to one implicitly commits one to attack the other. Your chapter gently critiques but does not attack. Doubtless you believe you can do more good by stressing similarities rather than differences. In this you well may be what I think you're not, viz right.

10 You use (again, p.10) "**natural**" in a biblically unnatural way: "natural processes patiently reaching toward self-aware unity with the divine, in what some are calling the New Story and new myth for [sic] mankind, replacing old teachings of the Fall and redemption...." In the Bible, "nature" is a fallen creature of God, who takes the initiative toward, & in Jesus Christ suffers for, its redemption. It's a "New Story...new myth" indeed that "nature" takes the initiative, & that not for its redemption, but for its self-elevation (in Hindu-Buddhist fashion) "towards self-aware unity with the divine." The two major religions originating in the Subcontinent would indeed "replace" biblical religion: what's "New...new" about that? Are you not, here, poor at enemy recognition?

But in New Age, a new patina, viz evolutionism, has been added to Subcontinent religiosity: "this new higher [too high!] view of human nature is expressed by seeing humans as the self-aware nervous system of Gaia, the evolving planet which has been developing in self-regulating modes ever since the Big Bang." "Self-regulating" is 18th-c. deism redivivus: "nature" is autonomous, doing its own thing as independently of God as the sinner is alien from God, the latter being the model of the former. So successful was that deism that in the next c., Darwin's "natural selection," a nonsense phrase, sounded like sober science. In our c., all this became "naturalistic theism" (Wieman's wrinkle on Whitehead's "process," a new wrinkle on progress belief). (Weren't we in a Wieman class together, hearing his oft-repeated "God is the increase of personal awareness in the person-making

process"?

Maybe we're in the postmodern age. In the modern age, the intellectual project was *How do we get rid of God?* Some split him off from "nature" & let him drift away into oblivion, gone & forgotten. Others sucked him into "nature" in various ways & to various degrees--eg, "process," "Woodstock," wicca, golden-age goddess (earth) worship, New Age (which is a buffet brunch of un- & anti-biblical options)....Were you with me, in 1941, in Aubrey's course, "The Natural and the Supernatural"? How accurate he was in presaging that as our culture became more God-amnesiac, "nature" would gain independent-relative force: it would be forgotten that "nature" is, historically (eg, 6th-c.-BC/BCE Ionian atomism), antonymic to "God" (&, by reversal, "supernature," "the supernatural")! The divine does not disappear: if it's no longer apparent, it's disappeared *into*. In the Enlightenment, God disappeared into "man," & we got such a blasphemous phrase as "the infinite value of the individual" (an inflation largely accounting for the cry of "Murderers!" against us who favor abortion & capital punishment). In the Age of Science, God disappeared into "nature" (a.k.a. "Nature" & "Mother Nature"). I predict that New Age will not survive into the fully-arrived postmodern age. For the postmodern age will surrender the numinosity of "nature," a romantic doctrine too fragile for the winds of philosophy, religion, & science.

11 New Age is a New Story more in being neosemantic (changing the meanings of historic religious terms East & West, twisting some into unrecognizable shapes) than in being neologistic (creating new words). In the lecture mentioned above, Ram Das reconfigured a dozen biblical words so they'd fit into his neo-Buddhist schema; eg, Western "resurrection" blurred into Eastern "reincarnation." Poetic license is one thing, duplicity is quite another....I'll limit myself to "reincarnation" & "karma," which you treat on p.11:

