

New age music and religion

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New Age music was first introduced in 1964, when Tony Scott recorded “Music for Zen Meditation.” In the years that followed this impressionistic music became popular in California, but was not sold nationally until the 1980s. Windam Hill is the largest producer of New Age music, grossing some thirty million dollars in 1987, but many competitors have recently come into the market. There is a wide variety in style of New Age music, but very often it is dreamy music associated with nature. Typical would be that of Paul Winter who on his saxophone accompanies the sounds of humpback whales, timber wolves, and eagles – letting them “create” the melody. Other New Age music features the sounds of waterfalls, ocean waves, and crickets (Rhodes: 133).

But despite the increasing support of many people to New Age music, its critics also have their own arguments about it. What is New Age music really about and what are the critics’ arguments about its association to religion? All of these and more are discussed as we go along the context.

Because it is much a decentralized movement, it is difficult to assess the impact of New Age. There is no doubt that it has already has a powerful influence on Western society, but its future is impossible to predict. Is it a passing fad that will be largely forgotten in decades to come, or is it a movement that has only just begun to gain momentum? In reference, Brooks Alexander writes in Christianity Today: “Is this just another diversion of New Age, or is it something more enduring?” There are many “faddish” characteristics of the movement, but fads have sometimes developed into time-honored traditions (Kemp: 135).

Indeed, there are many signs that New Age on the whole is gaining a powerful foothold in society that will not quickly pass away. This position is gaining credibility among secular scholars. According to Carl A. Raschke, a religion professor at the University of Denver and a student of the movement, New Age is “the most powerful social force in the country today” (Tucker: 351).

By the early 1990s, there was a myriad of Christian critiques of New Age. New Age had replaced ‘secular humanism’ as the enemy of traditional Christians. Other Christian anti-New Age works include Douglas Groothuis’ three-part series beginning with *Unmasking the New Age* (1986) and Walter Martin’s *The New Age Cult* (1989) (Kemp: 135). Innocuous ‘New Age music’ is also condemned for encouraging people to reflect on religion and culture that is not explicitly Christian. John Newport, for example, insists that it is ‘... satanically inspired... [and thus] theologically wrong in its roots and in the effects it hopes to achieve’ (Partridge: 255).

The mainstream churches have tended to be less overtly hostile in their official responses to New Age than some of the smaller the innovative approach to spirituality. However, their knowledge of New Age is often based on works by Evangelical or fundamentalist Christians and is strongly colored by them (Kemp: 135).

There is a strong spiritual dimension to the New Age. It is not only interested in contemporary philosophies but in ancient wisdom, drawing in an eclectic way from Eastern and Western spiritual-religious traditions, with a contemporary blend of psychology and ecology and a profound interest in such things as metaphysics and sacred geometry. Some New Age

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movements foster a mystical approach. It can fit within the category of non religious spiritualities, and for some adherents it is like an alternative to religion. For others, New Age practices harmonize with their religious beliefs (Wilber: 348).

The New Age is particularly concerned with lifestyle and health. It means a range of human needs from immediate wellbeing to a sense of connectedness with others and the world, and to meaning in life. It also has a commercial dimension catering to consumer spirituality; some practices at the market end of the New Age can be regarded as part of the self-help industry (Tucker: 350).

The literature on New Age highlights diversity and spirituality. While beyond our scope here, an appraisal of the spiritual scope of New Age remains an important part of any critical exploration of the contemporary spirituality that affects young people (Kemp: 134).

The New Age is mainly an adult and young adult interest. Nevertheless, adolescents and children will be inquisitive about it when they encounter it in the culture. They may well try some practices as part of their experimentation in identity and spirituality. What is likely to appeal to young people is the fluid and non-institutional appearance of the New Age; it does not prescribe beliefs but is based on individuals piecing together their own spirituality to suit their needs and interests. Also attractive would be its existential and lifestyle focus, and its holistic notion of the integration of mind-body-spirit (Crawford and Rossiter: 223).

Certain critics may not agree with the music of New Age but it doesn't deny the fact that a lot of people also patronize the music. Personally, I think New Age music soothes someone's mood and relaxes a tired mind. Association to religion is optional and should not make other people get bothered about the idea. It's just a matter of opinion, whether or not to accept New Age music or not.

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