

SOME DECEPTIONS OF THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

This leaflet, published originally in 1991, summarises some essential information for Catholics. The notes, arranged under four headings, provide a brief insight into the activities of New Agers - and the danger represented by their beliefs and practices.

BACKGROUND

Before we consider what the New Age means; before we look at its so-called doctrines and its sphere of influence let me set the scene. Millions of New Agers recognise the nature of the 'movement' to which they are dedicated. Millions more have little or no idea what it is they are involved in. But what is this New Age that is referred to so often these days? There is no simple definition. We can say, however, that New Age thinking is incompatible with Christianity and we can also say, with certainty, that it is a world-wide phenomenon which is now influencing Western countries to an alarming degree. How it is doing this is examined briefly in this leaflet. One of the most disturbing effects, already apparent, is that the New Age Movement under its various guises has infiltrated the Catholic Church to the point where some priests and bishops allow - or even actively encourage - beliefs and practices which should be denounced.

The basis of our Faith is the authority of Christ and the Church which He founded; but what about the claims to authority by the New Age proponents? The following quote gives us a clue. The words are those of a co-director of the Findhorn Community -a community which claims to be guided by spiritual beings: *'...Lucifer is the angel of man's inner light - he comes to give us the final gift of wholeness. If we accept it then we are free. This is the Luciferic initiation. It is an initiation into the New Age.'*

The Church has met and survived many challenges to Her authority. Each of these challenges was made against a background of factors which were particularly significant at the time. The combat is not new. What is it, then, that is particularly significant about our present time? One factor must be the mass-media and modern communications which permit the rapid spread of heresies. Another factor which is unique to this generation is that the year 2000 marks not only the beginning of the third millenium of Christianity but also - in New Age/astrological terms - the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. This is an event of peculiar significance for those involved in New Age practices and it is important for us to understand why.

Every two-thousand-one-hundred years or so, because of the apparent movement of the sun, the earth and the constellations in relation to each other, a different Zodiac 'sign' is said to be 'in the ascendancy'. Within this sequence, or pattern, the period from 2200 BC to the year 100 BC was said to be the Age of Aries - symbolised by the Ram - the time of Abraham and the Fatherhood of God. Then, coinciding with the Incarnation came the Age of Pisces - symbolised by the Fish - an age centred on Jesus the Son. Now, we approach the year 2000 AD, which sees the dawning of the Age of Aquarius - symbolised by the Water Carrier - supposedly the age of the spirit and liberated mankind. It can be seen from this how the deception takes shape. Think of the recent years paving the way: hippies, flower-power; transcendental meditation; gurus; drugs; the Beatles; the pop-rock culture. Add to that the involvement of writers, scientists, celebrities and activists lending influential status and intellectual credibility and, suddenly, it's no longer freaks and fanatics but a serious and even sinister threat. One recent publication summed it up like this: *'...the traditional forms of paganism are prospering in the West... in the midst of skyscrapers, computers, T. V. 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'*. It should be recognised that, for the New Agers, the beginning of the Age of Aquarius also marks the end of Christianity. *Know your enemy is the first rule of battle, so we need to become familiar with the false doctrines being promoted, who is promoting them and how they are being promoted.*

WHO'S WHO?

(n.b. Matthew Fox, referred to in this section, is no longer a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. He now works with the Episcopalians in America - see the leaflet entitled '*Spiritual Anarchy - The New Age Threat*' for more recent information)

First place goes to Dominican priest Fr Matthew Fox. He is the best-known promoter of Creation-Centred Spirituality - central to which is the insistence that for hundreds of years Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular has been barking up the wrong tree. Fr Fox was silenced by Rome in 1988 and it is revealing to hear his response to that decision. When told of the Vatican ban Fr Fox reportedly said to his superior: *'This work is just too pressing to be postponed until a neurotic papal regime dies out.'* Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out that Fr Matthew Fox *denies original sin; that his treatment of homosexuality is inspired neither by Scripture nor by the doctrines of the Church, and that his work is dangerous and deviant.*

Despite this, Fr Fox is still giving retreats, still speaking publicly and still spreading his heresies. His 1991 schedule includes several venues in Britain. The aim of the CCS network is to establish a presence in every parish in the country. Working closely with Fr Fox is an apostate Jewish woman who goes under the name of Starhawk. Her real name is Miriam Simos and she claims to be a pagan witch. Among her attributes is the revival of basic chants and spiral dances from ancient religions to awaken us all to *the power of play in worship!* That presumably confirms reports of her persuading nuns to dance around trees.

