Evaluation of New Age Teaching

(Scriptures from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless noted otherwise. First published June, 2023. Revised: March, 2024; August, 2026)

[The following discourse was written in answer to some questions that came up about the teachings of Richard Rohr]

Why do people dive into New Age thinking and teaching? Often it's because there's not enough spiritual reality to be found in "Christianity". So, any attempt to broaden the sometimes narrow scope of Christian teaching should at least be taken into consideration. I don't know that much about Rohr's teaching, but even if he has gone overboard on some things, that shouldn't stop us from looking at, even learning from, what he has to say.

From having studied astrology, I've come to realize that there's a fine line. My own interest in astrology would, I know, be condemned by not a few Christian teachers. And, true enough, astrology can be used by the Dark forces to bestow a kind of false spirituality/wisdom on people in hopes of pulling them into witchcraft – that is, into using their knowledge for selfish, manipulative purposes. And the use of horoscopes to divine or plan one's future easily becomes an attempt to control one's own destiny instead of trusting God and leaving the guidance of our lives in God's hands.

Astrology *per se* is not evil, but its misuse/over-indulgence can become evil. Like the study of physics, when scientists use their knowledge to make evil inventions like atom bombs, then that is evil, but the study of physics itself is not evil and has been used for good to benefit humanity in so many ways with useful inventions of all kinds. Astrology too can be very helpful in understanding one's self and others and in appreciating God's marvellously created cosmos and its amazing integration with our own personal lives and what is going on here on Earth.

It's difficult sometimes to know where to draw the line. Christianity tends to "play it safe" and draws that line in a way that shuts out anything that seems a bit risky. At times those narrow and restricted

guidelines are necessary. For example, alcoholics have to be restricted from drinking, period. In the ancient Greek world of the Early Church, sexual wantonness was running rampant, and the apostles had to clamp down on it.

But *"to everything there is a season"*. (Ecclesiastes 3:1) The once-needed guidelines can turn into a straight-jacket and need to be loosened later on. We want to obey and follow God, but it is easy to become legalistic, just follow a set of rules, and that doesn't allow the Spirit to move freely in our lives.

I wouldn't be surprised that Rohr's teachings will appeal to many who are into New Age thinking and will draw them to Christ. And if it does that, then who's to say those teachings shouldn't at least be tolerated, even if one doesn't want to accept them fully?

Maybe it's a question of *"by their fruits you will know them*." (Matthew 7:20) I'm thinking of Mormon teaching, which I suspect is off-center on some things theologically. Yet the Mormon church has won great numbers of people to the Lord. And one of their teachings that I like goes against the grain of standard Christian doctrine, and it may be one reason why the Lord has allowed the church to grow.

They teach that some people will go to Hell, but can be released if and when they repent and turn to the Lord – salvation in the spirit world. This gives a better idea of what God is like than does the standard Christian doctrine that, if you don't get "saved" (or "born again") in this life, then it's curtains for you – into Hell and you're doomed forever. (See post "Everlasting Punishment… Forever and Ever – Meaning?")

And what about Rohr's belief that Christianity isn't the only path to salvation?

What I think Rohr means is that having the right belief system (of Christianity) is important but cannot be used as an excuse or cover to neglect following what Jesus taught and where the Spirit is leading. And I might add, deeds are important – that is, *"deeds"* that are *"done in God",* as John 3:21 points out about anyone who *"does the truth"* and *"comes to the light"*. Jesus seemed to attach great importance to a person's deeds,

as we may gather from the parable in Matthew 25 about the sheep and the goats, or the parable of the Good Samaritan. (See posts "Salvation by Works?" 1 and 2.)

In general, what I think Rohr is trying to do is make "Christianity" more inclusive. In this age of "pluralism" and disillusionment with the narrow attitudes common in established Christianity, an approach like that is much needed nowadays.

It can be helpful, especially in a culture where the name of Christ is frowned upon or even prohibited. A truth-seeker may still sense the presence of Christ, as Rohr might put it. They may not be able to stick a name to it in the beginning, but they have had the spiritual experience of God's presence in Christ. And in time that will lead them into knowing Who exactly is the One who has been showing them *"the way, the truth, and the life"*. (John 14:6)

God has different ways to teach and reach into people's souls, and we cannot be too definite as to how we think Salvation in Christ is supposed to work. For as Jesus taught, *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* (John 3:8)

Of course, there is a danger to be aware of, one that is emphasized a great deal in New Age teaching. And that is the promotion of self-salvation, that one can become ultra-spiritual and perfected, and in this way a person can save him/herself. In their quest for spirituality, truth-seekers may lose sight of the fact that true Salvation is only possible through Jesus Christ.

New Age teaching tends to ignore the fact that we *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) We are desperately in need of the God who came in human form to free us from our inborn sinful nature, break the power of death and the forces of spiritual Darkness, and bring us back into fellowship with God.

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Related to this, we might wonder, what about Rohr's "Cosmic Christ"

doctrine?

