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Book Reviews

THE NEW AGE IS LYING TO YOU. By Eldon K. Winker. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 223 pages. Paperback, \$10.99.

What do channeling, Wiccan rituals, quartz crystals, ecofeminism, Greek politics, Gaia worship, visualization, Reiki therapy, and Obi-wan Kenobi have in common? There is more than one might have first expected, according to Eldon K. Winker in his tour of the Age of Aquarius come of age in the "New Age Movement." In his first chapter Winker introduces the reader to the New Age as "an eclectic, occult-based, evolution-promoting, man-centered, self-deifying, pervasive world view (philosophy of life) that seeks, through the transformation of individuals, to bring about a transformation of society in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a new world order of complete global harmony" (page 16). The remainder of the book presents compelling data to support this summary. Winker summarizes the New Age world-view in six theses: (1.) All is one; therefore all is God. (2.) Mankind is divine and has unlimited potential. (3.) Mankind's basic flaw is the ignorance of his divinity. (4.) Mankind's basic need is personal transformation produced by consciousness-altering techniques. (5.) Personal transformation is the springboard for global transformation. (6.) All religions are one and lead to cosmic unity. New Age thought is both monistic and pantheistic. It is a denial of sin and the "wages of sin," which is death. It exchanges the Creator for the creation and deifies man, who has the ability to define his own reality and morality. The second chapter tracks the eclectic roots of the New Age through eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism), nineteenth-century theosophism, spiritualism, and transcendentalism, eighteenth-century Swedenborgianism, second- and third-century Gnosticism, ultimately back to the original, self-deifying lie in the Garden of Eden: "You can be like God and will not die." The New Age is nothing less than a celebration of humanity's original rebellion and man's continued desire to be a god in place of God.

Winker devotes the next nine chapters to discussions of New Age influences in various areas of contemporary culture: Occultism, entertainment, neo-paganism, environmentalism, global politics, education, business, health care, and "new age Christianity." The range of topics is impressive and illustrates well the all-pervasiveness of New Age thinking. Winker provides many examples and citations from original sources. Each chapter concludes with a short Christian assessment and response. The analyses are generally objective and well balanced. Winker helpfully notes that the New Age movement has both humanistic and occultic strands (page 47). Many humanistic goals—for example, temporal peace, productivity, health, and proper stewardship of the environment—are shared by Christians and can be viewed positively in the way of God's

creaturely gifts in terms of the first article of the creed and civic righteousness. However, the occultic spirituality and anthropocentric accents of New Age thinking are incompatible with a scriptural view of the relationships among God, man, and the creation.

This reader has two criticisms of this book. First, although well researched, the writing style tends toward the sensationalistic. The "item" news-flashes, which begin each chapter, and the use of the acronym "NAM" for "New Age Movement" create the impression of a "conspiracy theory" and contradict Winker's own observation that the New Age is not a monolithic, well-organized movement (page 16). The reader begins to suspect a demon lurking under every quartz crystal. Secondly, the Christian responses at the end of each chapter are somewhat simplistic. "The New Age says this; the Bible says that." Such an approach may prevent a few people from floating off into the New Age, but it will not anchor them in the wounds of the crucified and risen Savior through the sacramental word, nor will it equip them to speak the truth in love to their New Age neighbors. Holy Baptism is mentioned only twice (pages 155, 195), Holy Communion and Holy Absolution not at all. Yet it is precisely the external, creaturely, sacramental word that anchors the Christian in the Incarnate God and keeps him from floating off into vaporous "spiritualities." The diminution of the sacraments has left much of Protestantism defenseless against *Schwärmerei*, New Age or otherwise. It is not surprising, therefore, to read that of the ninety-five percent of New Agers with religious backgrounds, fifty-five percent come out of Protestantism while only eighteen percent come out of Roman Catholicism (page 177). A stronger emphasis on the liturgical-sacramental dimension of Christianity would have been helpful to counterbalance the literature in this area, most of which is written from a Reformed perspective.

Ultimately, the New Age fantasy is doomed to self-destruction. Self-absorbed hedonism and global harmony are at crossed purposes. Self-indulgence and self-sacrifice are mutually incompatible. The church has a challenge and opportunity in these days of false messiahs and pseudo-salvations to proclaim neither "Pollyanna optimism" nor "Chicken Little pessimism," but the sober realism of living as sinner-saints in the new age which was inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Winker's book is a helpful primer on the New Age movement. He has done good work in alerting the Christian reader to various New Age accents within our culture. Ample footnotes from original sources and a good bibliography invite further reading and study. This book is relatively easy to read and would be suitable for study-groups in the parish and for

interested individuals.

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COLOSSIANS: A COMMENTARY. By Petr Pokorný. Peabody, Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers, 1991.

