



Critical Issues Commentary

A BIBLICALLY BASED COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOU

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OPRAH WINFREY PROMOTES PANTHEIST ECKHART TOLLE HOW BIBLICALLY ILLITERATE AMERICA IS BEING DECEIVED

BY BOB DEWAAY

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)

What sort of god needs to read a book or go to a seminar to discover his own identity? According to Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle, millions of such deities find it necessary to act on that need to awaken to their own godhood. These are human beings who lack a sense of consciousness of their divinity, and Oprah and Tolle have set out to remedy that situation.

Oprah entices visitors to her Web site with this quote: "Are you ready to be awakened? Millions have experienced Oprah and Eckhart's *A New Earth* classes."¹ The subtitle to Eckhart's *A New Earth* is "Awakening to Your Life's Purpose."² Under Oprah's influence, millions are being led away from rational, revealed truth, such as is found in the Bible, to a new state of consciousness under the guise of being awakened. They are being awakened to their own state of cosmic deity that supposedly has been hidden from them by ego and forms appearing to be "real" but are actually illusory.

"Forms" for Tolle are not just things and bodies; they are also "thought forms." Here is his definition of ego and his use of form: "Ego is a conglomeration of recurring thought forms and conditioned mental-emotional patterns that are invested with a sense of I, a sense of ego. Ego arises when your sense of Beingness, of 'I Am,' which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. . . . This is forgetfulness of Being,

the primary error, the illusion of absolute separateness that turns reality into a nightmare."³ In other words, we have become blind to our deity and think that we have real existence as individuals.

Tolle calls Christianity a "mind-dominated religion" that is committed to dogma and a rigid belief system.⁴ In his pantheistic worldview, thoughts and beliefs keep people from being conscious of their own deity, and Oprah understands what he is saying. She believes what Tolle teaches, promotes his book and concepts, and speaks with the passion of a true believer. Though perhaps my readers are not likely to be converted to Eastern pantheism (God is everything and all categories are illusions), I am certain that each of us knows someone who has been mesmerized by Oprah's promotion of Eastern monism (that God is all that exists) cloaked in the verbiage of self help.

I shall outline some of Tolle's key ideas, and later we will examine them more thoroughly. The subtitle of his book claims that we shall awaken to our "life's purpose" and appears to be another journey of self-discovery. But consider where that journey leads: to consciousness of your own deity. And to its corollary: Everything that would define you as a unique person created by God in His own image is merely "ego and form" that are the illusions that keep you from consciousness of deity. Even thinking is a huge problem that has to

be overcome because thoughts keep one from becoming aware of his or her own godhood.

Most Americans are defenseless against this Eastern allure because they don't understand pantheism—and as a result they get seduced to experience what it teaches. The first part of Tolle's book is couched in self-help terms that indicate that his teachings will help solve conflicts and relationship issues. It suggests that one can reach a Stoic-like state where he or she has no reaction to whatever may happen. This means accepting everything because what happens is merely a necessary part of the spiritual evolution process whereby God's dysfunction becomes progressively cured. In Tolle's pantheism, "happenings" are dysfunction in the mind of God that must be cured by creation becoming aware that God simply became infolded into creation and is in the process of unfolding. Tolle writes, "This [consciousness becoming unconscious of itself] could be described as the descent of the divine into matter. At that stage in the evolution of the universe, the entire outgoing movement takes place in that dreamlike state."⁵ So when he speaks of awakening, he means gaining consciousness of deity, consciousness that had been lost.

I state this at the beginning of the article so that you know immediately where this is going. Oprah's listeners and Tolle's readers hear a message that sounds like an attractive journey of self-discovery. The hard-core pantheism is not revealed until the end of Tolle's book (for readers who make it that far). He writes in the tone of a guru who tells his adoring students the secrets of the universe. There are no footnotes and precious little objective evidence to help the perceptive student to believe what he says. He is the master teacher; we are the students. Our questioning his ideas serves only as evidence that we are not "enlightened."

I will unpack the key ideas found in *The New Earth* so you understand what it means and be equipped to warn your friends and family, pointing them instead to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

INSANITY IN THE MIND OF GOD

The key question for pantheists is this: If God is all there is, and nothing exists outside of God, then why the apparent existence of everything else? Why all the wickedness and evil? The answer in Hinduism is *maya*—illusion that makes categories seem real. Tolle calls this “our inherited dysfunction” and describes the Hindu idea: “Certain teachings at the heart of Hinduism perhaps come closest to seeing this dysfunction as a form of collective mental illness. They call it *maya*, the veil of delusion.”⁶ He repeats this idea here: “Recognize the ego for what it is: a collective dysfunction, the insanity of the human mind.”⁷ But for pantheists like Tolle, the human mind is illusion; God is all there is, so the insanity is ultimately in God’s mind.

