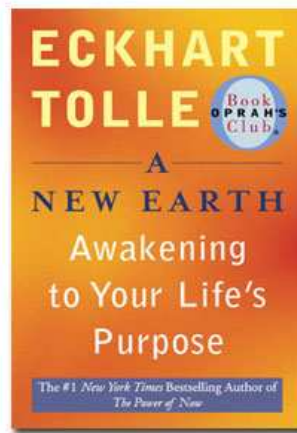


-An Open Letter to Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle-

A Christian Response to Eckhart Tolle's: *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Lifes' Purpose*

(By Dr. Ron Woodworth)



Introduction

I first heard of Eckhart Tolle when dear friends of ours mentioned they had, out of curiosity, ordered a copy of his latest book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, after hearing of it advertised on the Oprah Winfrey show. The more we discussed the content and popularity of the book the more certain I was that I should read, research, and write a response (rather than a reaction) from a “Christian” perspective.¹ My objective here is to present an article that is informed by my experience as an adjunct professor of world religions,² a seminary graduate,³ a published Christian apologist,⁴ and a former senior pastoral leader.⁵

Please know that in the article that follows there is absolutely no judgmentalism, resentment or vitriol in my intention. In fact, I am quite certain that Tolle and Winfrey are both sincerely seeking to bring awareness to many of those who have felt alienated from the irrelevance of legalistic “religion,” be it Christian or otherwise. I also share their concern. People are

hurting and are on a quest for healing, wholeness (harmony and alignment), and true meaning in life. Hence, rather than engage in an argumentative debate, my hope is that this article will at least help to clarify some fundamental issues between the worldview and subsequent spirituality recommended by Tolle vis-à-vis the biblical worldview and attending spirituality taught by Jesus Christ.

Anyone who has read Tolle's book and/or intends to embrace his call to enlightened/awakened consciousness needs to be aware of these critical distinctions before choosing, or recommending a life-path whose destination may merge with a reality not initially intended. To that end I write to all who seek an understanding of authentic spirituality in the 21st century and beyond.

[Note: Please be advised that a few of the responses below may be somewhat difficult to initially understand, especially if one has not studied Tolle's book or is unfamiliar with eastern religious philosophy. As a result, I have purposefully summarized the information that follows into 10 main sub-points—all with a view to public readability.]

Brief biographical background of Eckhart Tolle

Eckhart Tolle was originally born (1948) as Ulrich Tolle, but later changed his name to "Eckhart," after one of his acknowledged mentors, the Catholic-Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). This name change coincided with Eckhart's spiritual rebirth and new identity at the age of 29—which was itself the result of overcoming years of severe bouts of "suicidal depression." Ulrich's mother's constant fretting about his future career allegedly drove him to move to Spain and live with his father from ages 13 to 19—after which he moved to England. Ulrich had no public education during these teenage years choosing rather to pursue his own particular interests in preparation for his studies and presumed graduation at the University of London—followed by at least some level of doctoral research at Cambridge University.⁶ Since 1996, Tolle has lived in Vancouver, British Columbia/Canada where he resides with his domestic-partner and associate Kim Eng, who is also an advocate of the awakening of consciousness through her "Presence through Movement" workshop.⁷

Major influences on Tolle's life and philosophy

Tolle claims, as a matter of principle, to be non-aligned with any particular religion or tradition. However, he and others have acknowledged his “strong connections” and significant influences with at least the following spiritual teachers, texts and religious-philosophical belief systems. These influences will be mentioned and briefly described for the sake of gaining a perspective of the foundational thinking upon which Tolle's worldview is understandably predicated.

- J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986)...was an Indian philosopher and popular writer and speaker who, among many other things, taught that there is no path to truth and no set of beliefs to describe what can only be an “individual matter” alone. In essence, all truth is relative to each individual who makes their own path. However, Krishnamurti, in contradiction to relativism, advocated his own teachings “absolutely and unconditionally.”
- Ramana Maharshi (1879-1915)...was an Indian sage who taught non-dualism (or monism), which maintains that there is only one reality and ultimate consciousness in the universe. In other words, all suggestions of dualism, like between creator and creation do not exist and are therefore delusions.
- Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken also called “Bo Yin Ra” (1876-1943)...was a German mystical author and celebrated abstract painter whose books on mystical reality were eagerly ingested by Tolle at the formative age of 15 years.
- Zen Buddhism is a particular sect of Mahayana (or liberal) Buddhism in which practitioners attain “awakening” through the use of meditation and experiential wisdom over theoretical or text-based learning. Especially notable is Zen's emphasis on the “present moment, spontaneous action, and letting go of self-consciousness and judgmental thinking.”⁸
- Hinduism is one of the oldest and the 3rd largest world religion whose origin is traced in India. Hinduism (parent to Buddhism and Jainism) is based on karma, reincarnation and the concept of liberation (lit. *moksha*) from the endless cycle of life (birth, death, and rebirth).
- A Course in Miracles (ACIM) is a book written by psychologist Helen Schucman (1909-1981) who insists that she was channeling (through “inner dictation”) Jesus Christ who is simply an evolutionary elder

brother. The Course text is built on “Eastern religious philosophy but uses traditional Judeo-Christian terminology even though it contradicts Christian doctrine—and is most popular among those who have been disillusioned by organized/institutional Christianity.”⁹ J.G. Melton and W. Hanegraaff, secular scholars of alternative religions—including the New Age movement, have called the A Course in Miracles the “sacred scripture” of the New Age movement.

