

Part III

THE ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

CHAPTER NINE

We have looked at modern man's idea of the universe. Because of the dominant power of the dogma of evolution in our culture, man is no longer seen as a creature made in God's image. He is seen, instead, as an accident coming out of the void, and returning to it again. This is the result of trying to make scientific thought autonomous. And it might seem that modern man (having accepted the basic assumptions of evolutionist thought) would also accept the inevitable conclusion—that man is nothing and cannot hope for more than momentary and meaningless existence. In this lesson we wish to show that this does not happen in most instances. To the contrary, modern man defies the conclusion to which this very framework that he has accepted inevitably leads. We believe that this is so because man is not really what he thinks he is (what he has been taught to believe in new-framework thinking). No, in actual fact man is what God says he is. He is God's image bearer, and he has eternity set in his heart (Gen. 1:26; Eccles. 3:11). It is this that explains the many attempts that we see today in which "new framework" people try to somehow find meaning and purpose in life in spite of their despair.

The Tendency Toward Mysticism

A Mystical Realm of meaning (without content)

A Concrete Realm of content (without meaning)

In the new framework of thinking we find man trapped in a universe that has no meaning because it is looked upon as (a) not created by God, and (b) not controlled by His eternal plan or purpose. It is (as the diagram suggests) full of content without meaning. Yet, since man really is what the Bible says (rather than what the new framework teaches) There is an irresistible urge to find, or even to create, meaning. But how can there be meaning for man within this situation? The answer is that he must somehow go beyond—outside—or above the closed system in which he feels himself trapped. There must be some kind of experience whereby man transcends the world of content (without meaning). So it is that we live in a day in which we can see all manner of attempts to make a kind of "great leap into the void," in hopes of finding "the answer." As F. C. Happold puts it, "The whole of our analysis more and more forces us to the conclusion that the only possible religion for twentieth century man is a mystical religion and that all theological language must be recognized as a language of symbols." There must, in other words, be a realm of meaning (even if it has no content).

So the question is: How does one attain to this mystical realm of meaning? The answer is that there is no answer that can be put into words (as the old framework would use words). F. C. Happold gives a summary of the main characteristics of mystical experience. We give his summary in simplified form.

1. Mystical experience cannot be communicated in words. (It is intelligible only to those who experience it for themselves).
2. The experience results in a kind of immediate insight into the nature of reality.
3. The experience is (usually, at least) momentary.
4. There is, in this experience, a sense of "the oneness of everything."
5. There is, in this experience, a sense of "timelessness."
6. There comes in this experience, the conviction that the familiar ego of phenomenal realm (concrete world) is not the real "I."

What, then, are some of the ways in which modern man seeks this "leap," this transcendent experience, this "trip"? The answer is that we find many different ways in our culture. In the following paragraphs we will consider a few of them in a very brief way.

Astrology

An important article appeared in Time Magazine a few years ago on the rapid increase in the number of people turning to astrology (and other occult interests). We quote from this article. "It is one of the stranger

facts about the contemporary U.S. that Babylon's mystic conceptions of the universe are being taken up seriously and semi-seriously by the most scientifically sophisticated generation of young adults in history. Even the more occult arts of palmistry, numerology, fortunetelling and witchcraft—traditionally the twilight zone of the uneducated and overanxious—are catching on with youngsters. Book shops that cater to the trend are crammed with graduate students and assistant professors.” But why has this happened? “Carrol Righter, the best known and most successful of U.S. astrologers puts it into a Christian context. ‘The Piscean Age,’ he says, “was an age of tears and sorrow, focused on the death of Christ. In 1904, we entered the Age of Aquarius, which will be an age of joy, of science, and accomplishments and measuring his joy.” The article goes on to note that “Righter is only one of about 10,000 full time and 175,000 part time astrologers in the U.S.” The reason for this amazing increase is stated clearly by another popular astrologer, a young half Japanese woman named Kiyo, who works mostly among young pop groups and folk singers. “They’re interested in astrology,” she says, “because they’ve found material things failing them, and they’re trying to find their souls.” The article continues: “Predictive astrology, like divination and occultism generally, tends to take hold in times of confusion, uncertainty, and the breakdown of religious belief. Astrologers and assorted sorcerers were busy in Rome while the Empire was declining and prevalent throughout Europe during the great 17th century waves of plague. Today’s young stargazers claim to be responding to a similar sense of disintegration and disenchantment.... “Preposterous as it may be, the astrology cult suggests a deep longing for some order in the universe—an order denied by modern science and philosophy. Astrology is becoming popular today, in other words, for the same reason that it became a way of life in ancient Babylon, and again in the Roman Empire, and yet again in Europe in certain periods. It became popular because man cannot live with the consequences of his own rejection of the revelation that God has given. When God came to visit Israel in bondage, to deliver them from Egypt and bring them into covenant fellowship with Him self, He not only gave them a genuine revelation, but also warned them of the consequences of departing from it. “Beware,” He said, “lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven” (Deut. 4:19). God’s people—so long as they remain faithful to His covenant—will always see the heavenly bodies within the framework of His decrees of creation and providence. They will not reverence them because they know the created things are not to be worshiped. They will not reverence them because they know they are in the service of God. But whenever that framework is denied, man will repeat the sin of the Babylonians, and astrology will come to the forefront.

