

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND 'MUMBO-JUMBO'

The following is the text of a New Age update talk given by Michael Akerman to the Pro Fide Forum at St Vincent's Convent in Central London on 26th April 2007

Sixteen years ago an American journalist summed up the accelerating emergence of New Age beliefs and practices in these words: "*.....traditional forms of paganism are prospering in the West. In the midst of skyscrapers, computers, television and jets we find flourishing altars of Pantheism, nature worship, Buddhism, astrology and witchcraft.....we find spiritual supermarkets full of ready-wrapped, do-it-yourself meditation religions.*" End of quote.

Today, not only are all those activities still prospering, but they are also more widely, and more readily, available. They are accepted as legitimate alternative expressions of 'spirituality'. They have become part of mainstream culture. In this New Age update I want to highlight the extent to which some of these so-called alternative expressions of spirituality are spreading and flourishing in our society and how they have even infiltrated the Church under the guise of Modernism and Relativism. Divine Revelation they are NOT. They are the work of the enemy. The purpose here, as always, is to raise awareness and alert you to the dangers.

But first.....a few definitions are necessary.....let me explain why.

Perhaps some of you here this evening remember, like me, a time when BBC radio broadcast a weekly programme called The Brains Trust in which a panel of experts would discuss and comment on a variety of questions which had been sent in by listeners. The questions would cover a wide range of topics. If the programme was being broadcast today you might hear a question like, for example: "Is morality still relevant in today's society?"

One of the regular panel members on the Brains Trust was a very learned gentleman by the name of Professor Joad....and Professor Joad would invariably start his answer or comment by saying: "Well, it depends what you mean by....." so-and-so - mentioning then the key word in the question. In the example I've just given, the Professor would probably say: "It depends what you mean by morality...." or: "It depends what you mean by relevant....."

Words can have different meanings for different people, so definitions are important - and perhaps even more important than ever these days when we have so many distortions in - and of - the language. So let's begin by defining the words in the title of this talk: Religion, Spirituality and Mumbo-Jumbo.....

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word 'religion' can mean any particular system of faith and worship - or simply the human recognition of superhuman controlling power.

However we need to be more specific, so in the Catholic Dictionary compiled by Father John Hardon we find this definition of 'religion': *It is the moral virtue by which we render to God the worship and service He deserves in response to His dominion over all creation. Religion therefore corresponds to the practice of piety towards God as Creator of the Universe.....or, as the Penny Catechism puts it, 'Religion is giving to God the honour and service due to Him.'*

For those involved in New Age beliefs and practices the word 'religion' is synonymous with dogma, doctrine, rules and regulations - all of which they consider inhibit their personal freedom.

Now, what about 'spirituality'. Again, let's start with the Oxford English Dictionary. Here we find spirituality defined as a quality of spirit - as opposed to matter - something 'of the soul' as acted upon by God or proceeding from God...something holy, inspired or divine.....concerned with sacred or religious things.

The Catholic Dictionary, as we would expect, is more specific describing spirituality (or the spiritual life) as *"the life of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the souls of the faithful and enabling them to praise and love God and to serve Him in the practice of virtue."*

But what about New Age 'spirituality'?? The so-called 'spirituality' of the New Age Movement could be called 'spiritual humanism'. This is the belief that casts us in the role of a higher race of cosmic 'gods' ... (that is gods with a small 'g' of course). For the New Ager, 'spirituality' could also be defined in a *secular* sense when it is related to the power of positive thinking, creative imagination and visualisation rather than just plain mysticism. Many New Age advocates believe that a spiritual revolution is underway and that 'religion' appears to be giving way to 'spirituality'. You will often hear this opinion voiced in radio or television discussions on the subject.