New Age gives reincarnation a 180° turn, making it something to look forward to instead of (as in the East) something to be abhorred &, by all means, avoided. My Hindu students at the U. of Hawaii laughed heartily at this reversal of meaning; most had not heard of it till I mentioned it in class. I'm still laughing. But not as much as weeping, & praying for more honest speech on the earth. You soften to "the rebirth process," which sounds more honest, though its displaced to death from its biblical location (in the Bible, birthing is never a metaphor for dying). Even in the East, "the rebirth experience" & "the birth process" are associated more with the buddha (enlightenment) experience than with dying. Yet it's becoming rather common for Americans to view dying as "being born into a new life." It jars me whenever I hear-read it. Who sez? Millions who face the implicit if not explicit question "What happens to me when I die?" But of the several biblical answers to this question, that ain't one of 'em. The Bible is morally serious about life before & after death: the notion that everybody's death is a "rebirth process" trivializes morality & thus demeans humanity. We smile when the Queen of Hearts says "All have won and all shall have prizes." Smile, because we know life's not like that. Whence the notion that death is like that? The illusion may have a quieting effect on the dying, but are they not entitled to the truth as best we can frame it? Biblically, that truth is theocentric: in death as in life, whether we want to or not, we have to do with God....A New York hospice lists questions the dying ask but does not include "What happens to me when I die?" I need not expound the reasons for the elision....The media are far more apt to say "reincarnation" than (even at Easter!) "resurrection." The public is so biblically ignorant, I believe, that the former word is more familiar than the latter....You are right: "the issue of the nature and destiny of the soul is back on the spiritual agenda after an absence from mainstream theological reflection for nearly two centuries of modernity." Rein. Niebuhr's Gifford lectures were on THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN, not of the soul: "soul" is a pagan notion with scant biblical means of support. I favor the scientific exploration of consciousness & everything else more or less available to science; but I'm against the body/soul dualism New Age claims to be against (& is, ecologically) but isn't (metaphysically). Rightly you score the church for not communicating the biblical vision, & see New Age as in this sense a judgment on the church. But I do not see you yourself

as supporting the biblical vision, the resurrection way of seeing the future. The center of this vision is not the soul & its destiny but God & his denouement of history: psychocentricity is pagan, theocentricity is biblical. New Age is pagan. Pagan ain't all bad, just wrong at the core. Papa Jung was an improvement on Papa Freud, but not much.

As for karma, the case is not as diametrical a distortion as the case of reincarnation. The Subcontinent meaning is moral (as New Age "reincarnation" is not): we all get ours in the sense of retribution, have to face the consequences (Skrt. & Gk. "-ma") of our behavior ("kar-")--sooner or later, here or hereafter (in the hereafter). (Associated words in other I-E languages illumine the concept: eg, Gk. δίκη "dike" & μοῖρα "moira," Lat. *ius* & *fatum*.) The note of inevitability contrasts with biblical grace-repentance-forgiveness, which in the light of karma (original, pre-New-Age meaning) is immoral....You rightly see purgation vis-a-vis both reincarnation & karma. But you overdo it when you say that "the rebirth process" in New Age affirms "a position not too far removed from centuries-long Christian views of purgatory." "Purgatory," a Roman Catholic doctrine, applies not to all the deceased (as does New Age's "rebirth") but only to those who've not committed a mortal sin. The idea that everybody gets an afterlife chance to clean up is very recent, making the quality of one's behavior in this life less serious. Am I dogmatic about "the way it is" in the afterlife? No, rather I'm suggesting that any view be morally serious, ethically responsible, vis-a-vis pre-death behavior, & not try to sidestep the realities signalled by such biblical words as "sin" & "judgment."....As for loading karma with the extraneous meaning of "the flowering of talents and opportunities for service of one's fellows," well, neoHinduism has to have some place to put this noble sentiment. Gandhi didn't do it, but Radhakrisnan did--as in his bridge analogy: karma hands you the cards from your past, but you're free & responsible to make personally & socially good calls from them. And the Theosophical Society redacts karma into the teaching that our behavior creates + & - conditions un/favorable to our transmigratory progress toward freedom from all ignorance, at which point rebirth ceases but the soul continues to grow. (Most New Agers could join the Theosophical Society & feel right at home.) All very interesting to the religion connoisseur, & spiritually attractive to many with a taste for the exotic East & a turn-off from the endotic West. Many, indeed. Otherwise Christians wouldn't have written against New Age the score of books I've perused. (Among the resources for such books are scores of books written in response to former waves from the East, waves coming ashore in every period of Christian history, as you well know. The central Christian accusation has been, & is, **psycholatry**, the virtual worship of the soul, a black hole of metaphysical narcissism into which God, nature, society, & history disappear. In some manifestations of this Easternism, "the soul" becomes "the Soul" or "the collective unconscious" or other nuancings, but the central criticism holds: the gnostic story, no matter how it's gussied up New, is a competing alternative to "the old, old Story, / That I have loved so long." This being the dynamic, how could I love the Old without hating the New? Yet [1] Christian philosophers have always learned from their enemy-competitors, & [2] Christian goodwill & life-affirmation require that we Christians work together with New Agers on projects & in movements of mutual concern. I speak of intellectual opposition to a paradigm, & for friendliness toward & dialog with its holders.)

