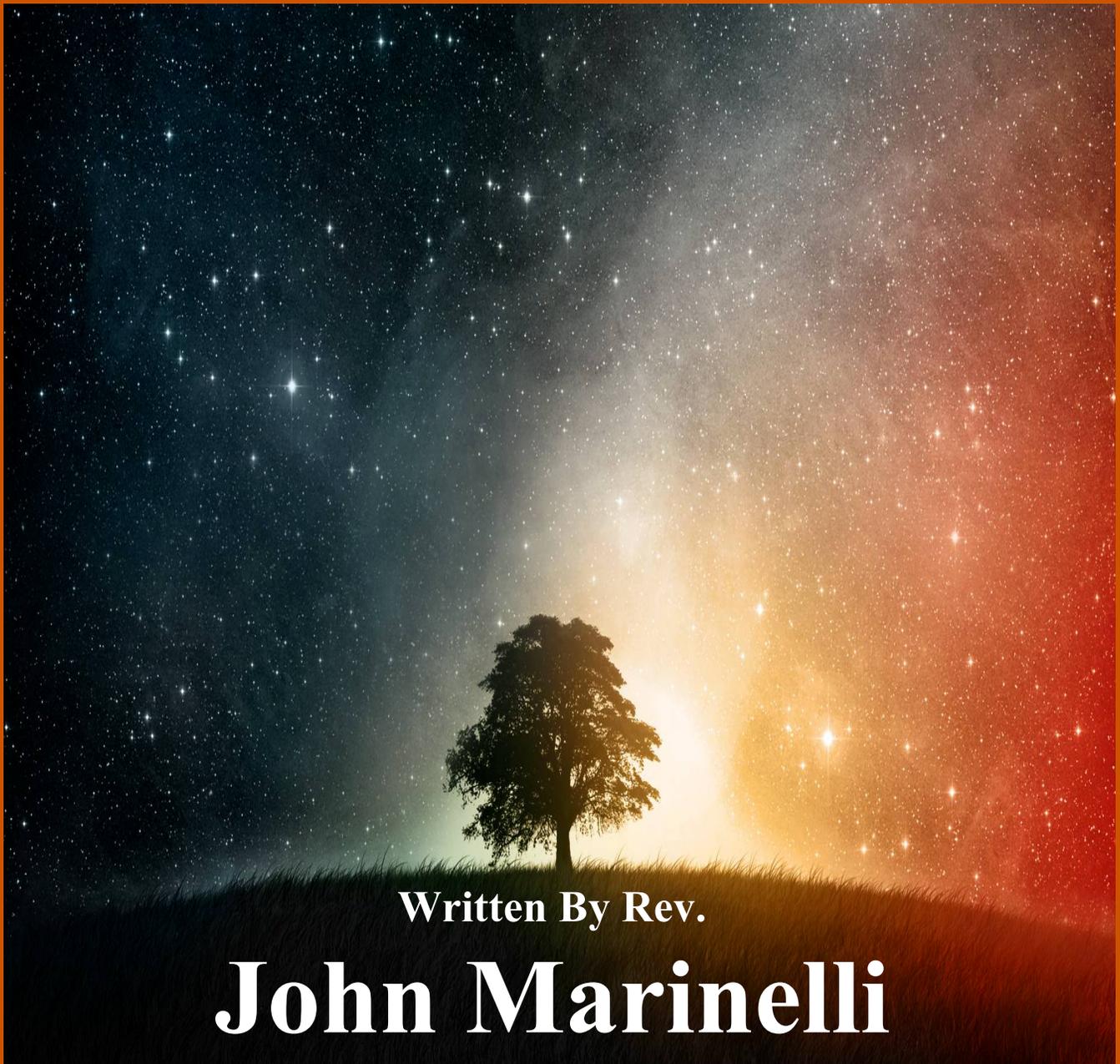


The “New Age” Movement And Christianity



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Introduction

The **New Age** is a term applied to a range of spiritual or religious beliefs and practices that developed in Western nations during the 1970s. Precise scholarly definitions of the movement differ in their emphasis, largely as a result of its highly eclectic structure.

