

NEW AGE IN ACTION (2) The Relentless Infiltration

'The essence of Liberalism is the view that the individual human being has the right to decide for himself the norms by which he will regulate his life; that he has the right to be his own arbiter as to what is right and what is wrong; and that he is under no obligation to submit himself to any external authority. In the Liberal sense, 'liberty of conscience' is the right of an individual to think and believe whatsoever he wants . . . and he has the right to express his views publicly and to persuade others to adopt them, using word of mouth, the public press or any other means.'

Michael Davies, 'The Reign of Christ the King' Tan Books, 1992.

INTRODUCTION

It was only after completing some recent research that I received a copy of Michael Davies' latest pamphlet *The Reign of Christ the King* from which the above quotation is taken. This pamphlet I would recommend to everyone as essential reading; the quotation I have used provides an appropriate opening for the second part of this review, dealing as it does with some specific examples of the systematic infiltration of Modernist and New Age ideas into the Catholic Church. In this context *Liberal* and *New Age* can be regarded as synonymous. The conspicuous activities of the militant feminists and the promoters of creation-centred spirituality have been widely publicised and commented upon and do not require further exposure here. However, one part of the Church, which must bear a large measure of responsibility for this infiltration, does warrant further examination - I refer, of course, to retreat centres in general and the prayer techniques or programmes offered therein, in particular.

As pointed out previously, the Authority of the Church is widely denounced, dismissed or simply disregarded these days. And nowhere more so than in some of the retreat centres which are officially listed as Roman Catholic. We hear of nuns who pray in the lotus position; of friars who recite mantras in their cells; we even hear of courses in zen meditation - and all this despite the fact that in December 1989 the Vatican issued a document giving the Church's position on eastern prayer techniques. In that document it was stated that no method or technique can *master* the love of God - and there was a specific warning about prayer techniques which are not inspired by the Gospel and which, in practice, tend to ignore Christ in favour of a mental void that has no meaning in Christianity.

AUTHENTIC PERSONAL FREEDOM?

You will all have heard of the Enneagram. It seems to have reached almost epidemic proportions in this country as well as in the United States. The Enneagram is one of the most commonly used exercises at retreat centres throughout Britain. To quote from a typical handbill (this one from Damascus House in North London): *The Enneagram is a system of typology encompassing both psychological and spiritual dimensions. Originally developed by the Sufi masters it is now being elaborated by the insight of Western psychology. It describes nine differing approaches to experiencing, thinking, feeling and behaving. The main purpose of the Enneagram is to discover one's type and to find one's way to greater authentic personal freedom.*

I drew attention to this self-awareness programme last year - pointing out its non-Christian origins and its dependence on pseudo-psychological techniques. A few weeks ago I acquired a full set of course notes issued at one of these programmes. They confirm my earlier concern that this programme can immerse unsuspecting fellow-Catholics in self-centred self-analysis at the expense of Christ-centred activity such as examination of conscience. The programme purports to give a new understanding of one's self and one's relationship with others. And all on the basis of feelings and emotions with not a hint of sin or of personal guilt in sight. Even if we look at the recommendations for prayer in the Enneagram it is necessary to identify one's *type* number (and there are twenty-seven permutations!) before determining the *appropriate* prayer technique. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that in the list of suggestions we find the following: *centering prayer: :en; focus on feelings; connecting inner and outer world; unconscious feelings; enabling the prayer* (whatever that means); *mantra; guided imagery; dreamwork; yoga; rhythm of breathing; music and dance* and so on. Would one have ever thought that prayer could be so complicated? Whatever happened to raising up the heart and mind to God? It seems to me that the ordinary Catholic has quite enough to do on his or her own path to holiness without delving into Jungian psychology and eastern prayer techniques -about which the Church has issued specific warnings anyway. And yet these programmes are promoted at Catholic retreat centres. As a matter of interest, by the way, one of the latest books on the Enneagram (available at C.T.S. bookshops) lists, among its

Recommended Reading titles, books by Fr Matthew Fox and Fr Edward Schillebeeckx - both of whom publicly dissent from Church teaching.

As I said earlier, these programmes and others like them - for example, the Myers-Briggs Workshops - focus attention on self rather than on Christ. They are inward-looking rather than outward-looking. They are consistent with New Age thinking.