As he is wont to do, Tolle interprets the Buddhist idea of *dukkha* and the Christian idea of sin along the lines of inherited dysfunction, making major religions say the same thing. He never mentions that Christianity’s concept of sin is not insanity in the mind of God, but our rebellion against God’s law. Whenever Tolle speaks of the “collective human dysfunction” he means the illusion that we actually exist as distinct beings with individual identities. For example, in a section where he teaches “nonreaction to the ego of others” he writes: “But you can only be in a state of nonreaction if you can recognize someone’s behavior as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction.”⁸ Of course, if, in my true essence I am deity and the other person is too, then any battle between us would be our unreal thoughts and forms in conflict. If we had both achieved consciousness (of deity) we would have no conflict. He writes, “When the ego is at war, know that it is no more than an illusion that is fighting to survive.”⁹

When Tolle speaks of “collective

disease” or “collective dysfunction” he advised that he is speaking of what happened to God when He was infolded into creation and lost consciousness of his own existence, and thus a dreamlike state ensued. So “human dysfunction” is merely a manifestation of God’s insanity being progressively cured by spiritual evolution. He says, “the collective disease of humanity is that people are so engrossed in what happens, so hypnotized by the world of fluctuating forms, so absorbed in the content of their lives, they have forgotten the essence, that which is beyond content, beyond form, beyond thought.”¹⁰ Consider this:

Object consciousness needs to be balanced by space consciousness for sanity to return to our planet and for humanity to fulfill its destiny. The arising of space consciousness is the next stage in the evolution of humanity.¹¹

What does he mean by “space consciousness”? It is another term for being awakened to our own divinity. As long as we are only conscious of the world of forms and thoughts, we are in an unreal dreamlike state from which we must awake. When awake, we become “space conscious”: “You are trapped in object consciousness, unaware of the timeless inner space of consciousness itself.”¹² “Awakening” is the achievement of consciousness, which Tolle’s book hopes to help us obtain. Consciousness is awareness of our own divinity.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF SELF-DEITY

Since the problem of all of creation is the lack of consciousness of being God, the solution is to gain consciousness of self-deity. In Tolle, the state of every unenlightened person is “unconscious.” The first step is to realize we are unconscious, living in a dream-like state that we consider to be real: “When you realize the unconsciousness in you, that which makes the recognition possible is the arising of consciousness, is awakening.”¹³ So where do we get this consciousness? Tolle says: “The light of consciousness is all that is necessary. You

are that light.”¹⁴ Why look elsewhere for light when you are the light and merely have failed to be conscious of it? In the following citation Tolle is forthright in declaring the deity of humans:

When forms around you die or death approaches, your sense of Beingness, of I Am, is freed from entanglement with form: Spirit is released from its imprisonment in matter. You realize your essential identity as formless, as an all-pervasive Presence, of Being prior to all forms, all identifications. You realize your true identity as consciousness itself, rather than what consciousness had identified with. That’s the peace of God. The ultimate truth of who you are is not I am this or I am that, but I Am.¹⁵

He had cited the apostle Paul about the peace of God and implies that Paul had the same idea as Tolle, which is absurd. But, when he speaks using capitalized terms such as “Being,” “Presence” or “I AM,” he means “God.” Later he explains why: “We could say ‘God’ if the word had not been so misused. I prefer to call it Being.”¹⁶ In reading his book, such capitalized terms (there are others such as “Now” and “Source”) could be replaced by “deity” and the meaning would not change. In fact, to help keep my thoughts about his book straight, when I found those terms I wrote “deity” in the margin to remind myself of what he means. We are the “I Am” but just do not know it. That is the problem to be solved. Finding one’s true essence as “Being” (deity) is the essence of salvation in the Oprah/Tolle scheme of things.