Although analytically often considered to be religious, those involved in it typically prefer the designation of "spiritual" and rarely use the term "New Age" themselves. Many scholars of the subject refer to it as the **New Age movement**, although others contest this term, believing that it gives a false sense of homogeneity to the phenomenon.

As a form of Western esotericism, the New Age movement drew heavily upon a number of older esoteric traditions, in particular those that emerged from **the occultist current** that developed in the eighteenth century. Such prominent occult influences include the work of Emanuel Swedenborg and Franz Mesmer, as well as the ideas of Spiritualism, New Thought, and the Theosophical Society. A number of mid-twentieth century influences, such as **the UFO religions** of the 1950s, **the Counterculture of the 1960s**, and the Human Potential Movement, also exerted a strong influence on the early

development of the New Age movement. Although the exact origins of the movement remain contested, it is agreed that it developed in the 1970s, at which time it was centred largely in the United Kingdom. It expanded and grew largely in the 1980s and 1990s, in particular within the United States.

Theologically: Holistic Form of Divinity

Despite its highly eclectic nature, a number of beliefs commonly found within the New Age movement have been identified. Theologically, the movement typically adopts a belief in a holistic form of divinity which imbues all of the universe, including human beings themselves. There is thus a strong emphasis on the spiritual authority of the self.

Semi-Divine Non-Human Entities

This is accompanied by a common belief in a wide variety of semi-divine non-human entities, such as angels and masters, with whom humans can communicate, particularly through the form of channeling. Typically viewing human history as being divided into a series of distinct ages, a common New Age belief is that whereas once humanity lived in an age of great technological advancement and spiritual wisdom, it has entered a period of spiritual degeneracy, which will be remedied through the establishment of a coming Age of Aquarius, from which the movement gets its name. There is also a strong focus on healing, particularly using forms of alternative medicine, and an emphasis on a "New Age science" which seeks to unite science and spirituality.

Those involved in the New Age movement have been primarily from middle and upper-middle-class backgrounds. The degree to which New Agers are involved in the movement varied considerably, from those who adopted a number of New Age ideas and practices to those who fully embraced and dedicated their lives to it. The movement has generated criticism from established Christian organisations as well as contemporary Pagan and indigenous communities. From the 1990s onward, the movement became the subject of research by academic scholars of religious studies.

The Christian Research Institute

Elliot Miller of The Christian Research Institute does a great job at compiling data on the New Ager Movement. He asks these questions on their website. Is the New Age Movement: Evidence of a new phase in evolution? A Harbinger of the Antichrist? A passing fad? A conspiracy myth created by paranoid Christians? Or is it so amorphous and enigmatic that it is impossible to adequately characterize?

The question posed by this article's title has been a live one for Evangelicals over the past few years. Answers have varied widely, including, but not limited to, those given above. Discussions of the topic have frequently generated a great deal more heat than light.

The New Age movement is not impossible to describe, just difficult. It is a complex sociological phenomenon not unlike the proverbial elephant discovered independently by three blind men: one came upon his leg and described him as a tree; another got hold of his trunk and likened him to a hose; the third stumbled onto his tail and insisted he was like a rope. Things that may be true about parts of the New Age movement are not necessarily true of the whole.

Loosely Structured Network

The New Age movement is an extremely large, *loosely* structured network of organizations and individuals bound together by common values (based in mysticism and monism—the world view that “all is one”) and a common vision (a coming “new age” of peace and mass enlightenment, the “Age of Aquarius”).

Within the New Age met network and movement are hundreds of smaller (but still sometimes very large) networks and movements encompassing a wide variety of interests and causes (all compatible with the ends of the larger network).

1. The Consciousness Movement
2. The Holistic Health Movement
3. The Human Potential Movement
4. The followers of many Eastern gurus and Western occult teachers.

Eastern/Gnostic movements do not believe in a coming new age, or participate in the networking process (such groups, like the Hare Krishnas and Christian Science, should really not be considered a part of the New Age movement, in spite of the many beliefs they hold in common with it).