If a commentary cannot be recommended with little or no reservation, one at least hopes that it will prove to be stimulating or provocative—as is the case with this translation of Pokorný's contribution of 1987 to the *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*. Pokorný, Professor of New Testament and member of the faculty of Protestant Theology in Prague, denies the Pauline authorship of Colossians, which often leads him to over-emphasize alleged differences between this epistle and the "authentic" letters of Paul. His conclusion regarding authorship compels him to excuse the deception of the real author as necessary to provide a successful antidote to the problem which he faced and to attribute the place of this pseudonymous work in the canon to the grace of God succeeding despite human failure and literary falsification. The author often engages in a method of interpretation that will remind the reader of the demythologization of Rudolf Bultmann.

Despite these major drawbacks there is significant food for thought in this work. Pokorný offers reasons for thinking that there may be allusions to baptism in a large number of places in the letter; the sacrament is therefore seen to be central to the entire epistle rather than something mentioned to only in 2:12-13 (which, the author argues, is to be understood as the thesis of the letter). The author outlines the letter by means of a chart which, for all its complexity, does point to certain major themes recurring in Colossians.

This volume does not make for easy reading; nevertheless, working through its pages in a dedicated way will pay dividends. After using the commentaries of Bruce (NICNT, 1984) or O'Brien (Word Biblical Commentary, 1982) to get a good basic understanding of Colossians, one may then take up Pokorný. His work is both challenging and provocative enough to take one deeper into the meaning of this letter.

Paul E. Deterding
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Books Received

Donald Wilson Stake. *The ABCs of Worship: A Concise Dictionary*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 196 pages. Paperback. \$9.95.

John F. Brug. *A Bible Study on Man and Woman in God's World*. Leader's Guide. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. 55 pages. Paperback. \$4.99.

John F. Brug. *A Bible Study on Man and Woman in God's World*. Student Manual. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. 63 pages. Paperback. \$3.50.

David J. Valleskey. *2 Corinthians*. The People's Bible. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. vi + 253 pages. Paperback. \$8.99.

Eleanor Scott Meyers, editor. *Envisioning the New City: A Reader on Urban Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 363 pages. Paperback. \$29.99.

Colin Duriez. *The J. R. R. Tolkien Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to His Life, Writings, and World of Middle-Earth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 316 pages. Paperback.

Peter Toon. *Spiritual Companions: An Introduction to the Christian Classics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. 210 pages. Paperback.

Millard J. Erickson. *Does It Matter What I Believe? What the Bible Teaches and Why We Should Believe It*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 192 pages. Paperback.

Ronald H. Rottschafer. *The Search for Satisfaction: Getting More for Yourself and Giving More to Others*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 221 pages. Paperback.

Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, editors. *The Re-forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 355 pages. Paperback. \$16.99.

William C. Placher and David Willis-Watkins. *Belonging to God: A Commentary on a Brief Statement of Faith*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press. 214 pages. Paperback. \$9.99.

Marvin Olasky. *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992. xvii + 299 pages. Hardback. \$21.95.

Harold Johnes and Ernst H. Wendland, editors. *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: A Century of WELS World Missions*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. 340 pages. Paperback. \$9.99.

An additional list of "Books Received" by the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* is to be found on page 244 of this issue.

Books Received

James G. Kiecker. *Martin Luther and the Long Reformation: Response and Reform in the Church: Pentecost to the Present*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. xiv + 241 pages. Paperback. \$10.99.

Richard Wetzell. *Melanchthons Briefwechsel: Band T 1, Texte 1-254 (1514-1522)*. Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe, hrsg. von Heinz Scheible. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991. 558 pages. Hardback. DM351.

Norman L. Geisler. *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Defense of Biblical Miracles*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 163 pages. Paperback.

Sherwood Lingenfelter. *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 218 pages. Paperback.

Paul Avis. *Authority, Leadership, and Conflict in the Church*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. xiii + 144 pages. Paperback. \$14.95.

James M. Childs, Jr. *Faith, Formation, and Decision: Ethics in the Community of Promise*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. x + 166 pages. Paperback.

Peter P. J. Beyerhaus. *God's Kingdom and the Utopian Error: Discerning the Biblical Kingdom of God from Its Political Counterparts*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992. x + 221 pages. Paperback. \$12.95.

Royce Gordon Gruenler. *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. xvii + 223 pages. Paperback.

Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, editors. *The Pluralistic Vision: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestant Education and Leadership*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 417 pages. Paperback. \$15.95.

Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, editors. *The Organization Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 391 pages. Paperback. \$16.95.

Mary Duckert. *New Kid in the Pew: Shared Ministry with Children*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. 122 pages. Paperback. \$8.95.

Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, editors. *The Women's Bible Commentary*. London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1992. xix + 396 pages. Hardback. \$19.95.