I find it interesting that Rick Warren has sold millions of books under the guise of helping people to find their purpose. His is a watered down “Christian” version of a journey of self-discovery.¹⁷ Though Warren’s version is a compromised gospel, it does maintain the distinction between the creature and the Creator. Tolle has a pantheistic version of self-discovery that has no such distinction: “There is no substitute

for finding true purpose. . . It [your primary purpose] does not concern what you do but what you are—that is to say, your state of consciousness.”¹⁸ So what is our “inner purpose”? Tolle’s answer: “Your inner purpose is to awaken. It is as simple as that.”¹⁹

The theme of Tolle’s book is to awaken to our purpose, but what does that mean? He explains: “Awakening is a shift in consciousness in which thinking and awareness separate.”²⁰ Throughout his book Tolle sees thinking as problematic and part of what keeps us in a dream-like state that assumes what we know and experience about ourselves in the real world is actually *real*, rather than *maya* or illusion. Awareness is a shift in consciousness that goes beyond thinking and actually leaves it behind: “Awareness takes over from thinking.”²¹ What is awareness? — “Awareness is conscious connection with universal intelligence. Another word for it is Presence: consciousness without thought.”²² For Tolle, if we think about the concept that we are one with the universe and part of universal consciousness (i.e. deity), that is not good. We would still be thinking, and the problematic ego (personal identity) would merely be asserting itself in a new way; reason is an enemy. So how does it happen? “Only the first awakening, the first glimpse of consciousness without thought, happens by grace, without doing on your part. . . . For some people, the reading of this book will initiate the awakening process.”²³

To those who understand the Bible well and have a Biblical worldview, this material appears to be absurd, and that is exactly what it is. But in Tolle’s way of thinking we are trapped in the ego world of forms and thinking (we’d call it objectivity and reason). For example when Tolle says that awakening must happen by grace, how can it be so when there is no transcendent God who created the world out of nothing, but rather somehow got Himself infolded into creation with no consciousness of His own existence? Who exactly confers grace upon whom? If we are deity and unconscious of it, then from whence comes saving grace? Does it come from

our own unenlightened consciousnesses? How does Tolle’s book confer grace? There are no answers.

But sadly we live in an age of Biblical illiteracy, and subjectivism is the rule. That means that millions are mesmerized by Oprah and Tolle and never think to ask critical questions. By demonizing the thought process, Tolle insures that people will not challenge his ideas. Obviously *he* has ideas that come from his thoughts, and he wrote a book.

Getting back to finding our purpose and discovering self deity, Tolle has an answer: “Opening yourself to the emerging consciousness and bringing its light into this world then becomes the primary purpose of your life.”²⁴ So what is it that we know once we find consciousness and light? How do we know without engaging in thinking (which would be self-defeating because thinking is the enemy of consciousness)? Tolle answers two questions about this: “What is the mind of God? Consciousness. What does it mean to know the mind of God? To be aware.”²⁵ Suppose someone became conscious and was aware of Presence, Being, and I Am. Tolle tells us how that fits into the great scheme of things: “Fulfilling your primary purpose is laying the foundation for a new reality, a new earth. Once that foundation is there, your external purpose becomes charged with spiritual power because your aims and intentions will be one with the evolutionary impulse of the universe.”²⁶ All such enlightened ones are helping the process of spiritual evolution. The rest hinder it. Such awareness of Being is salvation in this pantheistic system. At least it is a good start in the salvation process. But be mindful of this: ultimately salvation is God being delivered from his own insanity, which created the need for this process.

The ambiguity of this philosophy is frustrating. It is not based on anything observable in the real world. In fact, what we call the “real world” is the world of forms and ego that is unreal in Tolle’s way of thinking. Finding self-identity is problematic, even with all his discussion of awakening and conscious-

ness. For example:

You can add a thousand more definitions (thoughts) of who you are and by doing so will certainly increase the complexity of the experience of yourself, but in this way, you will never end up with the subject, the experiencer who is prior to all experience but without whom there would be no experience. So who is the experiencer? You are. And who are you? Consciousness. And what is consciousness? This question cannot be answered.²⁷

It seems to me that reading Tolle is like being a disciple sitting under a Zen master who teaches absurdities with which the disciple must wrestle under the fear of being deemed “unenlightened.” He says, “The subject, the I, the knower without which nothing could be known, perceived, thought or felt, must remain forever unknowable. This is because the I has no form.”²⁸

Okay, let’s contemplate that. I am to become conscious of my own deity, but what that means in terms of definitions and ideas is unknowable. I must be totally unenlightened because to me a deity that has lost consciousness of his own identity cannot be much of a deity. Why does anyone think this makes sense? Perhaps it is because we have abandoned the Bible which is rational and consistent and thus “escaped from reason” as Francis Schaeffer warned.