What about our third definition - Mumbo-Jumbo - and why did I include that word - or rather, those words - in the title of this talk?? Looking at the Oxford English Dictionary again we find Mumbo-Jumbo defined variously as: A meaningless ritual; Language or action intended to mystify or confuse; and an object of senseless veneration. In fact, the words 'Mumbo Jumbo' referred originally to a grotesque idol - said to have been worshipped by some primitive tribes. However - grotesque idols apart - it is reasonable to state that New Age beliefs and practices often *do* involve meaningless ritual *and* language or actions which mystify or confuse the participant - although it will be claimed by the practitioners that they bring enlightenment.

It is worth recalling in this context (and I have quoted this in previous talks) that Pope John Paul the Second issued a warning about New Age spirituality back in 1993 referring to it as '*a vague vision of the world expressed in myths and symbols*'. Speaking about meaningless ritual, mystifying language and myths and symbols I must tell you about what was a 'first' for the New Age movement that occurred last year..... it was a two-day event called The Mystic Arts Show - at Olympia here in London. It was advertised as 'an exhibition covering the Spiritual, Psychic and Paranormal' featuring 'mystic arts which transcend ordinary human knowledge.'

My wife Rita and I spent most of one day there. As we entered the exhibition area we were greeted by a line-up of witches and wizards. The hall was packed with people of all ages but mostly of the younger, articulate, professional-looking kind. There were over one hundred stands, as well as lectures, workshops and even two ghost walks in the locality. There were demonstrations of trance mediumship; you could connect with your spirit guide - or with your guardian angel; you could learn about the practical use of crystals - and develop your psychic awareness. We saw a lot of families there and a number of products aimed especially at children.

Among the many products on sale was a prominently displayed CD which is an example of how New Age deception works in practice. The cover illustration is the Virgin Mary holding the Child Jesus and surrounded by Angels. The original painting from which the illustration is taken hangs in a gallery in Paris. The title of the CD is Divine Mother Meditation. The sleeve note includes a quote from Mother Teresa. All of which gives it an appearance of Catholic authenticity. But if we continue to read the sleeve notes we find that the purpose of this meditation is for Divine Mother '*to reach the heart of your soul through the sound of love vibration*' and it goes on to tell us that: '*Divine Mother and her love vibration is sweeping planet Earth to bring polarity into oneness...it is a period of transcension through healing and purification preparing us for the New World order co-creating Heaven on Earth*'.

When playing the CD we hear a soft female voice over barely audible gentle background music telling us to '*let your higher self allow the golden energy to flow into your crown chakra....*' And much more of the same for almost an hour. This CD even includes guidance in a visualisation technique to induce the appearance of '*a female being in shimmering blue*'.

As I said, this is an example of New Age deception - a deception which could easily captivate a person who is vulnerable to being taken in by the persuasive presentation.

Another idea we came across at the Show was the Psychic Café. To quote the literature promoting it: 'The Psychic Café is a creative and sociable environment where like-minded people come together to satisfy and heighten their curiosity. The monthly meetings are each based on a different theme such as the tarot, numerology, angels, astrology, palmistry etc.' This is clearly a concept that could attract young people and there are already venues at fifteen different locations around the country. The website of the Psychic Café advertises the UK's annual Tarot Conference - the fourth one of which will take place in October this year, just around the corner from here at the Thistle Hotel, Westminster.

By the way, in case anyone is unsure what the Tarot is - it is a pack of 78 picture cards used for divination or fortune-telling. It was developed in its present form during the nineteenth century and it includes 22 main, or 'trump' characters including the magician, death, the pope, the popess, the devil and the fool - the last one representing any human on the path of life. A person is required to pick cards from the deck and the 'reader' then interprets their meaning.