Additionally, such movements/networks as ecology, “appropriate technology” the “peace movement” and future studies overlap the New Age network to varying degrees, though they are *by no means* entirely encompassed within it.

Not A Cult But Contains Cultic Organizations

The New Age movement is not a cult by any accepted sociological definition of the term. Although there are several cults, which could be classified within it (for example, the Rajneeshees, Transcendental Meditation, and the Divine Light Mission), most are on the movement’s periphery. Some, like the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness (MISA) and the Sufi Order in the West, are more in its mainstream, but only because they are *less* exclusive, and their leadership *less* authoritarian than most cults. Cult membership is by far the exception, and not the rule, for New Agers.

New Agers tend to be eclectic: they draw what they think is the best from many sources. Long-term, exclusive devotion to a single teaching, teacher, or technique is not the norm. They move from one approach to “wholeness” to another in their spiritual journeys (*fire-walking* as a means to “personal transformation” is the latest sensation!). *New Age Journal* observes:

Basic Beliefs

This eclectic tendency underscores the fact that New Agers consider spirituality much more a matter of experience than belief. Any teaching or technique that facilitates experience is welcome, but there is most often no loyalty to a rigid, elaborate system of belief.

Are there *any* beliefs that are universal, or almost universal, among New Agers? Some of them would answer “no” (in fact, beliefs are often portrayed

as direct impediments to enlightenment). However, certain assumptions cannot be separated from New Age thinking, or it would no longer *be* New Age thinking.

Pantheism Rules

All New Agers believe that “**all is one**”— everything that exists composes one essential reality. A second assumption is that this Ultimate Reality is neither dead matter nor unconscious energy. It is Being, Awareness, and Bliss (which is to say, a Hindu conception of God as an impersonal, infinite consciousness and power).

The first two assumptions imply two more: all that is, is God (which is pantheism); and man, a part of “all that is” is likewise divine. But how do New Agers answer the inescapable fact that most people don’t at all *feel* one with God?

In agreement with all pantheists, New Agers explain that man is separated from God *only* in his own consciousness. He is the victim of a *false* sense of separate identity, which blinds him to his essential unity with God, and this is the cause of all his problems. How then can man be saved (or made whole, as New Agers would prefer to put it)? It becomes a matter of *spiritual technology*.

Salvation Is Self-Realization This Is Anti-Christ

New Agers believe that any or all of a variety of techniques for *altering* the consciousness (including meditation, chanting, ecstatic dancing, and sensory deprivation) can enable the seeker to *consciously* (mystically) experience his supposed oneness with God. Thus, salvation for the New Ager is equated with *gnosis* (experiential knowledge). It is *Self-realization* or the realization that one’s *true* Self is God. Such mystical experiences are viewed as doorways to “personal transformation,” a lifelong growth process marked by increasing wholeness and personal power.

For the New Agers, experience and intuition are the final authorities. Such subjectivism makes sense, if one believes he’s in a universe where nothing ultimately exists but one solitary Self, or subject. How can there be an

objective authority? The very concept of objectivity loses ultimate validity and meaning in such a worldview. Thus, objectivity is not appreciated by New Agers as it has traditionally been in the West, though they like to consider themselves objective.

Reincarnation Dominates

In addition to the above universal beliefs, almost all New Agers adhere to the ancient Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma. By the law of karma it is understood that whatever a person does, good or bad, will return to him experientially in an exact proportion of good or bad. Since most people are unable to experience all of the “bad karma” that they have accumulated in one lifetime, they are compelled to return in few incarnations until all of their bad karma has been balanced by good karma. Thus, salvation for New Agers is clearly a matter of works.

Spiritualized Doctrine of Evolution

Also central to New Age belief are a spiritualized doctrine of evolution, the conviction that personal transformation leads to planetary transformation, and the concept of the New Age itself (usually defined astrologically). We will reserve discussion of these beliefs until later in this and the following article.