Tolle returns to the theme of self-deity: “Only forms can be known, and yet without the formless dimension, the world of form could not be. It is the luminous space in which the world arises and subsides. That space is the life that I Am. It is timeless. I Am timeless, eternal.”²⁹ This idea of our own deity apart from any objective evidence of such is the epitome of blind faith. All of the evidence points to the fact that humans are finite and fallen. By any definition of the term deity (such as non-contingent self existence) we fail. But according to Tolle, all the evidence that we are finite, troubled beings, desperately needing divine intervention from

outside ourselves, must be considered “illusion.” He writes, “Your memories are invested with a sense of self, and your story becomes who you perceive yourself to be. This ‘little me’ is an illusion that obscures your true identity as timeless and formless Presence [i.e. deity].”³⁰ We are not to believe the objective evidence, but rather that Tolle is a guru who can show us the way to awakening to our purpose.

Tolle claims that Jesus taught the same thing he does. Here is how he does that: “When Jesus said, ‘deny thyself,’ what he meant was: Negate (and thus undo) the illusion of the self. If the self—ego—were truly who I am, it would be absurd to deny it.”³¹ The Bible nowhere claims that the self is an illusion. Tolle wishes to put Eastern pantheism on the lips of Jesus, who taught no such thing. But his readers and Oprah’s listeners are likely so biblically illiterate they have no way of knowing that. Here is Tolle’s conclusion of his own twisting of Jesus’ meaning: “The only thing that ultimately matters is this: Can I sense my essential Beingness, the I Am, in the background of my life at all times? To be more accurate, can I sense that I Am that I Am at this moment?”³² To make it clear that he speaks of self-deity, in the next paragraph he speaks of “Being, the Source, God.”³³ So to deny self as Jesus taught is to deny the false “self” of being a finite human being, a created being accountable to God the Creator, and to embrace the true “self” which is Being, I Am (i.e., God).

EMERGENCE AND SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

So far we have discussed human beings as deemed to be extensions of deity who have lost consciousness of the fact and need to be awakened. But we have to consider the rest of the cosmos. Since all categories are *maya* (illusion), non-human creation also is caught up in the process of God having been infolded and having lost consciousness and the process of unfolding, which means the emergence of consciousness. Some Emergent Church leaders such as Rob

Bell and Brian McLaren have bought into this idea which they gleaned from pantheist Ken Wilber and his idea of “the great nest of being” which is gleaned from “the great chain of being.”³⁴ The idea is that deity has lost consciousness of itself but is nevertheless present in all things. Evolution is Spirit manifesting itself in emerging levels of complexity.³⁵ What Tolle calls “the descent of divine into matter”³⁶ creates the need for emergence from that state or cosmic evolution.

So deity is not found only in humans, but in all things. Writes Tolle, “Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in human beings’ perceptions, they can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with their own essence, and so love it as themselves.”³⁷ Not only is the divine essence to be found in other sentient creatures, but also in flowers and even minerals: “So when you are alert and contemplate a flower, crystal, or bird without naming it mentally, it becomes a window for you into the formless. There is an inner opening, however slight, into the realm of the spirit.”³⁸ Everything is included in emergence, or spiritual evolution. Tolle says, “Any life-form in any realm—mineral, vegetable, animal or human—can be said to undergo ‘enlightenment.’”³⁹ These he says are temporary manifestations of the one Consciousness (i.e., God).

Jesus Himself is conscripted to teach pantheistic evolution:

Like the Taoist of ancient China, Jesus likes to draw our attention to nature because he sees a power at work in it that humans have lost touch with. It is the creative power of the universe. Jesus goes on to say that if God clothes simple flowers in such beauty, how much more will God clothe you. That is to say, that while nature is a beautiful expression of the evolutionary impulse of the universe, when humans become aligned with the

intelligence that underlies it, they will express the same impulse on a higher more wondrous level.⁴⁰

It is obvious to those who understand the Bible that Jesus taught no such thing. But how many people who watch Oprah and read Eckhart Tolle know that? Our society is biblically illiterate, and being such is open to anything that comes cloaked in spirituality—even Eastern monism (that all reality is of one divine essence).