Another of the many organisations represented at The Mystic Arts Show was The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University whose International headquarters and main UK teaching centre is at a building called Global Co-operation House in Willesden, North London. Founded in India in the 1930's the Brahma Kumaris claims to bring together people of all cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. They define 'spirituality' as simply 'knowing how to live with meaning and purpose.' That sounds fine until you discover that *their* spirituality is based on Raja Yoga Meditation (Raja Yoga is mental or meditative yoga) and involves lessons in consciousness, the Law of Karma, reincarnation and self-realisation. By the way, this term - 'self-realisation' is a key phrase in the New Age vocabulary. It is their equivalent of 'fulfilling your potential'. In fact, the term 'self-realisation' refers to a personal recognition of one's own 'divinity'. It is their synonym for God-realisation. The World Spiritual University has over 7,000 centres in more than 90 countries with over half-a-million regular students worldwide. 15,000 people attended courses in Willesden alone in 2005. When we visited their stand at the Show, my wife Rita asked one of the ladies if they had any centres in Ireland. 'Oh, yes' was the enthusiastic response: 'we have several.'

Obviously this first Show was a success because the second Mystic Arts Show takes place at Olympia next month on the 12th and 13th of May. A much longer-established event is the Mind, Body, Spirit festival which will also be held next month in London. This festival, which is a flagship for the New Age movement in this country, will be taking place for the 31st year in succession. It has grown out of all recognition since it started from quite small beginnings in 1976 and it now features stage performances, demonstrations, workshops, a meditation room and, of course, many exhibitors' stands. Looking at this year's programme I noticed that a Doctor Mosaraf Ali will be presenting one of the Workshops and he also has a stand at the festival. His profile note in the programme states that, having completed his MD, he then studied acupuncture, iridology, hypnosis, fasting therapy and a range of herbal remedies which supposedly achieve harmony of body, mind and universe. Dr Mosaraf Ali is a busy man - he has a London clinic, two clinics in India and he is a health advisor to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

Over the years many smaller, local events have grown out of these large annual events. You may have seen something called a Psychic Fair advertised in your own locality - they often take place in a public house or a village hall. These small-scale events provide an opportunity for clairvoyants, spiritual healers and mediums to have direct contact with the unsuspecting public in cosy and convenient local surroundings. All designed to help you achieve that 'self-realisation' that I referred to earlier.

Another new development has been the emergence of several medium-size shows in provincial locations using the title of the Mind, Body and *Soul* Show. Not 'Mind, Body and *Spirit*' you notice. We might wonder why the word 'Spirit' has been changed to 'Soul'. Might it be, perhaps, to make it more meaningful to Catholics?..... Whatever the reason, it is clear that the 'Mind, Body, Soul' shows are just mini-'Mind, Body, Spirit' festivals under a different name and with many of the same exhibitors.

One of the regular supporters of these Festivals and Shows is an organisation called 'Alternatives' which is based at the church of St James's, in Piccadilly. One speaker on the New Age circuit has described St James's as 'one of the most spiritually significant places on the planet' and 'Alternatives' is described as 'a place of inspiration, wellbeing and community in the heart of London'. Last week was their 25th anniversary and Rita and I went along to their regular Monday evening meeting. There were two talks - both on the subject of 'Contemporary Spirituality.' We estimated the audience at about 150 to 160 with an average age of thirty-something - mostly presentable, professional, articulate people - who would no doubt be effective and enthusiastic evangelisers for their beliefs. The first speaker complimented his 'spiritually-evolved audience' and was dismissive of what he called 'structured religion' which he is certain will disappear in the face of 'spirituality'.

The second speaker referred to cosmic celebrations, transformation and exploration which would bring about changes beyond recognition in our lifetime - 'changes', he emphasised, 'that ancient dogmas are not going to give us.'

The Hindu path of meditation was recommended for achieving 'withdrawal from the world' and Hatha Yoga for 'finding spirituality through your body'. To give you some idea of how 'Alternatives' has progressed (and probably its sphere of influence as well) when we first became aware of them, back in 1990, their programme was printed in black on a single A4 sheet of paper it is now a 24-page full-colour glossy magazine.