Thematic review and biblical response to Tolle’s predominant ideas

1. The New Age and the biblical concept of the “antichrist”

As a religious studies scholar-professor, I would classify Tolle’s book as a form of New Age spirituality with a westernized version of Zen Buddhism at its core. For those unfamiliar with New Age spirituality, it can basically be described as a “decentralized social phenomenon and a Western socio-religious movement that combines aspects of spirituality, esotericism¹⁰ and religious-philosophical practices from many eastern (Asian and Indian) and western traditions across the world.”¹¹

Several key characteristics of New Age spirituality include eclecticism,¹² relativistic individualism,¹³ Gnosticism,¹⁴ and universalism¹⁵—including a strong aversion to creeds (doctrines or belief systems) from historic and/or institutionalized religious traditions.

As a Christian theologian, the main problem with the New Age is that many of the sources it consults either contradict, or in Tolle’s case, replace the biblical revelation that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.” (2 Cor. 5:19) In other words, Christianity starts (and ends) with Christ Jesus the Son of God who was/is the Lamb of God that “takes away the sin of the world” by the sacrifice of himself on the cross at Calvary. (John 3:16; John 1:29; Heb. 9:26)

In Tolle’s “theology” there is no mention of the need for sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ because of his alignment with historic Buddhism which is a non-theistic religious-philosophy of the 6th century BCE. However, before one embraces Buddhism as an

operative world view, it is important to know a couple of historic facts about Buddha himself. Born 563 BCE, Siddhartha Gautama (d. 483 BCE), later called Buddha (lit. “Enlightened one”), grew up in the culture of polytheistic Hinduism, which he came to view as superstition and futility. This helps to explain his aversion to the notion of God in favor of a non-theistic philosophy. Hence, Buddha’s concept of salvation (the freedom from endless human suffering) was a self-derived personal matter apart from the belief in any specific mythological god offered by Hinduism in Buddha’s lifetime. This also helps explain his rejection of dualism (god vs. creature) in favor of monism—in which there is only one ultimate reality.

If Buddha would have had the advantage of knowing about the atoning death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all human suffering, one can only wonder how it would have influenced his perspective. Hence, before adopting Buddhism as a *modern* world view, one should understand the implications of its historic distance from the revelation of God in Christ. Indeed, why make a conclusion about one’s ultimate destiny without the serious consideration of what Buddha, by no fault of his own, had no conception of himself when he was alive? After all, just think of what a difference the reality of flying would have made to all who lived 600 years before its invention by the Wright Brothers in the early 20th century!

Nevertheless, “modern” Buddhism argues that humanity’s problem is not “sin” (requiring atonement) but rather “ignorance” needing enlightenment, or what Tolle calls awakening. This is clearly an atheistic, or god denying proposition. However, rather than offend the theistic sensitivities of western culture, Tolle intentionally avoids the use of the term atheism. Rather, than denying god he simply replaces the notion of deity by suggesting, in monistic/Buddhist terms that we are our own “God,” our own Being, Presence, Source—even our own “I Am” (p. 251).¹⁶

In Christian terms, this deification of humanity finds a direct corollary with the concept of the “antichrist.” The word anti-Christ literally means two things: “in place of,” and/or “against” Christ. The New Testament uses the term 5 times to indicate the spiritual opposition (some kind of global influence—be it doctrine, philosophy, or a

person) who deceives the world by seeking to usurp the title, power, and prerogatives of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷

“But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus [as having come in the flesh/incarnate, 2 John 7] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:3)

It is not that I am suggesting that Tolle is himself the “antichrist,” but there is a curious connection between what he is teaching and what the Bible warns as the “spirit of the antichrist” that will globally emerge as a major deceptive force in the last days.¹⁸

2. Religion vs. spirituality

Tolle rightly argues that there is difference between being religious and being spiritual (p. 17-19). This truism is reflected in the statement: True Christianity is not a religion with rituals, rules, and relics, but a relationship with the living God through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem, however, with Tolle’s statement is that he unjustifiably jumps to the conclusion that true spirituality has nothing to do with beliefs or thinking at all. Instead, a set of beliefs necessarily leads to mind-dominated judgmentalism of others in order to protect our belief system, which has unfortunately become an extension of our own personal or form-based identity. In fact, what Tolle is advocating here is that no one can be truly spiritual if they embrace a set of beliefs that engage the mind in a rational process. Furthermore, all such religious people are always insecure and judgmental of others.

This is simply not the case. There are many people who are as spiritual as Tolle and at the same time embrace an historic set of beliefs (the incarnation of Christ Jesus, his miraculous ministry, atoning death for sin, confirmed bodily resurrection and ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, ca. 30AD) that undergird their personal practice of transformational faith and loving relationships with others. One does not need to reject their rationality to be spiritual. Indeed, echoing the Old Testament command, Jesus taught that we should love the Lord our God with all

our heart, soul and *mind*—and to love your neighbor as yourself (Deut. 6:5; Luke 10:27).

