

The New Age Speaks for Itself - *The New Believers*

Bette Chambers

WANT TO talk things over with Jesus Christ? Ask Margaret. She'll channel the voices of numerous historical personages, and she'll toss in "AROMA THERAPY" and "crystal acupuncture" - for a price.

Then there's Neville, who thinks that Jews brought the Holocaust on themselves because of their karma; he also thinks Adolf Hitler was a much misunderstood spiritual leader. Stick around long enough and Neville will channel the voices of a whole school of dolphins; they have wise words for our troubled times.

And you don't want to miss Master Ho, a porcine vendor of "crystal sex therapy," who strokes his satin smoking jacket as he informs us that the Star of Bethlehem was an ordinary UFO and that when Jesus ascended to heaven he was just "beaming up." Ho knows because he's an alien himself.

Then we visit Shawn in her elegant living room where she does a brisk mail-order business selling quartz-crystals at astronomical prices. Her cat, Kachina Sedona Max, is into meditation.

You'll meet these four New Age entrepreneurs in the engrossing thirty-minute video, *The New Believers*, produced by award winning documentary producer Tom Corboy of Los Angeles. In 1990 alone, *The New Believers* won Suffolk, New York, Houston, and Chicago film festival awards - not to mention others.

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"MASTER HO" in *The New Believers*

Are these people just a bunch of assorted nuts - weirdos, flakes, loonies - or are they con-artists? Are any of them sincere? Does it matter? You decide.

Had you attended the Whole Life Expo at the Pasadena Coliseum a while back, you would have met them - and hundreds like them. Thirty thousand people paid double-digit admission prices to do just that.

In *The New Believers*, filmed at the Pasadena "psyche in," you get a glimpse of the zany commercialism of the New Age movement as Corboy's camera spans the numerous booths of these hucksters and their variegated wares.

Yet, Corboy uses no script. The four characterized here all speak for themselves. All mention miserable childhood experiences. And all are making a living - although not always a rich living, there's too much competition - off the credulity of others.

The New Believers is a fascinating, hilarious, shocking and troubling film.

To summarize the discussions at the conference:

- . few felt that the four characters in the film were totally "honest." However, many felt they were "self-deluded."
- . all commented on the unhappy childhoods of all four characters in the film, which seemed to explain their irrationality.
- . all agreed that this sort of "snake oil" merchandizing characterizes the whole of the New Age movement. "Caveat emptor" seems to have no meaning to New Agers. They are easily bilked.
- . the New Agers represented in the film are saying, doing, selling and advocating things which are hurtful to the fabric of a sane society.
- . all viewing the tape vociferously objected to the notion that the Holocaust victims "deserved" their deaths at the hands of Hitler & Co., because - as "Neville" alleged - they "chose their own genocide" having once perpetrated genocide upon others whilst incamated as "Visigoths." All viewers felt the claim of "karmic consequences," which is endemic in New Age thinking, is socially vicious and morally reprehensible.

If you choose you can order a VHS copy from Monticello Productions, 1822 Easterly Terrace, Los Angeles, CA 90026.