Acceptance of Humanist Truths

It should be pointed out that underlying the New Age belief system is an acceptance of the “truths” purveyed by the humanist establishment. While remaining within the frameworks of humanism and existentialism, New Agers have simply gone on to spiritualize the universe by making consciousness its essence, rather than matter. New Age activist Mark Satin writes, “...consciousness is ‘ultimately’ determining. That is my perspective.

No Ultimate Answer

It is not ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – there is no ‘ultimate’ answer.” Denying that there is any objective truth we need to worry about (e.g., a personal God

with a definite will for mankind), New Agers see belief as something that we create to meet our cultural needs.

When these “myths” are no longer serving the culture (which is how they tend to see the orthodox Judeo-Christian faiths today), they should be discarded for the common good.

Careless Approach To Issues of Faith

Though New Agers have definite beliefs, this underlying utilitarian attitude explains their seemingly careless approach to issues of faith, which, to the Christian, have ultimate consequences.

A Gallup survey released a few years ago projected that 10% of Americans have participated in one of several New Age spiritual movements (including Transcendental Meditation, yoga, Oriental religions, and other forms of mysticism). Drawing upon this ground swell, the New Age movement has become a significant American spiritual and social force, existing alongside of the secular and religious establishments, competing with them for cultural dominance.

Classic Monistic Hinduism

In some respects, New Age religion can rightly be classified as a Western expression of classic monistic Hinduism (called *Vedanta*). The most basic beliefs (about God, the world, man, and salvation) are the same, as are the mystical experiences that are at the heart of both. Much of the New Age spiritual technology that produces these experiences has come straight from India, brought here and taught since the 1960s by Hindu swamis and gurus. Their followers make up a sizable — though by no means dominant — contingent of the movement itself.

“Trans-Material” Worldview

In spite of these commonalities, the New Age movement (including its Oriental components) is very different from traditional Eastern mysticism.

The key to this difference lies in the fact that New Agers are life and world affirming.

New Agers are now advocating a “trans-material” worldview, which is (they claim) neither non-materialist (as with Hinduism), nor materialist (as with secular humanism). It agrees with the Hindus that on a certain level of consciousness (the “spiritual state”), all is seen as one, and there are no distinctions between, for example, subject and object, or good and evil.

It would also agree with the materialist that on a certain level his perspective is valid. But New Agers argue for a third level, which incorporates both. Mark Satin comments, “In this state, objects, events, and self are neither separate, as in the material state, nor identical, as in the spiritual. Objects, events, and self are seen as separate *and* as flowing into a larger unity. As David Spangler puts it, difference is seen ‘as really an enriching manifestation of this unity rather than a fragmentation of it.’” In this perspective, the diversified created order can be viewed positively, rather than in the negative light in which Hinduism has long perceived it. The world, therefore, has value and purpose.

Three States of consciousness

The religious state of consciousness is as valid as the others and as necessary to us, for without it we could have no morals, no guidelines for living.

In the material state, morality is meaningless. An action works or it doesn’t work, and that’s that.

In the spiritual state, morality is impossible; if you wish for something for your self, even guidelines of principles, you’ve already separated yourself out from the One (and besides, everything is as it should be). But in the religious state, a moral principle is inherent in the universe, since *whatever is done to one part affects the whole*. As [Lawrence] Le Shan puts it, “if one part moves another toward greater harmony with the whole, all of the whole — including the part that took the action — benefits”; and the reverse is also true.

Distortion of Good & Evil

Therefore, “anything that moves a part toward its fullest development and fullest integration with the whole is good,” anything that does the reverse is evil.”

New Age Movement

The New Age movement bears a loose relationship, not only with Hinduism and the guru movements that have come from India, but also with the Western counterculture of the 1960s. It's true that many of the old hippies are not a part of today's New Age movement (a healthy minority in fact, are Christians), and most 1980s New Agers were probably never a part of the sixties counterculture. Nevertheless, the 1960s counterculture is a *major* historical tributary among the several that have converged to become today's rushing river of New Age activity.