3. The egoic self and immortality

Tolle defines the ego as “the illusory sense of self” (p. 27-28), which must be exposed in order for the illusion of the egoic-self, and all of its form-based identifies (thinking, feeling, wanting, owning, our bodies, etc.) to be dissolved. Such a dissolution of the egoic-self is necessary to realize the “I Am-ness” of our eternally present existence, which is another term for our awakened consciousness. In fact, much of Tolle’s book is devoted to detecting and thereby dissolving the bondage of the egoic self—be it individual or collective. However, this radical denial of the “egoic” self, as well as the impossibility of “losing one’s self-life” (p. 128) is at the same time a misunderstanding of New Testament spirituality as well as a logical extension of Tolle’s monistic (non-duality) assumptions.

The words of Jesus are quite clear:

“If anyone would follow after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)

First, what Tolle fails to see is the distinction between denying THE self (monism) versus denying ONEself (Christianity).¹⁹ In other words, Jesus admitted that there was such a thing as a personal self that needed to be denied in the daily practice of following him as Lord. Essentially this means to surrender ones self-centered claims of autonomy in order to live *from* Christ (the regenerated spirit within)²⁰ and *for* Christ (rather than for fame, fortune, happiness, etc.) throughout one’s life from conversion onward. Jesus further described this manner of spiritual life when he encouraged his followers to, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything you need in this life will be provided for you as well.*” (Matt. 6:33; See also Phil. 4:19) Furthermore, this kingdom-centered style of living is a continual source of Christian empowerment and has as its goal the “fruit of the spirit,” which is “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*” (Gal. 5:22).

Second, Jesus also specifically acknowledges the need to “lose one’s life” in order to gain it. Again, this plainly implies that each person, must make a deliberate choice²¹ to lay down (surrender) one’s own life for the sake of serving the purpose of God and hence gaining a reward/blessing “in this present life and also in the one to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

It should be pointed out here that Christians also believe in the immortality of every human being. Such a belief however, is not based on Tolle’s “incontrovertible” (p. 127) argument of monistic inseparability, but on the reality of the spark of divine-eternal life in every human being who has been created in the “image of God” (Gen. 1:27). And though every human being will live forever, the question is: in which state? Tolle’s answer is in the state of the ultimate-universal consciousness in which there is no life to be gained or lost. The biblical answer is either in the presence or absence of God. And though ultimate judgment is left to God, who alone knows the secrets of all men’s hearts,²² there is however a certainty of hope based on the promise of God to all who have sought refuge in God’s free gift of righteousness to all who believe in Christ Jesus.²³ In other words, while Christians cannot (and should not) conclusively speculate regarding the eternal state of others (1 Cor. 4:5), what we can (and should) proclaim with full conviction is the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴

4. The pain-body and the presence of the Lord.

Tolle defines the “pain-body” as an “accumulation of old [negative] emotional pain” (p. 140), which feeds on and/or is triggered by such things as your thoughts, emotions, relational drama, and negative forms of entertainment. Prime examples of negative emotions are fear, anxiety, anger, bearing a grudge, sadness, hatred or intense dislike, jealous, envy, and the quintessential negative emotion of them all: unhappiness. (p. 136) A predominate theme in Tolle’s writing, the pain-body is initially heavier in some than others—especially the great spiritual reformers and enlightened master teachers.

The pain-body is also generationally transferable, and is the basis of a sense of alienation and victimization through such things as the historic suppression of women (the feminine principle), as well as the collective identity of certain nations (Germany and Japan) and racial groups (Jews, Native Americans, and Black Americans) (p. 154-160). Tolle's solution to the pain-body is to break the pattern of accumulating and perpetuating the old emotional pain of the past (141). We do this by acknowledging the reality of the pain-body itself, accepting the presence of the negative emotions that surface (p. 184), and then shifting one's consciousness through the practice of Presence (161)—which can be immediately accessed by the awareness of one's breathing (p. 246).

Tolle then concludes chapter six by citing Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:48, "*Be ye whole, even as your Father in Heaven is whole*" as evidence in support of the notion that our inner God-nature emerges as we accept "the is-ness of the Now" (p. 184), thereby ensuring the ultimate dissolution of the pain-body.

[For the record, and contrary to Tolle's re-interpretation of the Greek text, the Greek word for "whole" is actually *holos*. However, the word used here is *teleios* and literally means "to reach an end/goal" i.e. to "complete" and by extension to be perfect or mature. In other words, it is simply inaccurate to insist, as Tolle does, that "perfect" is a "mistranslation of the original Greek word."]

From a Christian perspective, though the term "pain-body" may not be a biblical word, yet the idea of needing to overcome negative emotions that are generationally transferable, serve as a collective identity, tied to past trauma, reinforced by obsessive thinking, are the basis of much human unhappiness, and yet may serve as a catalyst for spiritual enlightenment²⁵ are all compatible with Christian psychology and spirituality. Furthermore, the idea of living in the present, rather than the past or future is a familiar biblical theme.

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Focus your energies instead on today's concerns."
(Matt. 6:34)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

The difference is that Tolle’s version of Presence is not the presence of the Lord, where there is joyful refreshing,²⁶ but a breath-induced state of consciousness of the God-nature within all things. This pantheistic view (God is the universe and the universe is God) of reality is foreign to the biblical worldview of a loving heavenly Father, who sent Jesus Christ his Son, to restore humanity to a right relationship. Such a relationship enables God’s presence to permeate every aspect of our earthly existence by the gift and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides guidance, comfort, healing, strength, and wisdom to overcome our past wounds and present temptations as we live in moment by moment communion with Him.

