

The False Imagining of "the false christ"

Colossians and the cosmic-christ.

"And he [God's Son] is before all things, and by him [God's Son] all things consist."

Colossians 1:17, KJV

Over three-and-one-half decades ago, John Lennon came out with the hit song *Imagine*. The lyrics project a utopian vision of the world in which, because there is no heaven or hell, no countries or religion, no possessions or greed, nothing to kill or die for, all the people will be one.[1] Internationally, Lennon's song about the new world remains most popular. Increasingly, political, religious, and media ideologues are suggesting that for Lennon's dream to become a reality, a one-world community must become committed to one-world spirituality.

As these societal movers and shakers might imagine, the new utopia will necessitate the dawning of a new spiritual consensus. Such messianism envisions christ to be mental, not personal, and that being the case, asks people to "shift" their consciousness to a one-world spirituality in order to build a one-world community. Utopia would, it is theorized, be based upon spiritual unity. Religion will no longer divide, but unite. There will be no heaven or hell, no countries or religion to die for. Terrorism will become obsolete. As John Lennon imagined, the world will be as one. But, under what guise might this spiritual shift be coming?

Its core belief appears to be this: In essence, the cosmos consists of a panentheist or pantheist-christ spirit permeating everything.[2] Thus, everything, animate and inanimate, becomes "sacred." This sacred christ is the one reality which comprises both the center and circumference of the universe. That's why it's called the cosmic christ. Christ is whatever constitutes time, matter, and space. Christ is Source. Christ is Moment. Christ is Energy. Christ is Thing. Christ is Presence. Christ is Being. Christ is Consciousness. Christ is Oneness. Christ is you. Christ is me. Christ is . . . In all of this, and unlike His portrayal in Holy Scripture, there is no sense in which Christ is personally before, above, without, or outside the world. (Oh, by the way . . . prepositions contain great theology!) This christ is co-existent and co-extensive with the universe. Because the New Age christ permeates nature, it is nature. If the universe didn't exist, this christ wouldn't exist. According to the math of the twin deceptions of New Ageism and the New Spirituality, christ minus the universe equals nothing. Arbitrarily, they take whatever is, assign divinity to it, and call it "christ."

After stating a god-essence resides "in every creature, every flower, every stone," Eckhart Tolle theorizes, "All that is, is holy." Then he adds, "This is why Jesus, speaking entirely from his essence or Christ identity, says in the Gospel of Thomas: 'Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me there.'"[3] Similarly, Matthew Fox wrote that God and Christ are in all things. As the "pattern that connects," Fox sees his cosmic-christ as offering hope "by insisting on the interconnectivity of all things and on the power of the human mind and spirit to experience personally this common glue among all things." [4] In his book *Quantum Spirituality*, emergent-evangelical Leonard Sweet advocates monism that nuances panentheism. Investing the cosmos with "christness," he states, "The world of nature has an identity and purpose apart

from human benefit. But we constitute together a cosmic body of Christ." [5] Even Rick Warren's reference to the *New Century Version* of Ephesians 4, and verse 6 ("God . . . is in everything"), plugs into the growing popularity of monistic spirituality. [6] So what might a Christian believer think about this redefinition of Christ?

Differing from the mystical spirituality of New Ageism, Holy Scripture presents a far different Christ than the one the New Spirituality imagines. The christ of New Ageism (pantheism/panentheism) and the Christ of the New Testament (theism) are worlds apart. While "the christ" of the New Age is the world, the Christ of the New Testament is the Word (See John 1:1-3, 14; Philippians 2:6-7.). In a onetime act of the divine incarnation, the Word became flesh, thereby delivering the Christian faith from the theological extremes of deism and transcendentalism on the one hand, and pantheism and immanentism on the other.

In a balanced way, again and again, the New Testament affirms the otherness of Christ from His creation and the togetherness of Christ with His creation. For reason of His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, Christ is present amidst His creation. But for reason of His incarnation, ascension and glorification, Christ remains transcendent above His creation. Paradoxically, but really, Christ is now physically present in heaven (Hebrews 1:3) while, at the same time, He is spiritually present on earth (Matthew 28:20). Though Christ is before and above time, matter, and space, He also is involved with time, matter, and space. But for reason of pantheistic or panentheistic monism which denies the otherness of Christ from the world, New Ageism neither needs nor wants Jesus' personal, historical, and exceptional Incarnation, Substitutionary Death, Resurrection, or Second Coming--redemptive events based upon the original separation of the Word from the world.

Yet, amazingly, and disingenuously, New Ageism quotes and spins the words of the Bible to prove their anti-Christian point of view. One text they use is Colossians 1, verse 17, which reads, "**And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together**" (NASB). New Ageism reads the second half of the verse to mean that nature is saturated by a christ spirit which forms the essence of the cosmos. [7] But does this text even hint, let alone teach, the permeation of a christ-spirit in nature? For a number of reasons, it does not.

First, we observe that Paul makes two emphatic statements about God's Son. [8] One, the Son "**is before all things.**" And two, "**by him** [i.e., the Son] **all things consist**" (Colossians 1:17, KJV). The two clauses express two distinct relationships the Son possesses to "all things": He is *precedent before all things* and also *provident over all things*. [9] That God's Son is "before all things" indicates that He is temporally separate from all things. Scripture presents the eternal Christ as being before creation. There never was a time when the Son was not (John 1:1-2). He is the uncreated Creator of everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; etc.). Christ does not derive from the cosmos. Rather, the cosmos derived from Christ. For reason of its commitment to pantheistic/panentheistic permeation, New Ageism denies this biblical understanding of Jesus Christ.