Radically Different Conceptions of Growth

In the Bible, spiritual growth is equated with increasing dependence upon Christ, and conformity to His will (e.g., **2 Cor. 3:4-5; James 4:13-16; Eph. 4:15**). In contrast, New Agers offer definitions like the following: “The personal and spiritual growth of a person can be described as the transformation from a dependent human being to one who knows and feels that he/she is in charge of his/her life and acts upon it.” These radically different conceptions of growth are perfectly consistent with the radically different universes which Christians and New Agers believe they inhabit.

The Distinction Between Creator And Creation Is Illusory

Since for the Christian the distinction between Creator and creation is absolute and permanent, the limited creature must always depend on, and obey, the all-sufficient, sovereign Creator. Though personal growth may involve increasing independence on a *human* level, our relationship to *God* operates differently.

For the New Ager, though, the distinction between Creator and creation is illusory, and so that which *is* all-sufficient and sovereign must be the self! In

such a case, growth or transformation would logically involve recognizing this fact and acting on it, in ever-increasing self-sufficiency and control over one's own life.

Different Meanings of “Taking Responsibility”

When New Ager's talk about “taking responsibility” and “being accountable” Christians can be disarmed, since these terms are part of their own vocabulary. Actually, the word “responsibility” can be used in very different contexts.

To the Christian, man is responsible and accountable to external authorities; beginning with God, and including those human authorities that He has instituted (e.g., **Rom. 13:1-2**).

The New Ager, on the other hand, defines “taking responsibility” and “being accountable” ultimately in terms of the *self*. We have the power to create our own reality, but it will be created by external forces if we don't take responsibility for whatever happens to us. This is why human potential seminar graduates have been known to blame such adversities as cancer and rape *on the people who suffer from them*.

New Age belief in unlimited human potential — our power to “take responsibility” and shape our own future — is increasingly being applied not just to the individual, but to society as a whole. New Ager and psychologist Barry Mc Waters writes of “the emerging potential of human beings to take responsibility individually and collectively, for a positive future

The Aquarian Age

The Aquarian Age is pre-eminently a spiritual age, and the spiritual side of the great lessons that Jesus gave to the world may now be comprehended by multitudes of people, for the many are now coming into an advanced stage of spiritual consciousness.

For some New Ager's the “Age of Aquarius” is little more than a convenient symbol for the anticipated new order, but for a majority, it is a deeply held religious belief.

New Age Religion Is Anything But Christian!

Belief in an astrologically rather than a biblically defined new age is indicative of the fact that New Age religion is thoroughly occultic, and totally unchristian. Discernment of this truth is sometimes woefully lacking, even in traditionally Christian circles.

Intellectually, if the basic New Age beliefs outlined earlier are adhered to, the central components of the Christian faith cannot remain intact. If all is One (God), there can be no sin and death. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sins becomes meaningless — even illusory.

It cannot even be said that Christ took our “bad karma” upon Himself. Karma is seen as an impersonal law *in* the universe, not the personal judge *of* the universe. It therefore is exacting, making no merciful provision for the sinner’s atonement.

Denial of Jesus As God

The New Ager will agree that Jesus Christ is God — his worldview will allow that. But his worldview will also compel him to say that Jesus is *no more* God than anyone else. The difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity must therefore be that He more fully *realized* and *demonstrated* the divine (Christ) potential we all have. His value to us becomes primarily one of example. New Agers say that Jesus wanted us to become His equals, not to worship Him.

By holding that “Christ” refers to a divine principle within *all* men, and that Jesus simply attained consciousness of it (“Christ consciousness”) as we all can, New Agers seemingly resolve the dilemma that the obvious uniqueness of Jesus poses for a pantheistic world view. In the process, however, they brand themselves as “anti-Christ,” for it was exactly *this* error that the apostle John was responding to when he used that term in **1 John 2:18-23.24**

Though some New Age groups identify themselves as Christian, and most New Agers think highly of Jesus, their endorsements of Him need to be evaluated in the light of **2 Cor. 11:3-4 and 13-15**. It is there we learn that

there can be a *counterfeit* Jesus, preached by counterfeit apostles, who serve a counterfeit “angel of light” (Satan).