Hence, the idea that we should get in touch with our god-like true selves by deep breathing falls far short of God’s gracious and abundant provision in Christ—the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, our inclusion in the kingdom (eternally present spiritual rule) of God (Col. 1:13-14) fills us with comforting assurance that though we do not know *what* the future holds, we do know *who* holds the future. In other words, the presence of God, confidently accessed and maintained by faith in Christ (Eph. 3:12), is an eternal reality for all those who willingly believe in the Lordship of Jesus. Why accept any other substitute?

5. Transformation of consciousness, the Kingdom of God and the power of free-will

When Tolle asserts that the “central message” of Jesus (p.6) was the transformation of consciousness he is, from a Christian perspective, “half right” and “half wrong.” He is half right to describe the radical need for human transformation in order to shape a better world. Unfortunately however, such a transformed world can not be fully realized in this present age. Rather the present heavens and earth must undergo a radical regeneration (rebirth) in order for the ultimate-eternal next age to begin.²⁷ But he is also half wrong to assume that this was Jesus’ “central teaching.” In fact, Matthew 4:23 makes an

unequivocal statement regarding Jesus' main message and central focus in his entire earthly ministry:

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”

Theologically speaking, the kingdom of God is the presence of the future invading human history—the eternal intersecting the temporal in the person of Christ Jesus; the establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of all who embrace its reality²⁸; the dethroning of all the spiritual forces of evil aligned against humanity (Col. 2:15); the removal of the consequences of sin, including death and all that diminishes human life²⁹; and the creation of a new universal order of righteousness and peace for redeemed humanity.³⁰

Furthermore, the kingdom of God not only transforms the believer's present identity (in keeping with the reality of Christ within us), but, as stated above, it will also ultimately regenerate the physical structures of the universe in which we now live.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare...But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”
(2 Pet. 3:10, 13)

This is where Tolle's transformational vision does not go far enough. Rather than simply an awakening of human/universal consciousness through dissolution of the egoic self's dependence on form-based reality, the Bible calls for the need for a physical dissolution of the present heavens and earth as a necessary precursor for the ultimate revelation/manifestation of the kingdom of God. Such a manifestation will specifically coincide with the central theme of the New Testament writers—the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

Again, this is where Tolle's text is absolutely silent. Predictably, this is because in Buddhism, death is an illusion that gives way to innumerable reincarnations.³¹ And for Tolle, reincarnation is the

implied (and necessary) mechanism for human evolution to occur—hopefully resulting in a universal consciousness and consensus. The only problem is that for this to occur would mean that every human being would ultimately have to arrive at fully awakened consciousness. This would imply that, among many other human dysfunctions and delusions not-with-standing,³² every monotheist on the planet now, of which there are over 3.3 billion,³³ will, in multiple lifetimes to come, have to abandon their belief in God and embrace Tolle’s philosophy in order for it to become a global reality of the newly evolved human species. Needless to say, the chances of this happening are beyond any reasonable calculation, which is undoubtedly why Tolle’s monistic utopianism (p. 308) must be based on the wholesale denial and/or rejection of rationality.

However, what Tolle hasn’t accounted for, and which is destined to be the undoing of his utopian ideal, is the biblical concept of free-will.³⁴ And even if the freedom of the individual is denied for a season, it will eventually emerge to cast off the constraints of those who seek to control it. Free-will, after all, is an inexorable aspect of our divine origin. Even the kingdom of God can not violate freedom of individual choice—which is why the Bible repeatedly invites the voluntary participation of “whosoever will” (Rev. 22:17).

6. The impermanence of form, eternal life and divine purpose

A key part of Tolle’s argument is that our egoic-self is attached to forms, be they material or otherwise in its insatiable thirst for what ultimately leads a false sense of identity. It is only through the realization of the instability of all forms (structures) that peace arises within.³⁵ This is because, according to Tolle, “the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it ‘eternal life.’” (p. 81)

Though the concept of the impermanence of this-worldly form-based structures does find a degree of resonance within the New Testament,³⁶ the notion that eternal life is somehow associated with the awakening to formlessness within oneself is not even remotely a consideration of Jesus, or any other biblical writer. On the contrary, Jesus specifically taught that eternal life was a gift from a loving God

mediated through him³⁷ to all who would behold and believe in the salvation accomplished by his death on their behalf.

“Just as Moses lifted up a snake in the desert [through mounting it on a pole so that anyone who was bitten could look upon it and live, Numbers 21:4-9], so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:14-16)

Notice that the context for God’s gift of eternal life is by the acknowledgment of Christ’s sacrificial death for sin. Allegorically, the result of the snake-serpent-satan’s “bite” has resulted in the poisoning of humanity’s personality as well the eventual reality of physical death. Such a terminal condition can only be effectively neutralized by “ingesting-believing” in Christ’s resurrection life. Indeed, the “antibody” of Christ’s life alone is sufficient to overcome the terminal condition of sin. Furthermore, such antibody is available to all who believe in his name. For to earnestly invoke the name (nature and authority) of the Lord Jesus Christ is to access the presence and power of God with confidence and certainty.³⁸