12 After characterizing New Age as given to psychic encounters, mythological motifs, altered states of consciousness, reincarnation & karma, & self-responsibility, you enunciate a proper warning (p.11): New Age "can be made a kind of ladder of spirituality without moral reference" (underlining, mine)...."mere technique" with "no Olympus and no pain"...."canned into flotation tanks, packaged vision quests into the outback, ritual chanting and sweating, and dream capturing which offers a higher consciousness that knows nothing of crudfixions and self-giving for others."...."shallowness of much New Age art and music which affirms the reachability of higher-consciousness through endless relaxing and musing, without engaging one's shadow side and the dark perversity which dogs human nature." (Did I really have to preach original sin to you?) "Reincarnation can of course be made the vehicle for narcissistic speculation and 'readings' about one's remarkable past, or for escaping responsibility to respond to the suffering of

others because it is their karma. And even taking responsibility for one's life and affairs can degenerate into mechanical affirmations of potency and peace, which dodge the divine call in situations where poverty of circumstance and spirit is the greatest strength, and miss the divine outrage over situations where there should be no peace."...."trivialization [of life] into psycho-techniques." I quote at length these words coming from the biblical-prophetic level of your inner life, lest my readers think (in the light of some of my above) that absent. What's distressing me is the absence of verbal integration of that level with your New Age manner of speaking. Maybe I'm just too language-sensitive, but your words often seem to me to be subverting, rather than honoring, the biblical speech-mode, the logion of our religion, yours & mine. (Or is this just a bibliobabbler complaining about a psychobabbler? Of course I think not; I think I'm saying something that may improve your act.)

13 Your first & last ¶s refer to New Age's "**ecstasy industry**," driven (I'd say) by a mixed fuel of spiritual yearning, American gee-whizz enthusiasm for "the latest" (a good tr. of the last Gk. word in Ac.17.21), & Mad. Av. exploitation. The first is the heart of the matter, "the longing for a direct personal relation with the divine" (p.1) in standing-out (ec-static) transcendence of ordinary dailiness. In this, Billy Graham & New Age make the same appeal, & their messages can open each to the other. One Spirit is striving to move our clay to glory now & hereafter --& though I be, I believe by divine call, a basher of Bible-bashers, anybody's ecstasy-striving is for me a call to thanksgiving (that God has given the gift of ecstasy) & prayer (that the ecstasy seeker will "go on to perfection" [Heb.6.1]). I say that lest you think me narrow-spirited, whereas I'm only narrow-minded (as committed to the biblical paradigm, as anyone committed to any paradigm is narrow-minded)....I'd like to write a liberation theology for Bible-bashers: the biblical vision is, I claim, the most liberating. And I've long been against the wedlock of Bible to any philosophy locking its meaning. You can see this in this diary passage of ½ c. + 2 days (& you'll recognize all the worthies, as having known them face to face): "2¼ hrs. Theology Club, James Luther Adams discussing the autonomy yet interrelatedness of the 3 disciplines--philosophy, philosophy of religion, & theology--in the thought of Paul Tillich. The rest of the time was given to questioning, mainly by W.Pauck, H.N.Wieman, D.Williams, & B.Loomer....The Chicago Anglo-Saxon naturalists [promoters of "naturalistic theism," which became process theology] do not have the tremendous digestive capacity & ability so characteristic of the German theologians, who can be at once left-wing radicals & right-wing traditionalists without experiencing gastronomic tragedy. This comprehensiveness or synthetic power of the Germans I admire because by it one can say 'I am debtor' to one's whole religious & cultural heritage, rather than be forced to accept some impoverishing structurification such as religious & philosophical naturalism." You did not let yourself get locked into "the Chicago school" of theology, but your Jungianism does seem to me to control how you see & use Scripture. Your privilege, of course. But I believe in a partnership marriage between Bible & philosophy, each illumining the other. Or, if the marriage is to be patriarchal, I prefer that the Bible be the husband. But that analogy betrays me. A better: for me, the ground commitment is biblical, & I am open to learn from all who would build thereon (as well, or course, to all who would build on any other foundation). What I'm against is (1) the ignorant bashing of the Bible, a condition curable by education, & (2) the cooptation of Scripture to other paradigms (Hindu, Buddhist, Jungian, whatever). Straight-out opposition to the Bible worries me less: if church & synagogue are faithful, it can take care of itself.