Then, on Thursday last week we attended a lecture given by a gentleman called Benjamin Crème. Mr Crème claims to be the forerunner of the Lord Maitreya, the Master of the Ascended Masters of Wisdom, who will soon reveal himself to the world. This was a somewhat different audience - smaller in number, about 60 - 70 people, of an older average age. The evening started with the playing of a 20-minute tape recording of the Maitreya allegedly speaking through Mr Crème. This was called an 'overshadowing' - the purpose of which is supposedly to create a receptive atmosphere. Much was said during the talk about the significance of the dominant energies of the Age of Pisces giving way to those of the Age of Aquarius.....the former were, apparently, divisive, whereas the latter are unifying. According to Mr Crème when the Lord Maitreya emerges and declares himself the World Teacher for the Age of Aquarius, Jesus, who is regarded as one of the elite group of Ascended Masters, will appear Himself - as Maitreya's disciple - because, it is claimed, Jesus then has the gigantic task of getting rid of all the man-made dogmas and doctrines from the Christian teachings.

I think, by now, you will understand why I included the words 'Mumbo-Jumbo' in the title of this talk. A lot of what I have told you already could be dismissed as nonsense but we must remember that it is taken very seriously by large numbers of people. And we must never forget that deception is a tool of Satan - the master of lies.

Another reason for including Mumbo-Jumbo in the title for today's talk is a book that I came across about eighteen months ago written by a prize-winning author and journalist called Francis Wheen. His book has the delightful title: 'How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World' - with the sub-title: 'A Short History of Modern Delusions'. Much of this book is taken up with observations and anecdotes about politicians and International statesmen - and the events they were involved in - but the part that interested me particularly was a chapter with the title: 'Old Snake-Oil - New Bottles'. A section of that chapter concerns a man named Deepak Chopra. Now, we had come across this man before. His name is well-known in New Age circles. Let me tell you about Mr Deepak Chopra - or, rather, I should say *Doctor* Deepak Chopra - because he is a medically qualified doctor who was born in India in 1946. It has been said that the marriage of mysticism and money-making reached its fulfilment in this man who, in the early nineteen-eighties, switched his attention from conventional medicine to transcendental meditation. But the transformation of Dr. Chopra from obscure medical practice to national guru can be dated precisely to Monday the 12th of July 1993 when he appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

His appearance on the Show was to promote his book: '*Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*'. Within twenty-four hours of the broadcast so many copies of his book had been ordered that his publishers were reprinting around the clock. By the end of that week there were 400,000 copies in circulation. Since then he has published 25 books, more than a hundred different audio-tapes, videos and CD's on Eastern philosophies, and Christian parables. Dr Chopra has been quoted as saying: 'I don't consider myself a religious or spiritual leader...I'm just a writer who explains some of the ancient wisdom traditions in contemporary language'. That modest claim enables him to command a fee of 25,000 dollars per lecture. One corporate client employed him for ten years to teach their employees how to find their 'inner space' and how to look at the world differently.

All this of course illustrates how easy it is to exploit vulnerable and gullible people but the really serious side is that it can be used by the enemy to undermine a lukewarm, weak or poorly-formed Faith. It is a particular danger to young people who have had no proper formation at all in the Faith. Deepak Chopra's philosophy is summed up in his own belief that the highest human condition is the state of: 'I am'. Isn't that reminiscent of Satan's - 'I will not serve'?? It is an almost aggressive statement of self-interest. But then, self-interest is the hallmark of the New Age mentality which maintains that each of us is god. We make our own reality, our own heaven. There is no need for redemption - no need for salvation or sanctification.

As I have said on other occasions, the followers of New Age beliefs might accept that Jesus was God - but they insist that he was no more God than you or me.

Two other brief comments before we leave Deepak Chopra. First, his own website informs us that last year, teaming up with Richard Branson, he launched Virgin Comics, the aim of which is to promote and examine Asian themes and culture through the use of the traditional comic book medium. The illustrations on the Virgin Comics website are grotesque and among the characters is one called 'Snakewoman'. Secondly, Dr Chopra is one of the founders and the current President of a new international organisation called The Alliance for a New Humanity the stated aims of which are: (and I quote) '.....to reverberate the reconnection with our humanity, the celebration of our inseparability, the dawn of a new consciousness that will take us into a civilisation of wisdom.' (end of quote). The Alliance for a New Humanity is part of a global tidal wave of New Age ideas, beliefs and practices which is threatening to engulf people from all walks of life, young and old alike.