Then we have Alice Bailey who died in 1949. She is considered to be a New Age prophetess. According to her, our destiny is guided by Ascended Masters, one of whom was Jesus who, she claimed, acted as *a bodily vehicle for the Cosmic Christ.*

One of Alice Bailey's disciples is Benjamin Creme author, lecturer and self-proclaimed forerunner of the New Age Guru, Maitreya or the Anti-Christ. Creme also founded the Tara Center in America which issues regular bulletins about the coming of the Anti-Christ. Next, we turn to Helena Blavatsky one of the founders of the Theosophical Society in 1875. The aims of Theosophy are the formation of a universal brotherhood, comparative study of world religions and the exploration of psychic and spiritual powers in man. The Society that set out to promote these aims laid the modern foundations of the New Age movement. In fact a plan drawn up in 1876 included a proposal that *work to achieve these aims should be carried on secretly for 100 years* before being brought out into the open. And that is exactly what has happened. Blavatsky's successor was Annie Besant whose books on Ancient Wisdom and Esoteric Christianity are still used among New Agers.

Then there's that popular New Age channeller J. Z. Knight - she claims that a thirty-five-thousand-year-old warrior called Ramtha communicates through her. This spirit guide is a favourite of actress Shirley Maclaine who herself is doing much to promote addiction to New Age practice and thinking. In fact, Shirley Maclaine has been described as *a super saleswoman for the movement.*

There are numerous avenues leading into New Age deception. New ways of thinking can be observed in all areas of society - in science, government, medicine, education, psychology, religion and so on. Many of these are referred to by Marilyn Ferguson in her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy*. She had noticed a fascinating phenomenon: that groups of people were linking together in networks. These networks themselves were interlinked because members of one would also be members of another. Marilyn Ferguson called it a Conspiracy in the sense that people are working together towards a common goal. Her book written in the early 1980's is regarded by many as a blue-print for the New Age movement.

Of necessity, this must be a very brief 'Who's Who' but it cannot be concluded without a reference to Helen Shucman who is responsible for a programme called *A Course in Miracles*. This course is widely available as a Penguin paperback and on audio cassettes. The purpose of this self-study course is to change one's perceptions. Dr Shucman claims that the course was given to her as an inner dictation. Some of it is written as though Jesus is speaking ... However, this 'Course in Miracles' has been described as a *modern version of Gnostic 'Christianity'*.

FALSE TEACHING

Now we look at New Age doctrines and interpretations starting with one that seems to reflect the more convoluted thinking of the New Agers. This is a definition of God from a book called *The Seth Material* by Jane Roberts. Seth was a disembodied entity who 'channelled' through the author: '*God is an energy gestalt... a psychic pyramid of inter-related, ever-expanding consciousness that creates simultaneously and instantaneously ... universes and individuals that are given duration, psychic comprehension, intelligence and eternal validity...*'

Or you may prefer the definition of Benjamin Creme: '*In a sense there is no such thing as God. God does not exist. And in another sense there is nothing else but God ... and because all is God, there is no God.*' Confused? Yes - and so are many people. But it is all made to sound so plausible to the unsuspecting and expectant listener or reader. For example, consider this definition of the Trinity from a book called *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*: ... '*Eternal thought is one: in essence it is two - intelligence and force: and when they breathe, a child is born: this child is love.*' It is certainly not what we know as the Mystery of The Blessed Trinity.