The spiritual evolution of which Tolle speaks means that some people will be higher on the evolutionary scale and become conscious while the unenlightened ones remain unconscious. Here is how Tolle explains it:

As the new consciousness emerges, some people will feel called to form groups that reflect the enlightened consciousness . . . Enlightened collectives will fulfill an important function in the arising of the new consciousness. Just as egoic collectives [elsewhere explained is groups like churches with rigid beliefs] pull you into unconsciousness and suffering, the enlightened collective can be a vortex for consciousness that will accelerate the planetary shift.⁴¹

The concept of emergence is based on the idea that God somehow got infolded into apparent (but illusory) forms of existence. In that state there is a loss of consciousness of deity. Emergence (or spiritual evolution) is the process of God emerging from that state and includes all forms of existence in the universe. So even rocks evolve: “And yet some rocks undergo a change in their molecular structure, turn into crystals, and become transparent to the light.”⁴² This is expressed in the concept of the great chain of Being.

How this works for us is mainly so we gain consciousness and thereby participate in the process. Since the universe is, as Ken Wilber says, spirit at play, we can trust the processes of the

universe to carry us along if we let go of our egos and addiction to forms. While Christians consider the created universe impersonal, those who are enlightened along the lines of Tolle and Oprah understand it differently. Tolle says, "One thing we do know: Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having."⁴³ We are no longer to make moral judgments about good and evil, but to trust that the spiritual evolution of the universe is bringing us along to a better state of consciousness.

THE "PAIN-BODY" AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

A common theme in neo-paganism is the transpersonal soul and interconnectedness of all things.⁴⁴ Tolle's pantheism has the same theme. In his case he posits the existence of a "pain-body" which is something like karma. He says:

Strictly speaking, you don't think: Thinking happens to you . . . The voice in the head has a life of its own. Most people are at the mercy of that voice; they are possessed by thought, by the mind. And since the mind is conditioned by the past, you are forced to reenact the past again and again. The Eastern term for this is karma.⁴⁵

Tolle explains that we have been "mind-possessed" and a false self (ego) has developed that is identified with the mind and thinking (which is a bad thing). The emotions are also a dimension of the ego and they are problematic as well. Then there is the "pain-body" that connects us to all the negative vibrations of the human race. Our problems are not just ours, but those of the unconscious human race who went before us. Tolle describes the "pain-body" in its individual manifestation:

[double indent] The remnants of pain left behind by every strong negative emotion that is not fully

faced, accepted, and then let go of join together to form an energy field that that lives in the very cells of your body. It consists not just of childhood pain, but also painful emotions that were added to it later in adolescence and during your adult life, much of it created by the voice of the ego [i.e. thinking]. It is the emotional pain that is your unavoidable companion when a false sense of self is the basis of your life.⁴⁶

Keep in mind that the "false sense of self" is the belief that we have a unique, independent existence, that our personal identities are meaningful, and that our unique identities can be defined objectively. The true self is consciousness of Presence, I Am, Now, and other ways of describing deity. It appears to me that Tolle's pain-body idea is a replacement for the biblical idea of sin. Our problem is not that we have rebelled against the unique creator God who has given us His moral law, but that we have allowed our thoughts, emotions, and addiction to forms to define us and keep us from becoming conscious (i.e., aware of our deity).

In this scheme of things, there is also interconnectivity or collective karma:

The pain-body, however, is not just individual in nature. It also partakes of the pain suffered by countless humans throughout the history of humanity, which is a history of continuous tribal warfare, of enslavement, pillage, rape, torture, and other forms of violence. This pain still lives in the collective psyche of humanity and is being added to on a daily basis.⁴⁷

So this "pain-body" is a huge problem, endemic to the human race, and the cause of the many problems we encounter. The solution for Tolle, of course, is to realize that it is illusion, escape from thought that attaches us to ego, and awaken to our real identity as I

Am.

Christ has a role in helping us with this problem of pain-body suffering:

Why is the suffering body of Christ, his face distorted in agony and his body bleeding from countless wounds, such a significant image in the collective consciousness of humanity? Millions of people, particularly in medieval times, would not have related to it as deeply as they did if something within themselves had not resonated with it, if they had not unconsciously recognized it as an outer representation of their own inner reality—the pain-body. . . . Christ can be seen as the archetypal human, embodying both the pain and the possibility of transcendence.⁴⁸

Tolle introduces the idea of Christ, and cites Jesus often as a teacher of the new consciousness. But he makes no effort to actually understand what the Bible tells us about the person and work of Christ. Christ came to die for sins, not to embody pain and possible transcendence. God's wrath is directed against sin. That wrath is satisfied for believers by the once-for-all shed blood that Christ offered. The new consciousness "Christ" that Tolle describes is not the Christ of the Bible. We do not need to merely identify with Christ as the one suffering pain, but to repent and believe the gospel. But that idea will not be presented by Oprah through her huge media network. Instead, Tolle and his ilk get massive promotion. People are attracted to such a "Christ," but this attraction does them no good; rather it leads them to further deception.