In the final analysis, the biblical alternative to an idolatrous preoccupation with the passing forms of this world is to lovingly devote oneself to serving the will (purpose and intention) of God on earth.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh [carnality] and the lust of the eyes [materialism] and the boastful pride of life [egoism], is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Tolle’s assertion is that the “reason for our existence” (p. 166) is to bring an awareness of our own universal connectedness (or consciousness) to the planet. However, the divine call and destiny for a Christian is undoubtedly and essentially reflected in a whole-hearted

commitment to what is called “the great commission.” The great commission has a number of essential components, which should at least include the following: the special empowering of the Holy Spirit³⁹; being “built together” as a living expression of the Body of Christ on earth⁴⁰; going forth into all of the nations of the world with the intent to share the good news of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for humanity⁴¹; baptizing those who repent and believe the Gospel as a public profession of their faith in Christ Jesus⁴²; instructing-nurturing believers in spiritual growth⁴³; and trusting the Lord to confirm his word by any number of signs that he may choose to grant.⁴⁴

Any lack of dynamic Christian spirituality can be traced to a loss of one or more of these essential kingdom characteristics-objectives. Furthermore, fulfillment of these objectives will most assuredly catalyze a Christian version of a global spiritual awakening (especially among the youth), a transformation of consciousness and character, and a counter-awakening backlash of persecution. All such events will collectively signal that the end of the age is upon us.⁴⁵

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matt. 24:14)

7. The problem of evil

In Tolle’s worldview the problem of evil is only one of misperception. Indeed, evil only exists (in relative terms) in those who are currently unenlightened-unawakened and thereby unconscious to the delusion of evil, which operates through the form-based identification of the egoic-mind (p. 22). This is why Tolle insists that the only “perpetrator of evil on the planet is human unconsciousness” (p. 160). Essentially, the unawareness of our universal connectedness coupled with our egoic identification with forms⁴⁶ is what Tolle refers to as the “original sin”—resulting in suffering and delusion (p. 22). And since evil only has a relative (vs. absolute) reality among the unconscious, when we are finally awakened we realize the futility of judgment and resistance—thus enabling us to forgive all offenses automatically. After all, if no evil offense was perpetrated against us then there is no need to retain judgments against others. Hence, forgiveness flows without effort from the heart of the awakened.

This notion of pacifism toward the presence of evil is based on a philosophical fatalism that embraces everything that happens to us, regardless of the appearance of evil, as a necessary part of “the greater whole” to which we are all connected (p. 286). In other words, evil itself will work to awaken us to the truth that there is actually no such thing as evil—we were only dreaming it was evil (p. 208). And when once awakened we now see the light that resistance to the illusion of evil is futile.

First observation: From a biblical perspective, the concept of “original sin” springs from the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), which resulted in the “fall of man” and subsequent power of evil in the world. (Rom. 5:12-19). Needless to say, this is a far cry from Tolle’s idea that “original sin” is forgetfulness of our ultimate connection with the universe (p. 22).

Second observation: Though Jesus did advocate that we “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39) in our attitude toward dealing with personal offenses, most commentators doubt that this was an unqualified endorsement of the doctrine of pacifism. Rather, the command goes to the heart of a self-defensiveness that escalates too quickly to confrontation (litigation) and violence. Such caustic behavior would indicate a lack of trust in God whose forgiveness, protection and favor is fundamental to those who confess faith in the Gospel of Christ. In addition, this injunction can not be construed to disallow the resistance of evil in relation to the assault of others. For to do so would be a violation of civil law, which according to the New Testament is given by God for the protection of social order.⁴⁷ Finally, the apostle Paul clarifies that the ultimate source of evil is not people, but “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Here Paul speaks of the devil/satan, who, as the archenemy of God must be firmly resisted by all who believe the truth in Christ.⁴⁸

8. The cure for unhappiness

According to Tolle, all unhappiness is the result of not being aligned with the present moment (p. 172) Indeed, the secret of living, success, and happiness is to be “one with life”...one with the present moment

(or now) (p. 115). As a result, all unhappiness, is simply a state of the egoic-mind which must be overcome by a denial of—or what Tolle prefers to call a “disidentification” (p. 117) with, the power of the illusion. Of course, the illusion is whatever appears to be the cause of the mental or emotional suffering, which can be painful issues from the past or desires regarding the future. Hence, both the past and the future must be equally resisted, or disidentified with, in order to live in the now of the present moment and be free of all unhappiness.

There are several things here that require response from a Christian perspective. First is the issue of misalignment. Tolle proposes that in order to find happiness and peace that we align ourselves with ourselves—albeit in a universally transcendent way. This of course is in direct contradiction to the idea of the ultimate transcendence of God alone. The Bible teaches that only God is the eternally self-existent one, which is the meaning of “I Am.”⁴⁹ Therefore, to suggest that we can align ourselves with someone or something that does not exist is, biblically speaking, an exercise of futility and self-deception.

Second is the issue of the denial. In Tolle’s perception of reality he borrows heavily from what are called the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, which are built around the concept that all life involves suffering—that can only be “extinguished” (lit. *Nirvana*) by the cessation of desire. Such desire is the motivation for attachment to things that can provide only temporary satisfaction. Hence, in order not to suffer ultimate disappointment we should refuse all attachments by attaining and perfecting a passion-less (or dispassionate) existence.⁵⁰

Biblically speaking, God created the earth to bless and sustain human life (Gen. 1:28-31). The New Testament again affirms, even with the reality of the “fall of man” and the entrance of sin, that there is still an intrinsic goodness in God’s creation which should not be rejected by those who know and believe the truth (1 Tim. 4:3-4). It is instructive that in the context of this affirmation of the goodness of God’s creation that marriage—one of the most basic and passionate relationships of humanity is mentioned (1 Tim. 4:3). In other words, rather than avoid disappointment by shielding oneself from temporal loss, we are encouraged to embrace life to its fullest trusting that one

can express worship to God in the normal affairs and relationships of everyday life.