Our Lord Himself is given only equal status with other prophets and spiritual leaders. In his *Reflections on the Christ*, David Spangler says this... "*The true birth of the Christ was not the birth of Jesus. Jesus was an individual who himself had to recapitulate certain stages. He built upon the pattern Buddha had established.*". Any New Ager may agree that Jesus Christ is God - his world-view will allow that. But his world-view will also compel him to say that Jesus is no more God than you or me. We hear many references to the Cosmic Christ the concept of which can be traced back to the second century although the term only surfaced in the nineteenth century. The concept attributes three natures to Christ - human, divine and cosmic, that is. pervading the whole physical universe, the sum total of experience. And if you start from a creation-centred view, the Cosmic Christ is within creation, holding it together, suffering with it and evolving with it. *Contrast that with the Catechism teaching on the second article of the Creed.*

When we come to the Four Last Things the *Aquarian Gospel* again gives us a clue to New Age thinking: '*God never made a heaven for man: He never made a hell. We are creators and we make our own.*'

Or from the aforementioned *Course in Miracles*: '*There is no need for help to enter Heaven, for you have never left.*' Finally, in this brief review, it is unlikely that you will be called upon to refute any false teaching about Our Lady because it seems that New Age writing and teaching simply ignores Our Blessed Mother.

These brief examples are typical of the dangerous material that is now available on the shelves of many bookshops — and often in the section marked 'Religion'. These false ideas and 'spirituality' can also be identified in magazine articles; business seminars; radio and television broadcasts; music; fashion; games; toys - and in the many fantasy films at the cinema. But it is in retreat programmes that they find their most spiritually dangerous expression....

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

One of the ways in which New Age ideas can be spread is through *Prayer Techniques*. We hear of nuns who pray in the lotus position; friars who recite mantras in their cells; courses in zen meditation in parishes and convents. Add to this the teaching of Anthony de Mello, Bede Griffiths, Thomas Merton and others, and one begins to realise the extent of the problem.

In December 1989 the Vatican released the text of a long-awaited document giving the Church's position on eastern prayer techniques. It points out that *no method or technique can 'master' the love of God*. The document also warns against prayer techniques that 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.

The document itself is in the form of a letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and therefore could be referred to if you are writing to your own Bishop on any such matter. The opening paragraph draws attention to the genuine desire of many Christians to experience a deeper and authentic prayer life despite the difficulties which the modern world places in the way of silence, recollection and meditation. But, we must be sure that any spiritual guidance is in keeping with *Catholic tradition* and that it does not by-pass or reject the *time-honoured devotions of the Church*.

Another popular vehicle for New Age deception today is the *Green Movement*. There are many examples of non-Christian views being expressed in the 'green' literature put out by numerous organisations and groups. Frequently, it speaks of '*reinterpreting*' the Church's teaching about creation. Furthermore, any instruction manual on '*How to be Green*' will almost invariably include a section on relaxation and the advice to '*find out about yoga classes in your area*'. The growing movement of Feminism, too, has strong links with New Age spirituality. This is evident in campaigns which seek to eliminate inequality between the sexes. But it goes further than that. The ultimate goal is the *dominance of the female principle* which supposedly corresponds to the spirit of the Age of Aquarius. It would be easy to become obsessed about such dangers. Not everyone who belongs to an environmental protection group is a New Age sympathiser. But when the origins and world-views of some of these campaigns are studied they are found to contain a strong allegiance to non-Christian spiritual traditions. Many adults - and their children - may be exposing themselves quite innocently to influences which could affect their thinking on matters concerning their religious belief.

CONCLUSION

In May 1993 Pope John Paul II warned Catholics about the dangers of New Age 'spirituality' He drew attention particularly to its promotion of what he called '*a vague vision of the world expressed in myths and symbols.*' Many people are being seduced by such myths and symbols. We are living in a time of unrestrained deception. Society has been conditioned to a life-style of self-gratification. The New Age Movement represents a major part of this deception and conditioning. It is directed towards the Age of Aquarius. It is inspired by demonic forces. It relies upon the response of susceptible and unwary men, women and children. It promises them freedom and fulfilment. *In reality it is Satan working furiously to destroy souls.*

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