The New Age Jesus

The New Age Jesus became “the Christ” only after purifying himself of “bad karma” through many incarnations, and even now (as many believe) he is only one of several “masters” who serve humanity from a higher (but not the highest) plane.

As exalted as this Jesus may be in the *New Ager’s* universe, he is a ghastly substitute for the Jesus of the Bible, the creator and sustainer of the universe (**Col. 1:16-17**). Reverence for the New Age “Jesus” will not impress the historical, biblical Jesus, who is “ready to judge the living and the dead” (**1 Pet. 4:5**).

Occultism: The Heart of New Age Religion

A study of religion in world history demonstrates the near universality of psychic phenomena and the mystical experience, as well as such practices as divination, magic, and spiritism. Only the biblical tradition really stands apart (e.g., **Deut. 18:9-14**), offering a different kind of spirituality the sovereign and gracious workings of the Holy Spirit among the covenant people of the true God.

Paganism Attempting Comeback In New Age Movement

Thanks to the profound historical influence of biblical faith in the West, pagan spirituality was forced to the cultural periphery, and given the stigmatizing rubric, “the occult” Now, in the form of the New Age movement,” paganism is attempting to regain *all* of its lost ground. By New Age design, Western culture is being permeated with a variety of techniques for altering the consciousness and tapping “universal energy” (e.g., yoga, “creative visualization;” and “therapeutic touch” for healing). Because of the scientific or pseudo-scientific language that is offered to explain these techniques, their occult connections often go unrecognized. In fact, the New Age’s multiple, doorways to spiritual power and experience *all* open up to

the *same* world that has been populated for millennia by witches, shamans, and mediums.

From a biblical perspective (that is to say, from the perspective closest to eternity that we are capable of), the New Age movement is *most* significantly a sophisticated, contemporary representation of the same old spiritual kingdom that has always stood in stark opposition to the kingdom of Jesus Christ (e.g., **Acts 13:8-12**).

New Agers desperately need this biblical perspective, lest they devote their lives to saving the world, only to find they were serving the author of its destruction (**John 8:44; 10:10**). Introduced to the *biblical* Jesus, they will find a resource for personal transformation that they have never dreamed of (**2 Cor. 2:18**), and a vision for human service grounded in the unshakeable kingdom of God (Heb. 12:28). In *His* service, their idealistic energy will not be wasted (**1 Cor. 11:34**).

But, Christianity has never been anything *other* than a faith focused in the person of Jesus Christ as the unique God-man (**2 Cor. 4:5; 11:2-3**), and the highest spiritual attainment has never been mystical identification with God, but *fellowship* with the Son of God, and through Him, with the Father (**1 John 1:1-3; John 17:3; Phil. 3:8**). *This* does not need any “middle-men” (**1 Tim. 2:5**), as Protestantism has always maintained.

Conclusion

The New age movement has been around a long time. However, it is nothing more than a quasi-Hindu religion. Here are some points to remember. Each one is in direct opposite position than the teachings of Christ and the revelation of the Bible.

1. Rejection of the incarnation of Christ.
2. Adherence to Pantheistic view.
3. Steeped in Occultism.
4. Follows a New age Jesus, Not the Jesus of the Bible.
5. Had an Illusory view of God and His Creation.
6. Distortion of Good & Evil.
7. “Trans-Material” Worldview.
8. Acceptance of Humanist Truths.

9. Spiritualized Doctrine of Evolution.
10. Salvation Is Self-Realization.
11. Belief in Reincarnation.
12. Follows A Holistic Form of Divinity.

As you can see, the New Age Movement is far from being Christian. All that they believe, we do not. None of their doctrine agrees with ours. They are Anti-Christ and should be rejected.

The best course of action is to read God's Word, The Bible, and learn what Christianity is and is not. Then apply the knowledge to all the many voices that speak to your soul. This will keep you on the straight and narrow path to eternal life.

May God Bless You In All That You Do