Second, in light of this, what does the second half of the apostle's statement ("**by him all things consist**") mean? Literally, the Greek text reads: "all things in Him stand together." [10] Bible versions translate the phrase with a slight difference. Most read: "**in Him all things hold**

together [or consist]" (NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, ASV 1901, and NAB). This understanding suggests that Christ is the sphere in whom creation holds together. While all things are in Christ, Christ is not in all things. The *King James Bible* reads just a little different--"by him" all things hold together. The Son is therefore, the agent by whom all things hold together.[11] From the flow of accolades Paul ascribes to Christ (i.e., He is preeminent in the cosmos, He is producer of the cosmos, He is precedent before the cosmos, and He is provident over the cosmos, vv. 15-17), I think the understanding that Christ is the Agent by whom all things hold together is preferred.

Regarding Jesus Christ's holding all things together, Moule wrote, "He is not their Cause only, in their initial sense; He is forever their Bond, their Order, their Law, the ultimate Secret which makes the whole universe, seen and unseen, a Cosmos, not a Chaos." [12] If Christ did not continually preserve His creation, the universe would disintegrate.

To guard against this heresy of christ-consciousness, both in his day and in ours, the apostle Peter assured believers, "**For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty**" (2 Peter 1:16, KJV). Though the Word entered the world, the Word is not the world. And against any supposition to the contrary, Paul writes that we are to cast down "**imaginings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,**" and to bring "**every thought to the obedience of Christ**" (2 Corinthians 10:5, KJV).

Concerning our relationship to all of the christ-imagining being advocated by the gurus and promoters of New Ageism and the New Spirituality, the apostle Paul warns: "**See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ**" (Colossians 2:8, NASB).

FOOTNOTES

[1] I am grateful to Warren Smith for his input into this article and drawing my attention to Lennon's lyrics. The words of Imagine are available online at (<http://www.lyrics007.com/John%20Lennon%20Lyrics/Imagine%20Lyrics.html>). For a detailed commentary on the relevance of Lennon's song to the spirituality of Eckhart Tolle, see Berit Kjos, "Oprah and Tolle Fuel New Age Revival," March 30, 2008 (<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:6eLRBJlxJVIJ:www.newswithviews.com/BeritKjos/kjos88.htm+Kjos,+Imagine&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us>).

[2] Readers will note that "christ" is spelled with a lower case "c." I will not dignify the "christ" of New Age imagining to the level of the Christ of Holy Scripture. Though slight, the terms pantheism and panentheism differ. The pantheist ascribes divinity to everything. If I kick a tree, I've kicked God. The panentheist invests the tree with divinity for reason that it harbors the divine soul. Thus, if I kick a tree, though I've not directly kicked Him, I have kicked an object in which God resides. In their attempt to invest nature with sacredness, both views commit idolatry for reason of betraying the biblical God's holiness or separateness from His creation (See Isaiah 40:18-*25; Romans 1:20-23.).

[3] Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, California: New World Library, 1999): 134. Tolle places awareness of "the God-essence" in feeling. Of that

"intense present-moment awareness," he writes "you become conscious of the Unmanifested both directly and indirectly. Directly, you feel it as the radiance and the power of your conscious presence--no content, just presence. Indirectly, you are aware of the Unmanifested in and through the sensory realm. In other words, you feel the God-essence . . ." (*Power of Now*, 133). It is obvious that the basis of Tolle's pantheism rests upon a fantasy of mystical "feeling," an illusion which is delusion.

[4] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988): 133.

[5] Some emergent-evangelicals may object to the association of Leonard Sweet with the Episcopalian priest Matthew Fox, a former Roman Catholic Dominican dismissed from that order in 1992, by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI). But to support his statement regarding "a cosmic body of Christ," Sweet approvingly cites Fox's book *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. See his online version of *Quantum Spirituality*, pdf pages 89, 195, and footnote 66 (<http://www.leonardsweet.com/Quantum/quantum-ebook.pdf>).

[6] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002): 88.

[7] Fox employs Colossians 1:15-17 to demonstrate that his christ is "the pattern that connects." See *Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 133.

[8] Greek grammarians note that the pronoun "is used emphatically--He Himself, in contrast to the created things . . . Here it means 'He and no other' . . ." See Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998): 461. The NRSV carries the emphasis into its translation which reads, "He himself is before all things . . ." (Emphasis mine, Colossians 1:17a).

[9] The preposition "before" (Greek, pro) can carry a temporal or a rank meaning. Wallace suggests both are appropriate. He writes, "Jesus Christ takes priority over and is before all things." See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1996): 379, Footnote 67.

[10] Between the Logos of the Bible and the logos of Stoicism, and based upon Colossians 1:17, a scholar observed this contrast: "He [i.e., the biblical Christ] is not in all things but all things are in him. The Logos of the Stoics gave unity and order, and meaning to all things because it permeated all things as dia-existent principle; the Colossian hymn praises him in whom all things begin, continue, and conclude because they are in, through, and unto him as a pre-existent being." See David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary, quoting Fred B. Craddock (Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998): 89, Footnote 29. From Craddock's observation, the similarity between the philosophical christ of Stoicism and the spiritual christ of New Ageism is apparent. While not viewing Christ as "a pre-existent being," the New Spirituality does embrace christ as "dia-existent principle."

[11] Wallace notes that the dative of agency rarely occurs in the New Testament, if at all. However, this text appears to be one of the exceptions because "in him," is personal. See Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 373. Opke remarks: "This rich usage is not just a Hebraism, nor does it rest on a mystically local conception, but it is based on the view of Christ as a cosmically and eschatologically universal personage." (Emphasis mine, A. Opke, "en," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in One Volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985): 234.

[12] H.C.G. Moule, *Colossian and Philemon Studies* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, 1932): 78.