Take note that the ideas presented by Tolle are offered as the wisdom of the spiritual masters that he has gleaned, modified, and presented as the means of obtaining the "new earth." He sees no need to present evidence or proof that the universe is as he says it is. It would be counterproductive, in his way of thinking, to do so. Why? Because evidence causes our minds to spring into action and analyze things, and thoughts

are the problem—the awakened consciousness is the solution.

Thus we see odd claims tossed our way with no evidence reinforce them. Consider these statements:

Thoughts consist of the same energy vibrating at a higher frequency than matter, which is why they cannot be seen or touched. Thoughts have their own range of frequencies, with negative thoughts at the lower end of the scale and positive thoughts at the higher. The vibrational frequency of the pain-body resonates with that of negative thoughts.⁴⁹

Thus our collective pain-body is attracted to negative thoughts, which causes addiction to unhappiness. Here is why: “This is because the pain-body at that time [when you have negative thoughts] is living through you, pretending to be you. And to the pain-body, pain is pleasure.”⁵⁰

I think this sort of idea is what attracts many people to the Oprah/Tolle understanding of spirituality. If the negative thoughts their listeners and readers wish to be rid of are merely a pain-body (that is, not them) resonating at a lower frequency, then perhaps finding a different state of consciousness would solve the problem. The problem is not our own sin and guilt, but an unfortunate equating the interconnected pain and guilt of unconscious humanity with who we really are. If we find a way to awaken to the reality of our own divinity, all that pain will instantly disappear. It will be seen for the unreality it is.

But is there any reason to believe this material which has no evidence for its veracity? What if it is all a lie and our guilt really is *our* guilt and it needs expiation not relegation to the category of “illusion”?

A key component in mitigating the pain-body is meditation. Speaking of China, he states:

Every day in the streets and city parks, millions practice this [t'ai chi] movement meditation that

stills the mind. This makes a considerable difference to the collective energy field and goes some way toward diminishing the pain-body by reducing thinking and generating Presence. Spiritual practices that involve the physical body, such as t'ai chi, qigong, and yoga, are increasingly being embraced in the Western world. These practices do not create a separation between body and spirit and are helpful in weakening the pain-body. They will play an important role in the global awakening.⁵¹

Does this “pain-body” that supposedly will diminish with meditation actually exist? Are thoughts actually vibrations at various frequencies? Is the adoption of Eastern religion really a “global awakening,” or is it instead a global delusion as predicted in the Bible? These are serious questions that people who sign up for Oprah spirituality ought to be asking. But mostly they don't; rather they accept these ideas and practices on blind faith.

ENTERING THE SILENCE

As we have mentioned several times, in Tolle's philosophy thoughts and thinking are problematic. That which will silence thinking is helpful in the awakening of Presence. Tolle states, “We can never understand this higher order through thinking about it because whatever we think about is content; whereas, the higher order emanates from the formless realm of consciousness, from universal intelligence.”⁵² Is the concept of “intelligence” devoid of thinking meaningful? To me it is not; but then I have not achieved consciousness. As I understand it, I would know nothing of God if He had not chosen to reveal Himself using words, such as those revealed to Moses on Sinai and to the church through Jesus Christ who came into history and spoke God's words that are intended to be understood and binding. We are to oppose attempts to shut off our thinking and we should seek every opportunity to listen to the

God who has spoken once for all (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

Tolle gives the example of entering a forest unsullied by man. He says that our “thinking mind” will see only disorder and chaos. But there is an alternative: “Only if we are still enough inside and the noise of thinking subsides can we become aware that there is a hidden harmony here, a sacredness, a higher order in which everything has its perfect place and could not be other than what it is and the way it is.”⁵³ I do not believe that such an experience, if we had one, would reveal anything. Having a subjective religious experience does not explain either the order or chaos one sees in nature. However, the biblical teaching of creation followed by a fall into sin does. That material must be understood with our minds lest we become like “unreasoning beasts” (2Peter 2:12). Shutting off thinking does not raise us to a higher level. Rather, it lowers us to a level of creatures who are not created in God's image as humans are.