14 Your distinction between (biblical) **obedience** & (Hindu-Buddhist-Greek-New-Age) **gnosis** (enlightenment, vision) is too stark, though you say "obedience and gnosis always need each other" (p.12). Campbell's "Follow your bliss" is the commandment, the call to obedience, at the heart of his New Age gospel. And surely the root of biblical religion is vision (Heb. navi, the prophet as "seer"). What New Age resists is obedience to "the Father of lights" (Jas.1.17), the biblical God. Loving obedience to that God is the heart of the Bible.

15 Your grasp of the virtues, ignorances, & vices of New Age is so much better than mine that I read your chapter a number of times so as to miss nothing. As you can see, I can't resist sharing some of your insider sharp critiquing with my readers. Where you & I differ most is in our **tasks**. Yours seems to be to purify & deepen a movement whose roots & hopes you see as healthy & hopeful. My task, as I see it, is, while appreciating some of New Age's potentially redeeming social values, to identify, clarify, & amplify the points at which (to allude again to this Thinksheet's title) the two Stories are irreconcilable. In a public dialog, our two tasks would so seem to converge that our differences would be in danger of disappearing!

16 If Rodney King were New Age, he wouldn't have gotten drunk &, by driving 115mph, so endangered the lives of the pursuing police as to enrage them into administering so severe a beating. If so, New Age in this instance would have saved a lot of folks a lot of trouble & expense. What's humorous about my statement is the extreme improbability of R.K. being into New Age, whose clientele are mainly white, upper-middle-class, college-educated liberals (says Michael D'Antonio, HEAVEN ON EARTH: DISPATCHES FROM AMERICA'S SPIRITUAL FRONTIER, Crown/92). This cohort loves flexible, amorphous, low-&-temporary-commitment movements that arise spontaneously, without benefit of institution. I could name a few hands-on social services being performed by New Age groups, & some good social-change ideas bounce around in some New-Age discussions I've been in, but Jerry Brown (politically relevant-irrelevant) is about the best (I think) we can expect of New Agers. While their neopaganism may have some influence in environmentalism, the New Age mentality is alienated from & foreign to power-wielding institutions--business, government, media, education, church. (Recently I was in our UCC church in Sedona, Ariz., where I felt the presence of God & our Christian heritage, but not "the powerful natural-energy vortices" New Agers go there to feel, their belief being that those red rocks appearing through the glass wall behind our church's altar are a form of condensed pure energy. Which agrees with your scoring New Age for historyless ecstatic immediacy.)

17 As a bird in flight will ascend higher over a conflagration, so religion in times of trouble develops a time-&-times-transcending form. The soul rises to inhabit a reverse-image realm (eg, of relaxation above when there's stress below, of peace above when there's war below, of clarity above when there's confusion below, of simplicity above when there's complexity below)....Directional prepositions signal here different paradigms of transcendence. Historical religions speak of **toward** & **above**; mystical religions, of **within** & **beyond**. As historical, biblical religion is eschatological ("toward") & apocalyptic (from "above"). New Age is heavily invested in interiority ("within") & the paranormal ("beyond"). (New Age environmentalism adds an element of historical religion, viz concern for the earth. Then, in unconscious irony, accuses biblical religion of being unconcerned for the earth!)....Times-of-trouble transcendence is a balloon whose string is tied to the trouble--both to institutions perceived to be dysfunctional & to the chaotic voids succeeding institutions, mores, & morals that have died. Eg, the New Age seedbed was late-'60s, early-'70s hippiedom...This type of transcendence may take various political forms: (1) The apolitical, to-hell-with-institutions, why-vote? disengagement from sociopolitical processes; (2) The golden-age-past restorationist; (3) The utopian fundamentalist. All three are now appearing not only in the West but also in Islam & Buddhism (teaching at U. of Hawaii, I had New-Age Muslim & New-Age Buddhist students, though fewer in number than their traditional counterparts)....Once this type of transcendence is, by comparative method, established as a category,