To see how the New Age manifests itself in relation to our Catholic faith we need look no further than Modernism and Relativism. Modernism was condemned clearly and firmly by Pope St. Pius X one hundred years ago but its characteristics are still very much in evidence today. Modernism maintains that religion is essentially a matter of experience - personal and collective experience. Faith is from within - a part of human nature hidden and unconscious - a natural instinct belonging to the emotions - a sort of *feeling* for the divine. Modernists reject miracles, the testimony of history and objective revelation - insisting that faith is uniquely from within.

Clearly, this is at odds with the teaching of the Church but it *does* square with New Age philosophy. Then we have the problem of Relativism. The Catholic Dictionary defines Relativism as a philosophical view that there is no *absolute* truth. It is claimed that truth depends entirely on variable factors such as the individual concerned, the place, the time and the circumstances. *Moral* relativism maintains that there are no unchangeable principles of human behaviour *because* all truth is relative - *or* because there cannot be any inherently evil actions if everything depends on other factors such as established customs, conventions or social approval. In other words 'your truth is OK for you; my truth is OK for me.' That's pure New Age - or should I say *impure* New Age! To give a practical example - I suggest that it is opinions like these which lend support to groups who are currently campaigning to try and force the Church to change its traditional teaching on the sinfulness of homosexual acts. And, as we might expect, there is evidence of the acceptance of homosexual practice in the New Age movement. For instance, one of the exhibitors at the Mystic Arts Show is the College of Psychic Studies and last year the College hosted a workshop entitled: 'Gay Spirituality - Exploring the Role of Homosexuals in the Spiritual World.' The workshop was given by a male clairvoyant who is in a so-called 'gay marriage'. He claims to channel an Ascended Master called 'St' Germain (not a saint at all) - a spiritual being who had many past lives as a homosexual. During the workshop he introduces the concept of the 'gay soul' with its 'vital function within our world'.

It has to be said that, as well as in the spoken word, the *writings* of many New Age proponents often contain Christian terminology and quotations from Sacred Scripture. This gives the writings a cloak of authenticity which they do not deserve. An example of this is a programme called 'A Course in Miracles' promoted by the Institute for Teaching Inner Peace. They have an impressive website offering a range of books, CD's, DVD's, audio and video tapes and a free quarterly magazine. The purpose of this self-study course is to change one's perceptions. The author, Helen Shucman, said that the course was given to her as an inner dictation. Some of it is written as though the words come directly from Jesus. The unwary may be taken in by this, but the 'Course in Miracles' has been described as a modern version of Gnosticism. It is counterfeit Christianity. It is interesting to note that in his 'History of the Church' Philip Hughes states that the Gnostic movement of the second and third centuries became '*a rich and confused amalgam of rituals and beliefs, magical practices and theories, which attracted many followers.*' That would be a suitable description for much of the New Age Movement today.

Those whom we might call 'New Agers' share a conviction about many of the characteristics of Gnosticism: a suspicion of tradition; a distrust of authority; a dislike of objective statements of faith; the need for 'freedom' from the 'stifling effects' of doctrine and dogma; and the claim that orthodox Christianity, by being too rigid, keeps people from making their own choices about good and evil.

In other words, it prevents them from making up their own minds about truth and falsehood. Add to that the promise of enlightenment that goes beyond normality, and we have the New Age in a nutshell. In charity, it must be said that most people who are involved in the New Age have little, if any, conscious awareness of any potential dangers connected with the activities in which they are participating. Activities such as Yoga and Reiki - virtually unheard of forty years ago - are now regarded as almost essential for a healthy, balanced lifestyle. No danger is seen in the spiritual philosophy upon which such activities are based, although it is clear that New Age beliefs and practices are incompatible with Christianity. Is yoga a suitable activity for Catholics? The simple answer to that question is - no! Why?? Because the practice of yoga could undermine the Faith of any unsuspecting Catholic.