Furthermore, the hope of a future resurrection life mediates any and every sense of loss we might experience in this life” (1 Thess. 4:1-18). Though the believer in Christ is wary of the temptation of evil, nevertheless, the Christian occupation is not one of reservation but rather celebration; not one of denial but of affirmation; not one of withdrawal but of engagement; not one of dispassion but of cheerfulness.

“The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17)

Finally there is the issue of unhappiness itself. As mentioned above, Tolle’s solution to unhappiness is simply to live in the present moment alone—the eternal now-ness of being. And while learning to live one day at a time (moment by moment/thought by thought) is also a vital aspect of Christian spirituality,⁵¹ there is biblically much more involved in comprehensively addressing the causes and cures for unhappiness.

Specifically, happiness flows to those who have been blessed by God by aligning themselves with the kingdom values as taught by Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount”: Blessed (lit. “happy”) are the poor in spirit...blessed/happy are those who mourn...blessed/happy are the meek...blessed/happy are those who hunger and thirsty for righteousness...blessed/happy are the merciful...blessed/happy are the pure in heart...blessed/happy are the peacemakers...blessed/happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt 5:3-12).

Happiness also flows to those who have an optimistic attitude, which reveals itself in a positive spirit of gratitude, thankfulness, and cheerfulness rather than negativity, pessimism, and cynicism.⁵² Happiness flows to those who have learned the “secret of contentment” (Phil.4:11-13) with what they have rather than by always requiring more. In other words, they have embraced a limitation (rather than an ascetic “moratorium”) regarding the necessities of life—purposefully and persistently shunning greed and

materialism (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Happiness flows to those who prayerfully trust in the Lord to intervene on their behalf—regardless of what the future may bring.⁵³ Happiness flows to and through those who have learned to patiently forgive—themselves and others (Luke 4:4).

9. Popular psychology and interpreting Jesus

Similar to how Tolle approaches the cure to unhappiness—by disidentification-denial of the past and future in favor of cultivating the presence of Now, so too are many of his prescriptions to the fundamental struggles of life. Such struggles include physical illness (p. 124), addictions (smoking, drinking, gluttony (p. 246), emotional negativity (pain-body), judgmentalism, guilt (p. 204), unforgiveness, resentment (p. 65), victimization, depression (234), anger (p. 136), fear, greed (p. 12), etc. All of these, and many more are, according to Tolle, basically symptomatic of the need to connect with our higher consciousness through acknowledging, accepting, and dissolving the awareness of our reactive lives (p. 65).

The problem with this remedy is that it simply fails to address the complex nature of (and solutions to) the great variety of physical-psychological infirmities of the human race. In other words, it is going to take a lot more than “deep breathing” exercises (p. 247), and the denial of temporal realities, in order to effectively deal with destructive issues like cancer, paranoia, heart disease, murder, rape or genocide. Granted that one’s attitude and awareness can help in the healing process, there is however, so much more involved in the quest for wholeness than offered by a “Zen version of popular psychology.”

As to “interpreting Jesus,” though Tolle specifically refers to Jesus thirty-one times,⁵⁴ he nevertheless insists that Jesus is often misinterpreted by those who are not aware of his “deeper-mystical meaning.” Such deeper meaning however, is generally in direct contradiction to the biblical context of Jesus’ own words.

For example, when Jesus said that he was/is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6a), Tolle insists that what Jesus meant was that like himself, so too do all life-forms share the collective-universal identity of the Way, the Truth and the Life (p. 71). Jesus is simply an

archetypal representation (p. 144) of a transcendent reality that we should all claim as our own. The problem here is the last half of the same verse, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6b). Here Jesus is clearly conveying his ability to mediate between humanity and God, his Father (1 Tim. 2:5). This mediation is biblically based on his atoning sacrifice through which we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins (Col. 1:14).

In other words, Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God who has been divinely-prophetically identified as the Savior of humanity by virtue of his historical birth, life, death and resurrection. This means that any righteous person (who “fears God and does what is right,” Acts 10:34-35), and from any era of human history, is welcomed without partiality to God on the basis of the finished-eternal work of Christ. This is because the “work of atonement” was foreseen by God before the foundation of the world, but revealed in the “fullness of time” in the person of Christ Jesus.⁵⁵ Essentially, God summed up the past (Eph. 1:10) and inaugurated a “new and living way,” through Christ’s death for sin and physical resurrection from the dead. The way is now open, whereby men of all nations can receive the gift of salvation apart from all previous religious systems of good works—be they Jewish or Gentile, Eastern or Western.⁵⁶ Suffice it to say, a Christian interpretation of Christ is stunningly different than the mystical alternative proposed by Tolle (p. 16).