ONLY ONE THING TO BE FEARED

It is often difficult to communicate with those who have absorbed, or been infected by, what we might call the '*spirit of the times*'. Those who are riding on that particular bandwagon meet any criticism - let alone an outright condemnation or *anathema* - with a response which suggests that we do not understand how meaningful this whole development is - and what freedom it gives. But, to repeat my opening remarks, the crucial test has to be: does the activity concerned imply acceptance or rejection of the Authority of the Church in any matter pertaining to our Faith and its expression in our lives. Because the Authority of the Church is the embodiment of the Love of God. Reject Authority and you reject God.

Looking at just one traditional reference point - the beautiful Novena to the Holy Ghost - the opening meditation for Day One reminds us that: *Only one thing is important - eternal salvation. Only one thing, therefore, is to be feared - sin.* That is in sharp contrast to what many of our young people are being told in their Catholic schools today. There, it is much more likely to be: *Only one thing is important - saving the earth. Only one thing, therefore, is to be feared - pollution.* Or, for pollution, you could substitute *population growth*.

The excesses of the *green* movement and can draw the unwary away from the true teaching of the Church. It can change attitudes to our Faith, in a quite subtle way, especially in regard to our responsibility towards God and His creation. For example, Olympia is currently hosting the Global Partnership Exhibition which seems to rival the Rio Earth Summit in its scope. There you would find nearly 200 exhibitors sponsored by Time Out, The Independent, New Internationalist and Kiss FM and including *Catholic* organisations such as the Catholic Institute for International Relations. The exhibition aims to promote *global partnership at work* but watch out for the small print because it also promotes *human rights and freedom, stabilising population levels and opposing regressive regimes* among other things. Which is another way of saying that it supports liberation theology, abortion and contraception. Issued by the organisers, The Trust for Education and Development, colourful leaflets promoting the Exhibition could be found in the porches of many Catholic churches.

Simultaneously, at the Islington Business Design Centre in North London, was another major exhibition entitled Tales from the Earth focusing on the mythical and spiritual dimensions of tribal and traditional knowledge. Just the place for Dad to take the children while Mum does the shopping. This exhibition featured shamanism, the healing arts; folk medicine and planetary ecology. Alternatively, if you preferred a day out of London, you could visit an abbey in Oxfordshire (advertised in *The Universe*) for '1992 and Beyond - The Church's Response to the Earth Summit'. This one-day event posed the question: *How are church people in Britain to live out faith in God as Creator in their everyday lives?* And the brochure for the event reminds us that *the Earth Summit provided the opportunity to 'think globally' but when it is all over the need is to 'act locally'*. Now where have we heard that before?

BEWARE OF THE PANDA

You see, it is all around us. Coming at us from every direction. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find these ideas, these distortions, these deceptions, surfacing in Catholic publications, Catholic retreat centres, Catholic homes and, perhaps giving rise to the most serious concern, in Catholic schools. Just consider for a moment these extracts from an article which appeared in that excellent magazine *Apropos*. This article exposes the machinations of the World Wide Fund for Nature (previously known as the World Wildlife Fund): *'The notepaper of the WWF bears the endearing panda logo and the names of the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Alexandra. It has good connections and commands very large funds . . . The inter-faith assembly at Assisi in 1986 was the 25th anniversary of the WWF, which was putting up the money for the assembly and hoped to persuade the religious leaders to make some sort of common declaration about conserving nature. This they duly did . . . As a result of all this the WWF is now able to boast that 'religious philosophers are helping to inject some powerful moral perspectives into conservation's ill-defined ethical foundations'. WWF's audio-visual aids for schools now include 'Conservation and Christianity' and 'Conservation and Islam' . . . The WWF is now a loud voice in the schools of Britain. In 1989 it published a book 'Greenprints for Changing Schools' (and) since the WWF is trying to change people's behaviour as well as their minds it is starting with the very young. The aim is to make children realise that they are not independent creatures but part of a social whole. It follows that co-operation must replace competition. Children will work in groups rather than individually and will sit at communal tables rather than separate desks. They will do oral rather than written work because speech is a social activity whereas writing is solitary . . . Since the world is one there must be no walls between classrooms or walls between subjects: in open-plan schools all subjects will merge into 'world studies' or 'global education' . . . All this is part of what is called 'holistic' awareness. We are all parts of a greater whole and man is but one evolutionary life-form among the many here on earth. He must therefore learn to co-exist with his environment on peaceful terms. The Book of Genesis teaches that man is the lord of creation and earth and all that is in it was made for him. That view is rejected by holistic thinkers as dangerously arrogant... The Worldwide Fund for Nature claims that the holistic philosophy is now established in most of our local education authority areas.* This, truly, is the New Age in action.