The Occult

As the above material suggests, there is a close relationship between astrology and such things as witchcraft, fortunetelling, seances, etc. In this section we shall simply take one of these as representative. The following quotations are from an article on this subject which appeared in *The National Observer*, a weekly newspaper. “Cleo is a pseudonym. He doesn’t want to be identified for the same reason that he and the others meet secretly by moon light in the woods, far from the notice of folks who just wouldn’t understand. They aren’t sure what would happen if they were found out; but, reincarnation being among the group’s beliefs, Cleo harbors a worrisome image of what happened in a former existence. He was burned at the stake. To come right to the point, Cleo is a witch. So are his wife and six of their closest friends—a female writer, a seamstress, a druggist and his wife, and a business executive and his wife.... To their neighbors, co-workers, and non-witch friends and relatives, these eight people are respectable, responsible middle class citizens. They range in age from 27 to 45 and live in a predominantly industrial region of Michigan.” The article goes on to explain in some detail the weird practices of the cult. Then it asks this question: “What draws a technician and scientist to an anachronistic cult devoted to procreation and talismanic wonders? ‘The computer age is one of incredible boredom to most of us,’ the (Air Force) captain replies. ‘The sense of wonder and awe has been lost and replaced by programmed learning and living. Now people are searching for something more personal, more intimate, more stimulating—something with deep roots and ancient mystery. Christianity, which has a strong magical element of its own, once provided these things; but today the Christian church no longer seems relevant.’” The rise of the occult, then, is clear to anyone who understands the shift from old framework thinking to new framework thinking. Of this, too, the Bible speaks clearly. In Deuteronomy 18:9ff. we read these words: “When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that... useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch... or a consulter with familiar spirits... for all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord.” Despite God’s warning these things did come to exist in Israel. The reason then was the same as the reason is today. When men refuse to live by the light of God’s true revelation in His word, they may imagine that they can live by bread alone. But they cannot. They cannot

because they were created in the image of God, and because they have eternity set in their hearts. There is—to use the words of Francis Schaeffer—an incessant need and desire for some “first order experience,” some thing that will lift them right up out of this world of content without meaning, into another world of meaning (even if it has no content that can be put into words).

Drugs

We do not doubt that many young people in our culture have experimented with drugs simply because other young people were doing it. Young people like to be “with it.” They do not like to have others look down on them because they stand apart from the group. (Even in not conforming to their parents’ wishes many young people are acting the part of conformists—they are simply conforming to their peer group). But it would be a mistake to think that this is all there is to it. When a professor from one of the most honored universities in America organizes a religious sect based on the use of drugs (to obtain “first order experience”)—when he invites his followers to believe, saying “The LSD kick is a spiritual ecstasy. The LSD trip is a religious pilgrimage”—it is perfectly clear that there is something much deeper than mere group conformity here. It is a well known fact that drugs have long been in use by various tribes of American Indians for the same purpose. These tribes lost contact with the original and reliable content of the truth. There was a longing in their hearts too for some way out of the void, to some first order experience. They found, in the use of drugs, a momentary ecstasy which made them feel that they had an insight into another (higher) realm. Modern man—for the same reason—has tried to find the answer in drugs. The following lines from one of the songs of the Beatles probably was meant to express the invitation to surrender to drug addiction as a “way out.”

Turn off your mind relax and float down stream
it is not dying, it is not dying
lay down all thought surrender to the void
it is shining, it is shining,
That you may see the meaning of within
it is speaking, it is speaking,
that love is all and love is ev'ryone
it is knowing, it is knowing
Without going out of my door
I can know all things on earth
Without looking out of my window
I could know the ways of heaven

Questions:

1. Why is it that many new framework people cannot live with the logical conclusions of their own beliefs?
2. What are some of the ways of seeking escape discussed in this lesson? Can you name others?
3. Why do we call the mystical realm a realm of “meaning without content”?
4. In your own words give a few characteristics of mystical experience.
5. Choose one of these characteristics and try to show how it is present in astrology, witchcraft, or drug addiction (as a way to “first order experience”).
6. In the section on Astrology underline the quoted words which show that the present day increase of this practice is a result of new framework thinking.
7. Why is astrology forbidden in Deuteronomy 4?
8. In the material quoted from the National Observer underline any phrases which prove to you that this phenomenon too is a result of “the new framework.”
9. Why is witchcraft (and similar occult practices) forbidden in Deuteronomy 18?
10. In what way are modern drug users like the American Indian tribes?
11. Relate the lines of the Beatles to the principles stated in the first part of this lesson.

Projects:

1. Find a magazine article on astrology, the occult or drugs. Report your findings in class. Show how it supports (or does not support) the teaching of this lesson.
2. Read the story of King Saul and the witch at Endor (I Sam. 28). Consult a Bible dictionary for a summary of Saul’s life. Relate this event to the main point of this lesson.