18 the **interpretive field** is enriched, with new freedoms of distancing/involvement & interillumination between the hub (the category) & the spokes (the instances) & among the spokes. The field is also enriched by the multiple correlation method: (1) Tillich's question/answer correlation; (2) correlation among the questions; (3) correlation among the answers....My mind is made to work correlatively, comparatively, analogically. A half-century ago I was offering a NT

intro course requiring the mastery, & comparison, of two diametrical introductions, Goodspeed's & Cartledge's. Thinking is polar: how could the students think if presented with only one point of view? In this sense, New Age is an invitation to address the question that titles this Thinksheet.

19 ADDITIONAL NOTES:....(1) You are so quotable, but I limit myself to two more quotes: "A shallow ethic usually comes from a shallow gospel" (p.2); "A Course in Miracles" as "literally the words of Jesus...overlooks the obvious Vedantist substance of the teaching (which denies the crucifixion and ultimately the reality of evil) far from the NT, and robs students of a legitimate but disciplined encounter between Eastern and Western treasures, approached in their own integrity and depth" (p.3).....(2) All God's chillun should now be transcultural, but New Age friends press me to be transreligious. One of them goes beyond gematria to what I may call arithmancy: a recent letter quotes me ten of the world's scriptures at 2.6 in each, with which catena he weaves a message going beyond "the religions." One more form of hatred of history & institutions, *odium mundi*, though it's the human-world-as-is, not "nature," that he hates....(3) What biblical religion calls revelation, New Age in some of its manifestations calls channeling. We had the Seth books, then "A Course in Miracles," now "The [2,097-p.] Urantia Book," with its SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP JOURNAL, "ecumenical and nonsectarian," against the religion about Jesus & for the religion of Jesus, preaching (Spring/92 editorial) "the spiritual insights and truth resonance of the harmonious integration of the entire universe," & mentioning "a small group of UCC ministers planning to work in and through the church in spreading this Good News."(4) A cold-bath correction from an old teacher of mine: Mort. Adler's TRUTH IN RELIGION (Mac/90). And Eliade....(5) Public television leans heavily in the New Age direction. Eg, the current "The Millenium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World" series (first segment: "the death of one proud God [the biblical] and the rebirth of others")....(6) Reading creates hyperindividuals (Walt Whitman: "I am my own institution"). New Agers are readers. Few read. Therefore, New Age will not become a mass movement even though pooped by the media.

20 Harmon, **so much is RIGHT with the world!** That's the thought that swept over me when I saw this newspaper photo of any (million) four-year-old boy ecstatically hugging any (million) mother, who's also (for him) the only mother in the whole world. As photography has been my persistent hobby since 1927, when I began processing glass plates (before film eliminated them, except in science, where they're still used), my heart sings praise to God when I see a pic that's technically excellent (form) & humanly triumphant. And whenever that happens, as this time, I never fail to say to myself, often also to Loree, "That photographer is happy!"



But what's this have to do with this Thinksheet's subject? Mood, man, mood. My matter has been to contrast New Age's New Story unfavorably with our Christian faith's Old Story, as the two are now in our country profoundly wrestling against each other. But my mood throughout has been gratitude to God for anything & everything that brings any light to blind eyes, any song to deaf ears, any strength to weak limbs, any hope to discouraged hearts, any love to the lonely. "They are but broken lights of Thee, / And Thou, O Lord, art more than they." In an ancient phrase I love, $\psi\omega\varsigma\ \psi\omega\tau\acute{\iota}$ (*p^{hos} p^{hoti}*, which can be rendered either "by Light, light" [God reveals himself as water finds its way in wherever there are cracks] or "by light, Light" [theotropism: Light comes when we truly pray, Lighten our darkness, O Lord!]).