NEW AGE ARIANISM

Is it any wonder, then, that we become concerned for our children and for the next generation of Catholics? Any optimism we may have is further undermined when we look at one of the publications of the Catholic Enquiry Office, issued to would-be converts, and find the following reference to the Mass (sadly, no mention of Holy Sacrifice) *'The Mass, the Eucharist, the breaking of bread - whatever you like to call it - is the love one person has for another . . . The Mass comes to us in many guises whether it be a celebration in a skittle-alley accompanied by one out-of-tune guitar or an elaborate ceremony in a cathedral embellished by the music of Mozart. . .'*

In the fourth century the Arians denied the Divinity of Christ. The New Age Movement of the twentieth century does the same. It is consistent with *the spirit of the times* in the Church today. Randall Baer, one-time prominent as a New Age leader in the United States, refers to it as *a broad spectrum of non-Christian philosophies and practices that can be categorised as New Age Spiritual Humanism*. The New Age movement is so called because it is intended to bring about a new world order with one government and one religion. Its morality tolerates divorce, sex outside marriage, homosexual practices, abortion and every other deviant practice of neo-Paganism. It embraces parapsychology, the occult, yoga and exotic therapies (some of which, as we have seen, surface in Catholic retreat centres). New Agers do not need a redeeming Christ - they redeem themselves.

RIGHT WHEN WE ARE WRONG

At a time when we are awash with talk of rights and freedom and tolerance we need to focus clearly on responsibility and authority and discipline. Never before has there been such a need for a straight-forward and unequivocal enunciation of the Catholic Faith. We hope and pray that the (new) Catechism of the Catholic Church, the official British edition of which is scheduled to appear at Easter, will be just that. I am encouraged by the remarks of Cardinal Ratzinger earlier this year when he said that the Catechism will contain, at the end of each section, short summaries *'suitable for memorising'*. In the past, committing the short sentences of the Penny Catechism to memory always laid a firm foundation and provided a yardstick for the rest of life. Not always adhered to, but there in the memory nonetheless. An invaluable reference point. A return to such a practice must be welcomed - and long overdue. We are reminded, in this context, of the words of

G.K.Chesterton (written seventy years ago but equally true today): *We do not really want a religion that is right when we are right. What we want is a religion that is right when we are wrong. In these current fashions it is not really a question of the religion allowing us a liberty but (at best) of the liberty allowing us a religion. These people merely take the modern mood and then require any creed to be cut down to fit that mood. They say they want a religion like this because they are like this already. It is a very different matter when a religion in the real sense of a binding thing, binds men to their morality when it is not identical with their mood . . . it is in those cases when we get the peculiar and solitary triumph of the Catholic Faith.*

There is a great need at this time for us to support and encourage each other and, especially, for us to support and encourage those priests and religious who have recognised, and who are prepared to resist, the insidious and relentless infiltration of which we speak.

In the final part of this presentation I want to reiterate some of the ideas put forward at the 1992 Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Conference at Swanwick. These are practical suggestions as to how we can consolidate our defence of the Faith and make a measured response to what we see and hear around us in our own society, in our parishes and in our neighbourhood. Let us conclude this part with the following quotation from a sermon given by Archbishop Quinn in San Francisco in 1992:

'Christian discipleship is not a matter of playing games. If you want to be a Catholic today you have to be prepared to be ridiculed, to see the Pope ridiculed, to see the Mass and the Sacraments profaned and ridiculed. There is no longer room for ambiguity. We have to know where we stand and with God's help we have to stand firm in the midst of these increasing attacks. The Catholic Church, it should be clear, is the one thing in society today, which can be freely and without recrimination made the object of public contempt and ridicule. I want you to stand with me and to be unashamedly Catholic and to stand firm and courageous in the face of the increasing attacks on the Church - that is, on you and me.'

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