There are many forms of physical exercise which can be undertaken without putting oneself in regular contact with a practice which is based on, and rooted in, a non-Christian, Eastern spiritual philosophy and lifestyle. In this, as in all matters concerning the Faith, the authoritative voice of the Church must be heard and acted upon. Remember the Penny Catechism question: *"Of which must you take most care, your body or your soul?"* Answer: *I must take most care of my soul."*

To quote a 2003 Vatican document: *'There is talk of God among New Age practitioners but it is not a personal, transcendent God. Nor is it the Creator and sustainer of the universe, but an 'impersonal energy' with which it forms a 'cosmic unity'* This is the spiritual 'philosophy' of which yoga is a part. A weekly partwork publication called 'Enhancing your Mind, Body, Spirit' explained that: *'The physical postures that form the core of any Yoga session, invigorate the body and mind. These physical exercises are called 'asanas'. The word 'asana' means 'steady pose' (each posture is meant to be held for some time). The asanas help to redress the body's harmony by helping to align the spine and head, improve blood flow, induce a state of relaxation, energise glands and organs and enhance well-being. This is the result of the seven major centres of energy (the Chakras) being brought into balance.'*

In the programme of the 2005 National Conference of the dissenting Catholic organisation 'Call to Action' in the United States, there was this announcement: *'Carol will lead morning prayer of gentle yoga and pranayama (i.e. breathing) ... Yoga is a sacrament, a symphony of soul and motion that emerges from the inside out. We bless the new day through sun salutation, half moon, and other yoga postures.'* In fact, the 'Sun salutation' is a sequence of 12 Yogic postures originating from the ancient practice of divine prostration - an act of bowing down in homage to the Sun, which is said to be the creative life-force of the universe that exists within all of us.'

Let us be quite clear - whether one realises it or not, Yoga is a combination of physical exercises and the spiritual. No part of yoga can be separated from the philosophy behind it. One commentator on the New Age - someone who was at one time deeply involved in New Age practices - says this: *'Often it is thought that Hatha Yoga (the physical exercise form of Yoga) is benign and somehow disassociated from the rest of the total Yoga system. This is a potentially dangerous fallacy. Hatha Yoga is part and parcel of the whole of yoga, with many of the same dangers. In addition, it also functions as a door through which the curious sometimes walk to explore other aspects of the New Age.'*

Another widespread practice today is Reiki (pronounced *ray-key*). It was developed by a Buddhist monk in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He claimed to have spent many years evolving a healing system based on ancient teachings written in Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hindus. This monk spent the rest of his life practising and teaching his method of healing. It is claimed by practitioners that Reiki raises our 'vibrational frequencies' and, as more and more people become initiated and attuned, so our planet's 'vibrations' are lifted also. Now, it is obvious that this practice is not compatible with Christianity and should be avoided.

But, in case we needed any further convincing, we can refer to a warning intended for health professionals and patients that was circulated four years ago by a team of nine highly qualified doctors and a mental nurse. Their joint statement makes sombre reading. Among other things, they point out that:

'Reiki is an exclusively spiritual technique which connects the recipient to spiritual powers or 'spirit guides' whether they realise it or not.' And that: 'recipients are usually unaware that the practitioners are spiritist mediums who channel spiritual powers in the same way as mediums in seances.'

Before concluding I want to say a few words about some special Masses which you may have seen advertised in your locality. They certainly occur in our area of North London quite frequently. I am referring to the so-called 'Family Tree Masses' and I want to quote at some length from an article by an Australian priest, Fr Peter Joseph. Fr Joseph has excellent credentials as the Vice-Rector and a lecturer in dogma at a diocesan seminary and he was also the Chancellor for the Maronite Diocese of Australia from 2003 until 2006. The article entitled 'Healing the family tree - New Age under the guise of religion.' Fr Joseph writes as follows: 'In the state of confusion in the Church today, some people have taken up New Age or Protestant fundamentalist ideas without being aware of their real origin or falsity. A major example of this is the current fad for 'healing the family tree.' Much of the literature on the subject is contradictory. Some claim to have linked every possible malady to every possible class of ancestral sinner who is the cause of its passing down the line. Others teach that you or your family are victims of the demon of anger, or the demon of lust, or of gambling, or of drug abuse, or of mental breakdown.