10. A new Heaven and new Earth and the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Inspiration for the title of Tolle’s book came from a Bible prophecy in Revelation 21:1 and Isaiah 65:17, which both speak of the future creation of a new heaven(s) and a new earth (p. 23). For Tolle, the new heaven is a “transformed state of human consciousness,” and the new earth is an unspecified “reflection in the physical realm.”⁵⁷ Again, Tolle admits that he derives this idea, not from biblical hermeneutics, but from “esoteric”-mystical inference.⁵⁸ As previously explained in point number five above, the kingdom of heaven⁵⁹ has both a present and future dynamic. And though the present manifestation of the kingdom of heaven does indeed involve a “global spiritual awakening,” such awakening however, is not to a universal consciousness of a monistic (non-theistic/”god-less”) reality.

Rather, the biblical prophecies clearly reveal that, as a result of the supernatural resurrection of Christ from the dead, the Father has poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit upon “all people.”⁶⁰ This gift (infilling) of the Holy Spirit has even now been personally experienced by, what Harvard Professor Harvey Cox calculates to be, in excess of 500 million people world wide—with no sign of receding.⁶¹ Furthermore, the central revelation of this global empowerment is the transcendent reality of the eternal kingdom of God, over which Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel; ‘In the last days, God say, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams...I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”
(Acts 2:16-21 c.f. Joel 2:28-32)

“He [Christ Jesus] became obedient to death—even the death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 8-11)

“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15)

Conclusion

This article was conceived as a Christian response (not reaction) to the published and “prophetic vision”⁶² of Eckhart Tolle in his book entitled, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. The content of Tolle’s text has been unreservedly promoted (and even co-taught) by beloved American icon, Oprah Winfrey. Such an endorsement has affected millions, both Christian and non-Christian alike.

As a result, and given my previously mentioned background, I felt a “prophetic prompting” of my own to objectively evaluate Tolle’s assertions (1 Cor. 14:29). What I have discovered has been briefly enumerated here for all to assess in light of biblical revelation and contemporary Christian spirituality.

And while I would agree that the general state of institutionalized Christianity has been sadly lacking a dynamic and integrated faith, what I would recommend is not a rejection-replacement, but a spiritual renewal-revival⁶³ of the original Christian message and power. Furthermore, where ever this dynamic Christian spirituality is lacking, a vacuum or void has been created. Such a void will attempt to be filled by those offering an alternative for humanity’s deepest longing for meaning and purpose.

In place of this dynamic Christian spirituality, what Tolle is recommending is that we all let go of our rational thinking in favor of an awareness that is a “consciousness without thought.” (p. 259). In other words, an uncritical awareness that finds no need for divine intervention...no need for the atoning sacrifice of Christ...no need for the resurrection from the dead...no need for Christianity itself.

Such an alternative is unacceptable to the proliferating hundreds of millions of us who have experienced the power of the Spirit of Christ and believe in the integrity of his word.⁶⁴ And while Tolle insists that humanity must either “evolve or die,” (p. 21) the Christian messages remains the same: “repent and live!” (Luke 24:46-49)

“This grace...has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Tim. 1:10)

“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life...even so, Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 17, 20)

¹ As will be explained later, this should not be interpreted as a wholesale acceptance of the state of Christianity at large. Refer to my recent text on “A Christian Critique of the Major World Religions” where I critique Christianity as well as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism @ www.RonWoodworth.Org.

² As a Doctor of Religious Studies, I worked as adjunct professor of world religions at Mesa Community College (Arizona) for 3 years, from 2004 to 2007.

³ Trinity Seminary, Indiana.

⁴ *For Such a Time as This: Lessons in Discernment for the Thinking Christian*, Pleasant Word Publications, 2007. Available online @ Amazon.com

⁵ I have formerly served in the capacities of church planer, senior pastor, and mega-church associate pastor, in a full time capacity from 1978 to 2005.

⁶ Tolle’s major emphasis in study was literature, languages and philosophy.

⁷ See Kim Eng’s Biography and endorsement by Eckhart Tolle @ http://eckharttolle.com/kim_biography

⁸ See “Definitions of Zen Buddhism” @ http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&defl=en&q=define:ZEN+BUDDHISM&sa=X&oi=glossary_definition&ct=title.

⁹ See “A Course in Miracles” @ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Course_in_Miracles.

¹⁰ Esotericism implies special inner-mystical knowledge available only to the enlightened.

¹¹ See “New Age” article @ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_age.

¹² Eclecticism is that which is composed of elements from various/diverse sources.

¹³ Relativistic individualism is claiming ones self as the ultimate authority of truth.

¹⁴ Gnosticism literally means “to know,” and suggests special spiritual knowledge known only by those who have been initiated into enlightenment.

¹⁵ Universalism maintains the ultimate/divine interrelatedness of all creatures.

¹⁶ “I AM” is the divine name in the Jewish Scriptures and also the title Jesus claimed as his own identity (Ex. 3:14; John 8:58). Note Tolle’s use of capital letters to underscore his assertion that we, not a “transcendent God” or Jesus Christ, are the ultimate reality. Indeed, we are the god (the notion of divinity) that all historic religious traditions have been seeking and that all ancient spiritual masters, including Jesus, have been prophesying would come.

¹⁷ See 1 John 2:18, 22-23, 4:3, 2 John 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antichrist>.

¹⁸ See Matt. 24:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:4 and Rev. 13.

¹⁹ See Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23.

²⁰ See Titus 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:4; and John 3:3-6.

²¹ The faculty of human choice is theologically a result of the biblical idea of free-will. Also see endnote number 34 below.

²² See Rom. 2:16 and Acts 10:34-35.