Rohr is referring here to the spirit – God's Spirit – that is embedded in and permeates everything in the universe. The Scriptures affirm this idea: *"He* [Christ] *holds all creation together…* [The Son] *sustains everything by the mighty power of His command."* (Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3 – NLT) This could be mistaken for Pantheism – the idea that the Creation and God are the same thing. But Rohr does not advocate that, for he has made it clear that God dwells beyond His Creation, not just in His Creation

From God's Word, we understand that God's Spirit is embedded in the universe and is the "energy" that "holds it together". And those who are skilled in that realm can tap into and use that spiritual energy to bring spiritual and physical healing to people. Disciplines such as acupuncture, reiki healing, pranic healing are based on an understanding of how the spiritual body works and how to use the natural spiritual energy in God's creation for beneficial purposes.

This is fine as long as it is understood that these disciplines are not meant to glorify its practitioners. This compares to how doctors make use of their knowledge of how the body works in order to bring healing to their patients; but sometimes they, and energy healing practitioners, take too much credit to themselves – instead of giving glory to the One who created our spiritual and physical bodies.

If New-Agers could just combine their gifts of self-knowledge and spiritual awareness with a full acceptance of Christ, that could be a powerful combination!

But without that, if there is a refusal to accept the love and power of Christ, alternative healing disciplines can lack the grounding they need to stay on track. This is no different from any other discipline or branch of knowledge – whether medicine, physics, astrology, auto mechanics, or anything else – none of them is the be-all and end-all. And a wise person will realize this and be open to the fact that, despite being an expert and knowledgeable in certain aspects of God's Creation, one can never achieve a state of complete omniscience; only God can. That wise person will make sure to glorify God and use their knowledge for good, rather than use it selfishly – to manipulate, make a name for themselves, gain riches or

power, or whatever else.

So in this case, by knowing the secrets of how spiritual energy works, it can become easy to slip into thinking that salvation can come from oneself. Through this knowledge, it is true, one can reach a high level of mental, physical, and spiritual health and well-being. That is wonderful.

But that should not erase the knowledge that we human beings are not God. No matter how mature we may have grown through the disciplines of New Age teaching, the fact is, we cannot make it on our own. We need a Savior. We need the One who, according to His own words, is *"the way, the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6)

And when we think about it, why did Christ come to Earth in the first place? Why did He go to all the trouble, coming to Earth and suffering here, if there really was a way that we could make it on our own?

The answer is we can't make it on our own, regardless of how good or self-developed we manage to become. The fact is, we are created beings and cannot help but fall *"short of the glory of God"* (as Scripture teaches in Romans 3:23). For we have inherited the sin nature that began long ago in the Garden of Eden.

But Jesus is the Son of God – that is, God in the flesh. Before Christ came, wise men were aware of what was known in philosophical terms as the *Logos* – the mediator between God and the natural world. The apostle John makes mention of this in His Gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1)

This *Logos* became personal when Christ was born. *"And the Word [Logos] became flesh and dwelt among us."* (John 1:14) And His followers at the time couldn't help but testify, *"we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) *"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."* (2Peter 1:16)

What New-Agers sometimes refer to as the "Christ principle" became embodied and took on the form of humanity. "Fully God", but also "fully

human". (That's a concept that our finite minds cannot grasp!) But it makes sense; if God exists and if He loves the human race, then why would He not at some point enter our world as one of us?

At this point it might help to take a look at what Scriptures teach about the Spirit of God. In the Scriptures there is mention about the "Godhead" (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20, Colossians 2:9), which is a term that comprises the different ways that this Infinite Being, whom we can never possibly comprehend, manifests Himself to us. This is often known as the Trinity – of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are all one and yet distinct.

If they are all one, then Jesus should have attributes that we might think belong only to God or the Holy Spirit. In John 1:9 we learn about the *"Word"* (Jesus) that He *"was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world."* That word *"light"* expresses a reality that seems quite expansive and all-encompassing and somewhat akin to the Holy Spirit. John 3:20-21 talk also about coming to the Light.

Another revealing Scripture in Matthew 12:31-32 states that *"every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men"* – even *"anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man". "But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him."* What this seems to be saying is that the Spirit of Truth is not bound by culture or religious teaching (such as those cultural biases that war against belief in Christ).

When the Spirit of Truth has awakened a person's mind or conscience, then they are truly "responsible"; and therefore can't be forgiven for blaspheming or rejecting what the Spirit has revealed to them – whatever that may be. The Spirit may reveal the truth about who Jesus is. Or he may reveal some other truths needed for the society of a certain time in history.

In this connection I think of Buddhism, which for a time before Christ's First Coming brought a large measure of peace to the land of India under those kings who embraced Buddhist philosophy. So, are we to think that the Devil brought it? I would rather think that it was the Light of God, the Spirit, that managed to get through to lessen the warmongering among those people in ancient times.

But as always, the Devil is right there to corrupt useful codes of conduct, ideas, inventions and cause them to serve an evil purpose. So, now Buddhism acts to deflect people away from faith in Christ. Sad to say, the same could be said for the kind of materialistic Christianity we often see nowadays and is referred to in the *Book of Revelation* as the *Great Harlot.* (See series of posts on that subject.)

But we should ask, why do many people turn to Buddhism? Often, it's because they don't like what they see in Christianity. Each case has to be examined on its own merits. One person who tries out Buddhism is genuinely searching for truth. Another who turns to Buddhism just wants to get away from something God is asking him or her to do.

Well, I don't know if these thoughts are helpful. As I said above, I haven't really studied Rohr's writings very much. So I can't claim to be a very good evaluator of his teachings. But maybe these thoughts will provide, if nothing else, some helpful perspective on New Age thinking.