'The Apostles, too, at one time had the common Jewish notion that every affliction could be traced to a specific sin. They asked Our Lord: 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus' answer (recorded in the 9th chapter of St John's Gospel) is very enlightening and very important: 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.' If someone in your family has an illness there is no need to search your family tree for sinners. The belief in ancestral or generational curses is a perversion - a falsification - of the Catholic doctrine of Original Sin which suffices to explain the evils and imperfections of this world. The remedy is baptismal regeneration and the life of Grace - not special healing rites. If people make a good confession of the past, make reparation for their sins, keep the Commandments, receive the Sacraments regularly, and avoid the occult and superstitions...then they can be certain that any afflictions are not by reason of some occult cause. Some Catholics claiming to expel the influence of troublesome ancestors are really just misled by New Age influences which play upon peoples sensitivities and susceptibilities. It is typical of New Agers to teach others to look elsewhere than themselves for the source of their problems. This is widespread in the world today - refusing to take responsibility for our own choices and decisions. So some seek to blame their parents, or ancestors, or a curse that was placed upon them - whereas what they *really* need is formation in the virtues of fortitude and trust in God.

'A few years ago,' continues Fr Joseph, 'my Bishop was approached by a nun who asked if she could do a seminar on 'healing your family tree'. He refused on the grounds that it was contrary to Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. In fact, no Father, no Doctor of the Church, no Saint, no Pope, no Council of the Church ever taught or implied any such thing. It is a pure fiction without foundation in Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition. There is not a word on the subject anywhere in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In short, it is a mythical notion imported from sects outside the Church.' (end of quote) I have quoted from that article at length because I believe it is an important illustration of how, despite well-meaning intentions, anyone can be caught up innocently in practices which undermine the teaching of the Church.

Now, finally, I want to bring to your attention the content of a website that I came across recently. It is a website that promotes religious tolerance (a subject we hear a great deal about today) and it provides a point of view which I suspect is quite widely held by the general public. It is this:

'The New Age Movement is in a class by itself. Unlike most formal religions it has no holy text, no central organisation or membership, no formal clergy or geographic centre, no dogma or creed.....the New Age is in fact a free-flowing spiritual movement; a network of believers and practitioners who share similar beliefs and practices which they add on to whichever formal religion - if any - that they follow. Their book publishers take the place of a central organisation, whilst conferences, books and informal groups replace sermons and religious services.'

The website further informs us that a recent survey in the United States revealed that 11% of American adults believe that God is just a higher state of consciousness that *any* person can reach. Is that a measure of the extent to which New Age ideas have penetrated our society here in Britain too? It could be. And that is a sobering thought when you consider that a similar proportion of Catholics in this country may be dabbling with the New Age in one form or another. That is why I want our Bishops to tell their priests to preach about New Age beliefs and practices. I want Sunday Mass congregations to hear from the pulpit about the dangers of the New Age *and* to be reminded about the importance of their children receiving clear, reliable, full and thorough instruction in the Faith.

Only that way will they be equipped to identify error and deception when they encounter it. Only that way will they be able to defend and uphold the Truth when confronted by falsehood and confusion. Let me conclude with St Paul's warning to Timothy:

'... the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but, having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.' (2 Tim.4; 3-4)

This is spiritual warfare - so we will close with a prayer to the Patron Saint of the spiritual battle:

Holy Michael, the Archangel defend us in the day of battle, be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil; may God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust down into hell Satan and all the wicked spirits who wander through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

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