The deluding experiences of those who shut off their minds leads them to believe that everything is sacred and nothing is profane (in contradiction to the Bible). Sacredness becomes meaningless through universal application. But for Tolle the process of shutting off thoughts leads to the experience of the sacred:

You cannot understand it through thought, but you can sense it when you let go of thought, become still and alert, and don't try to understand or explain. Only then can you be aware of the sacredness of the forest. As soon as you sense that hidden harmony, that sacredness, you realize you are not separate from it, and when you realize that, you become a conscious participant in it. In this way you become realigned with the wholeness of life.⁵⁴

Tolle repeatedly advises that we stop thinking. I do not doubt that doing so might create a “religious experience.”

But it reveals nothing about God, the nature of the world He created or the terms of how one can find true holiness. Those who practice these things are being deluded into a sense of sacredness when the reality is that they are profane sinners in God's sight. Holiness only comes from the blood atonement, not an experience with nature.

There are practices that Tolle offers to help his readers shut down their minds. One that is apparently useful is to become conscious of one's own breath. This same idea is taught by Christian mystics such as Richard Foster. Tolle says, "Being aware of your breathing takes attention away from thinking and creates space. It is one way of generating consciousness. Although the fullness of consciousness is already there as the unmanifested, we are here to bring consciousness into this dimension."⁵⁵ As always, the most important thing for Tolle is that we become "conscious," which means awakened to Presence.

He believes that breath is useful and spiritual, citing Genesis where God breathed breath into man in the act of creation. Then he mentions the Sanskrit word *Atman* from which the German word *atmen* is derived. *Atman* means the indwelling divine spirit (according to Tolle) and *atmen* is the German word for breathing. He says, "The fact that breath has no form is one of the reasons why breath awareness is an extremely effective way of bringing space into your life, of generating consciousness."⁵⁶ This reminds me of when I studied the teachings of pantheist Ken Wilber. When asked about his complicated and esoteric philosophy, that many struggle to understand, the interviewer enquired what someone could do short of understanding it. His answer was "just meditate."⁵⁷ Any process that shuts down the mind and creates silence will supposedly work to create space in which one is awakened to consciousness. This consciousness is that of the realization of one's own divinity and interconnectivity with the whole.

THE NEW EARTH

Amazingly, the title of Tolle's book comes from the Bible. He cites Revelation 21:1 about a new earth. Tolle cites Jesus more often than he does Buddha. The Bible and Jesus are well known in the West, where his target audience lies. But what he fails to tell his readers is that the new earth John was shown as recounted in Revelation 21:1 does not come until after the cataclysmic judgments earlier in Revelation and the final judgment which is described in Revelation 20 where all God's enemies are thrown into the lake of fire. With Tolle believing that evil is an illusion and that ultimately everything in his pantheistic scheme of things is God, a final judgment in which some people end up with God and others banished to eternal punishment is totally incompatible with Tolle's philosophy. So if the Bible is so seriously in error in Revelation 20, why should we believe Revelation 21:1? Also, as we shall soon see, since Tolle's interpretation of Revelation 21:1 is totally foreign to anything in the Bible, should we not be suspect of why he is using it? Does he want to hijack the Bible in order to give credibility to his pagan philosophy all the while teaching ideas that are antithetical to the teachings of the Bible? I can come to no other conclusion than that he does.

So what exactly is "the new earth" of Revelation 21:1 according to Tolle's reading of it? "The foundation for a new earth is a new heaven—the awakened consciousness."⁵⁸ Heaven is not a future destination for those who have faith in Jesus Christ; it is a new consciousness now for the awakened ones. For Tolle this all has to be Now:

The earth—external reality—is only its outer reflection. The arising of a new heaven and by implication a new earth are not future events that are going to make us free. Nothing is *going to* make us free because only the present moment can make us free. That realization is the awakening. Awakening as a future event has no meaning

because awakening is the realization of Presence. . . . A new heaven and a new earth are arising within you at this moment, and if they are not arising within you at this moment, they are no more than a thought in your head and therefore not arising at all.⁵⁹

This is not even within the realm of biblical ideas. The new heaven and earth do not happen as an arising consciousness; they happen only after direct judgment by the transcendent God as described in the Bible. If Tolle does not believe the Bible, I am not shocked. But he is disingenuous to call upon the Bible by twisting its meaning to lend credibility to his pagan and ungodly ideas.

