

## What is Neo-Platonism?

Why include a question on a heathen philosophy? The reason is because there are many supposedly 'Christian' teachings, experiences, cults and sects that are founded upon the principles found in Neo-Platonism.

The original philosophy, which did not create its own religious movement, arose after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Alexandria and was developed by Plotinus and Porphyry. It was a system of thought which paralleled the mystical ideas found in various Eastern religions; however, as a model of intellectual methodology, it was utilised by many great Christian theologians such as Basil the Great and Augustine.

Essentially, it was a combination of Platonic dualism (spirit good, matter evil) with oriental mysticism. God is above being, but revelatory light streams from divine perfection. Existence is a desire for the light hindered by irrational behaviour. The mind can overcome the hindrances of life by meditation or focusing to get a mystical illumination of the divine. This overcomes Platonic duality (only overcome at death) by direct union of the soul with God in this life. However, there is always a separation of the material world and God. There is no manifestation of God in the material world at all; so Christ (as God) could not have a real body of flesh, but only appeared as a phantasm (in Gnosticism, which had Neo-Platonic notions, this idea was called *Docetism*).

Any group which engenders mystical practices, especially of the Oriental type (such as found in Hinduism), combined with the idea of gradually reaching God or improving spirituality through special 'spiritual' experiences is likely to have Neo-Platonic overtones. For instance, there were many examples of this in teaching and practice in the Toronto Experience of the 1990s where mysticism flourished. Whenever there is a focus upon the divine or spiritual as being opposed to the material, we see Neo-Platonic influences (New Age ideas are full of it). Calvinism is utterly opposed to this, and teaches that Christians serve God spiritually in their day-to-day lives by doing ordinary things as unto Christ. Thus a plumber can serve God in his work by living according to God's law and maintaining a pure testimony to Christ. The material world is not avoided or condemned in Christianity, but man is called to serve God in it. God is pleased with our obedience in this ordinary life, not with our exciting, and supposedly spiritual, experiences.

The various forms of modern mysticism have all been expressed and even rationalised in ancient occult religions and philosophies. All forms of mysticism must be avoided and condemned. Passivity, as the main ingredient in mysticism ('don't think just drink') is exceptionally dangerous.

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