

By Nancy Pearcey



Mention the New Age movement and you're likely to get amused condescension: "Oh yes, crystals." "Oh yes, astrology." To many people, the New Age movement means trendy gimmicks and silly superstitions. That should concern us. For the New Age movement is more than a matter of this technique or that gimmick. What underlies all these surface phenomena is a way of looking at life, a philosophy, a world view, a faith. And it is a faith hostile to Christian faith.

I can think of no better way to explain the New Age world view than by quoting extensively from a children's book I just read. A classic, I might add. (And you thought you could trust the classics to be harmless?) It's entitled **The Secret Garden**, by Francis Hodgson Burnett.

Most of you who have children will probably recognize the title. But how many of you noticed that about two-thirds of the way through the book, the author launches into a straightforward explication of Hindu pantheism? (Do you know what your children are reading?)

To be sure, the book doesn't use theological language. It doesn't come right out and announce. Hey, God is not a transcendent Creator of the Bible, God is a spiritual presence that permeates nature. Instead, Burnett has her characters speak about "Magic," a kind of spiritual force in all

things. Yet this Magic (capitalized) has all the characteristics of a pantheistic God.

Magic is in Everything

One of the characters in the book, a little boy named Colin, gives lectures on Magic.

"Everything is made out of Magic," he explains, "leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people." (250-251) In another place he chants: "the sun is shining - the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing - the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is Magic - being strong is the Magic. the Magic is in me - the Magic is in me.

It's in every one of us." (254) The underlying assumption is that the material world - sun and trees and animals and people - is an emanation of a spiritual force, Magic. This is classic pantheism: God is identified with the universe.

Magic Creates out of Nothing

Magic makes things grow. (236) Magic makes people good. (267) Magic heals the sick. (251)

Indeed, Dickon, another boy in the story, insists there could not be any "bigger Magic" (237) - i.e. no greater power exists. Magic is the greatest power there is. Significantly, Colin describes it using the language of the Christian creeds: "Magic is always . . . making things out of nothing." (250)

Magic is a Force to be Harnessed

The differences between this pantheistic deity and the Christian God become clearest when we discover that this deity is an impersonal force that can be tapped and used to do things. In Colin's words, "I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us - like electricity and horses and steam." (250)

Harness Magic with Positive Thinking

Colin suffers from a psychosomatic illness and has not walked in several months. His friend, Mary, helps him to walk again. She "makes Magic" by repeating over and over, "You can do it! You can do it! I told you you could! You can do it!" (237) This is described as a "spell," (248) and Colin concludes that this sort of positive thinking is one way to invoke the power of Magic. He decides that "Every morning and evening and as often in the daytime as I can remember I am going to say, 'Magic is in me! Magic is making me well! I am going to be as strong as Dickon, as strong as Dickon!'" (251)

The power of Magic can also be harnessed by invoking it directly. "If you keep thinking about it

and calling it perhaps it will come If you keep calling it to come to you and help you it will get to be part of you and it will stay and do things." (251) Colin says as he walks around the garden, "The Magic is in me! The Magic is making me strong! I can feel it! I can feel it!" (256) The effect is that Colin is healed of his illness ("The Magic in this garden has made me stand up." 251), and Mary is cured of her pinched, sour personality.

Consciousness Creates Reality

At one point, the author undertakes to enlighten her readers in her own words, not even bothering to put her ideas into the mouth of a character. "In each century since the beginning of the world wonderful things have been discovered," she says. ". . . One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts - just mere thoughts - are as powerful as electric batteries = as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body." (293-294) As Colin summarizes, thinking negative thoughts is "wrong Magic." It will make bad things happen. Thinking good thoughts is "right Magic," and will make nice things happen. (252, 255)

Now, it is true that what we think influences how we act. But the book is saying more than that. It is saying that ideas actually make things happen. What we think creates reality. The philosophy expressed is akin to the occult view that the material world is an emanation of mental or spiritual reality - and therefore if we change the mental world we can create a new material reality. The spells and incantations used by magicians are based on this philosophy.

All Religions Worship Magic

The children's meetings become times of worship where, inspired by pictures from India, they sit cross-legged under a canopy of trees - "like sitting in a sort of temple." (253) Before long, they are practicing their ritual every day. "Every beautiful morning the Magic was worked by the mystic circle" in their garden temple. If this sounds like a seance, you are not far mistaken.

At one point, the children's activities seem to take on a Christian cast: they sing the Doxology together. It is the first time Colin has heard it, and he immediately equates the God of the Doxology with the Magic they have been worshipping. So what if some call it God and others call it Magic, or even something else? The difference is only in the name people give it. "Perhaps they are the same thing. How can we know the exact names of everything?" (285)

Dickon's mother agrees. What does the name matter, she asks. People in the different cultures call it different things. But they're all really worshipping the same thing. She calls it "the Big Good Thing," the force that makes plants grow and the sun shine. (290) When you sing the Doxology, she says, you are really singing to it.

Notice that "it". The concept is obviously not a personal God, an agent who acts and speaks and relates to us as a Father. Instead, it is an impersonal power. The author implies that all religions, whatever concept of God they many profess, are really reducible to worship of one spiritual reality. And it is obvious which religion, her opinion, has a clearer grasp of this basic spiritual reality. Direct references to Christianity in the book are all mildly negative. (253, 254, 255, 281, 284) References to India and Hinduism, by contrast, are all favorable, (251, 252, 253, 290)

Magic can be Scientifically Verified

We've all heard proponents of Transcendental Meditation claim scientific validity for the benefits of TM. And readers of [the Bible-Science Newsletter] *are familiar with the attempts of New Agers to buttress their beliefs with theories from the new physics (see October, 1988, page1).* *So perhaps it should come as no surprise that Frances Burnett claims scientific verifiability for the existence of the spiritual electricity she call Magic. Repeatedly, Colin announces that his incantations of Magic are really a "scientific experiment." (249, 256, 282)*

The astonishing thing is that this book was recommended to me by several Christian mothers, who gushed over it and told me it was a wonderful book. Clearly, Christians do not recognize an alien spiritual philosophy as readily as they do an alien materialistic philosophy. though written long before the New Age craze of the Sixties, **The Secret Garden** gives an explicit teaching of Hindu pantheism, with a little science thrown in to make it "modern."

[*This article was originally published in the December, 1988 issue of the Bible-Science Newsletter, which is now controlled and maintained by Paul Abramson at www.creationism.org. We have reprinted this article with their generous permission.*

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