Before he finishes the last page of his book, he cites Jesus one last time saying, "Heaven is right here in the midst of you" and "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." He answers his own question about the identity of the meek:

The meek are egoless. They are those who have awakened to their essential true nature as consciousness and recognize that essence in 'all others,' all life-forms. They live in the surrendered state and so feel their oneness with the whole and the Source. They embody the awakened consciousness that is changing all aspects of life on our planet, including nature. . . . A new species is arising on the planet. It is arising now, and you are it!⁶⁰

Heaven and the new earth are here now, and they arise as we gain consciousness of our own deity and the interconnectedness of all things. So says Eckhart Tolle.

CONCLUSION

I do not believe that Eckhart Tolle believes the Bible. He cites it often to give the illusion that it supports his ideas. Anyone knowledgeable of the

basic worldview revealed in the Bible would immediately know that Jesus is not some Eastern guru who agrees with Buddha. Such a person would know that Tolle contradicts nearly every important teaching in the Bible. But with Oprah's help he is deceiving millions of people. How is that possible? It would not be possible if most people were not biblically illiterate. Even regular churchgoers are in that condition, and many such churchgoers listen to Oprah and the deceptive spirituality of her guests such as Tolle and many others.

The evangelical church is not guiltless in this matter. When Tolle twists scripture to find self-discovery as the key, he does nothing that Rick Warren has not done before him. Tolle's deception is of a different order and magnitude than Warren's. But Warren taught the evangelical movement that obscuring the meaning of Biblical passages to promote a journey of self discovery was not only acceptable, but a good way to gain massive popularity. So now Tolle does the same, only in a more egregious manner. He too finds massive popularity and sells millions of books. Warren and others like him helped create the fertile conditions in which pagan ideas like Tolle's can take hold: a biblically illiterate populace who want to find a path to self-discovery. Tolle teaches finding consciousness through breath awareness; Warren teaches breath prayers. The evangelical church is in love with mysticism, a fact we have documented in many articles. Tolle teaches a mysticism that is even more powerful. Now having a hunger for mysticism, many move to a better source of it: Eastern mysticism minus any idea of a transcendent God.

The only deliverance from this alluring deception is the truth of the gospel and sanctification through the means of grace. Only the church has the message that can deliver Oprah's followers from the seduction of deceiving spirits that give the energy to these experiences of awakened consciousness. We need to be unashamed to tell them the truth of the gospel. We need to

preach the true Christ so that people know there is an alternative to the false Christ of Eastern mysticism. Churches need to preach the pure word of God so if their members watch Oprah they immediately see that the spirituality of her guests is pure deception and spiritual wickedness. The time is short, and we must take action.

END NOTES

1. http://www.oprah.com/article/oprahs-bookclub/anewearth/pkganewearth-webcast/20080130_obc_webcast_marketing
2. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth – Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*; (Plume Books: New York, 2006)
3. Ibid. 54.
4. Ibid. 18.
5. Ibid. 292.
6. Ibid. 8, 9.
7. Ibid. 76.
8. Ibid. 62.
9. Ibid. 77.
10. Ibid. 220.
11. Ibid. 227.
12. Ibid. 228.
13. Ibid. 8.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. 57.
16. Ibid. 220.
17. I explain his journey of self-discovery in *Redefining Christianity – Understanding the Purpose Driven Movement*.
18. Tolle, 258.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. 259.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid. 260.
24. Ibid. 261.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid. 265.
27. Ibid. 242.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. 140.
31. Ibid. 79.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. I devote chapter 9 of *The Emergent Church – Undefining Christianity* to Wilber's philosophy and its expression in the Emergent Church movement. The book is available here: <http://www.cicstore.org/servlet/the-61/The-Emergent-Church-dsh--dsh--Undefining/Detail>
35. I explain this in more detail, DeWaa, *Emergent Church* pages 184 – 186.
36. Tolle, 292.
37. Ibid. 4.
38. Ibid. 5.
39. Ibid. 3.
40. Ibid. 268, 269.
41. Ibid. 127.
42. Ibid. 3.
43. Ibid. 41.
44. I wrote about this in CIC issue 33: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue33.htm>
45. Tolle, 129.
46. Ibid. 142.
47. Ibid. 142, 143
48. Ibid. 144.
49. Ibid. 147.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid. 158, 159.
52. Ibid. 194.
53. Ibid. 195.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid. 244.
56. Ibid. 245.
57. I cite Wilber and discuss this response in *The Emergent Church*, p 188.
58. Tolle 308.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid. 309.

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Twin City Fellowship
 P.O. Box 26127
 St. Louis Park, MN 55426
 952-935-3100
www.twincityfellowship.com
www.cicministry.org

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