²³ See Heb. 6:13-20; Phil. 3:9 and Rom. 3:22-24.

²⁴ See Acts 2:38-39 and John 17:3.

²⁵ See Hebrews 6:4 and John 8:12.

²⁶ See Ps. 16:11 and Acts 3:19.

²⁷ See 1 John 2:17 and 2 Pet. 3:10-13.

²⁸ Entrance into the kingdom of God biblically requires “repentance,” which is literally “a change of mind.” In other words, kingdom enlightenment does require a radical change of mind. However, such a change/renewal never implies a denial, dissolution or “disidentification” of/with the mind itself. See also Matt. 4:17; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:17-24.

²⁹ See 2 Tim. 1:10 and John 10:10.

³⁰ See Rom. 14:17; 2 Pet. 3:13 and Rev. 21:4. Also see the NIV footnote to Matt. 3:2 which includes a number of the items I’ve listed as descriptive of the kingdom of God.

³¹ Reincarnation is the Hindu term *samsara* and refers to the “transmigration of the soul” across countless lifetimes. Furthermore, the force that binds the soul to *samsara* is the inexorable law of *karma*.

³² Such as the task of dissolving the egoic-mind of over 6 billion people.

³³ This number includes 2.1 billion Christians, 1.2 billion Muslims, and 14.1 million Jews.

³⁴ See Joshua 24:15; John 1:12; Acts 2:41 and Rev. 3:20.

³⁵ Such internal peace implies a cessation of striving. However, the end of striving, according to Psalm 46:10, is not in the knowledge of the impermanence of all structures, but rather the certainty that an eternally transcendent God is in control of the world and of all those who have entrusted their lives to him as well. See also Prov. 3:5-6 and Isaiah 26:3.

³⁶ See 1 Cor. 7:31; 1 John 2:15-17 and Heb. 12:26-28.

³⁷ See 1 Tim. 2:5.

³⁸ See Eph. 3:12 and John 14:13-14.

³⁹ See Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5.

⁴⁰ The Body of Christ is also called the Church in the New Testament. See Eph. 2:19-22 and Eph. 4:15-16.

⁴¹ See Luke 24:46-47.

⁴² See Matt. 28:19.

⁴³ See Matt. 28:20.

⁴⁴ See Mark 16:17-20 and Heb. 2:3b-4.

⁴⁵ See Acts 2:17-21; 2 Pet, 3:11-12 and Matt. 24:9-14.

⁴⁶ Forms, for Tolle, include physical, mental-thought, or emotional structures of identity.

⁴⁷ See Rom. 13:1-7 and 1 Tim. 1:8.

⁴⁸ See Eph. 6:10-17 and 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

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- ⁴⁹ See Ex. 3:14 and John 8:58.
- ⁵⁰ See “The Four Nobles Truth” of Buddhism @ <http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/fourtruths.html>.
- ⁵¹ See Matt. 6:34 and 2 Cor. 10:5.
- ⁵² See Prov. 15:13, 15; 17:22 and Col. 3:15-16.
- ⁵³ See Prov. 3:5-6; Isaiah 26:3-4; Psalm 23 and Matt. 6:34.
- ⁵⁴ See pages 6, 13, 23, 43, 61 (2x’s), 66, 71(3x’s), 81, 89, 104, 144 (2x’s as Christ), 184, 191, 192, 215, 216, 234, 254, 259, 267, 268 (3x’s), 303, 305, 309 (2x’s).
- ⁵⁵ See 1 Pet. 1:17, 20-21 and Gal. 4:4.
- ⁵⁶ See Heb. 10:20; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 2:6-16 and Heb. 6:1. Note: The NIV footnote for Heb. 6:1 says that “repentance from ‘dead works’” are “deeds or rituals that can not impart life.”
- ⁵⁷ This quote is also on p. 23.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ It may be of some interest to know that the “kingdom of God” is synonymous with the “kingdom of heaven.” This is demonstrated by the historic fact that Matthew was written to a predominately Jewish audience who would be offended with directed references to God—stemming from the commandment not to take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Mark, on the other hand, was written to Gentiles (non-Jews) who would have no such religious-cultural sensitivity.
- ⁶⁰ See Acts 2:33, 39 and Acts 2: 16-21.
- ⁶¹ See *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994. Also see Acts 2:33, 39; Acts 1:4-5 and Acts 2:1-4.
- ⁶² On page 307, Tolle indicates that “teachers of Being,” like himself, are what he calls “frequency holders”—whose function is to “anchor the frequency of the new consciousness on this planet,” until it takes hold in the broader global population. Another word I would propose for “frequency holders” would be “Prophets of the New Age” who are proclaiming another Gospel than originally represented in Christ Jesus. In fact, Tolle even uses the term “good news,” which is the literal meaning of the word “Gospel,” to describe his message (p.28, 52). See also Gal.1:6-9; Matt. 24:4 and 2 Pet. 2:1.

⁶³ Such a revival should not be equated with manipulated emotionalism, human striving, or gimmicky.

⁶⁴ This would include believers from virtually all Christian denominations be they Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestants. And while there are some 2.2 billion Christians in the world today, a sizeable number of those either do not believe in or are not experiencing a “dynamic Christian spirituality” such as recommended in this article. See my article on “Empowered Evangelicals” @ [www.Ron Woodworth.Org](http://www.RonWoodworth.Org)