

## Session 24: The First Three Commandments

HYMN: Take Up Your Cross



Take up your cross, the Saviour  
said,  
if you would My disciple be.  
Deny yourself, the world forsake,  
and humbly follow after Me.

Take up your cross; let not its  
weight  
fill your weak soul with vain alarm.  
His strength shall bear your spirit  
up  
and nerve your heart and brace your  
arm.

Take up your cross, nor heed the  
shame,  
and let your foolish heart be still.  
Your Lord for you endured to die  
upon a cross, on Calv'ry's hill.

Take up your cross, then, in His  
strength,  
and calmly ev'ry danger brave.  
'Twill guide you to a better home  
and lead to vict'ry o'er the grave.

Take up your cross, and follow  
Christ,  
nor think 'till death to lay it  
down.  
For only he who bears the cross  
may hope to wear the glorious crown.

## PRAYER:

Let us pray:  
O God, Who,  
through Your Word  
reconcile the human race to Yourself  
in a wonderful way,  
grant, we pray,  
that with prompt devotion  
and eager faith,  
the Christian people may hasten  
toward the solemn celebrations  
to come.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your Son,  
Who lives and reigns with You  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
— Amen

## READING:

Dt 4:5-9

A Reading from the Book of  
Deuteronomy

These are the words  
that Moses spoke to all Israel:  
"I teach you  
the statutes and decrees  
as the Lord, my God,  
has commanded me,  
that you may observe them  
in the land  
you are entering to occupy.

"Observe them carefully,  
for thus will you give evidence  
of your wisdom and intelligence  
to the nations,  
who will hear all these statutes  
and say, 'This great nation is truly  
a wise and intelligent people.'

"For what great nation is there  
that has gods so close to it  
as the Lord, our God, is to us  
whenever we call upon Him?

"Or what great nation  
has statutes and decrees  
that are as just as this whole law  
that I am setting before you today?

"However, take care  
and be earnestly on your guard  
not to forget the things  
that your eyes have seen,  
nor let them slip from your memory  
as long as you live,  
but teach them to your children  
and to your children's children."  
The Word of the Lord  
— Thanks be to God

## IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

The First Commandment is,  
"I am the Lord your God,  
Who brought you out  
from the land of Egypt,  
and out of the house of bondage.  
You shall not have strange gods —

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before Me.

You shall not make to yourself  
any graven thing,  
nor the likeness of anything  
that is in heaven above,  
or in the earth beneath,  
nor of those things  
that are in the waters  
under the earth.  
You shall not adore them  
nor serve them."

The Second Commandment is,  
"You shall not take  
the name of the Lord your God  
in vain."

The Third Commandment is,  
"Remember that you keep holy  
the Sabbath."

Besides the Ten Commandments,  
we are also bound  
to obey the Church's Commandments  
or Precepts,  
because Christ said  
to the pastors of His Church,  
"He who hears you, hears Me.  
He who rejects you, rejects Me."  
• You shall attend Mass on Sundays  
and holy days of obligation.  
• You shall confess your sins  
at least once a year.  
• You shall humbly receive  
your Creator in Holy Communion  
at least during the Easter season.  
• You shall keep holy  
the holy days of obligation.  
• You shall observe  
the prescribed days  
of fasting and abstinence.

We also have the duty  
to provide for the material needs  
of the Church,  
each according to our ability.

"Do not think  
that I have come to abolish  
the law and the prophets,"  
Jesus said.

"I have come,  
not to abolish them,  
but to fulfil them.

"Of this much I assure you:  
until heaven and earth pass away,  
not the smallest letter of the law,  
not the smallest part of a letter,  
shall be done away with  
until it all comes true."

### BIBLE READING

Mt 1-11

Next week,  
as you start reading the Gospels,  
you will read how Jesus  
upheld God's will  
as expressed in His commandments.

We began studying the commandments  
this week,  
and we will finish studying  
"The Last Seven Commandments"  
next week.

## The First Three Commandments

### Introduction

We humans are created, not self-existent, so we have "insurmountable limits," which we "must freely recognize and respect with trust."<sup>1</sup>

First, there are limitations on our bodies: the so-called "laws" (or, better, "patterns") described by science.<sup>2</sup> Second, there are limitations on our souls: the moral laws, or the laws of right and wrong.<sup>3</sup>

The moral laws differ from the physical "laws" in some very fundamental ways:

- The physical "laws" describe how inanimate objects *are actually observed* to behave, while the moral laws prescribe how humans *ought* to behave.<sup>4</sup>
- The physical "laws" are not logically *necessary*;<sup>5</sup> it is not impossible or unthinkable that God can, and sometimes does, do things differently.<sup>6</sup> However, the moral laws *could not possibly be different*,<sup>7</sup> for they reflect God's nature,<sup>8</sup> and therefore human nature, made in His image.
- We do not have the option of disobeying the physical "laws," but we do have the option of disobeying the moral laws.

In other ways, moral law is like physical "law." For example, they must be *learned*; we cannot invent or abolish either.<sup>9</sup> If we know them, we can act freely within them, but if we do not, or if we ignore them, we can be destroyed or damaged, soul or body.<sup>10</sup>

### The Decalogue

The moral law is not beyond human reason. From the beginning, God implanted it in our hearts. But when Adam and Eve fell,<sup>11</sup> our reason became obscured. In our fallen state, we had to be reminded of the moral law and have it fully explained. Accordingly, God gave us the Ten Commandments:<sup>12</sup> the Decalogue.<sup>13</sup>

"God revealed these 'ten words' to His people" on Mount Sinai, just after He had freed them from slavery in Egypt. "Unlike the other commandments, written by Moses,"<sup>14</sup> they "were written 'with the finger of God.'"<sup>15</sup>

"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain and out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness," Moses told the people. "And He wrote them upon two tablets of stone, and gave them to me."<sup>16</sup>

From then on, the Israelites kept the tablets in the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>17</sup>

Moses spoke of *ten* commandments,<sup>18</sup> but the Bible does not number them, and we number them in various ways.<sup>19</sup> In the way Catholics use, the first three tell us how to treat God; the last seven, how to treat our neighbours. St. Augustine said that God wrote the first three on one tablet and the last seven on the other.<sup>20</sup>

1 CCC 396

2 See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

3 See the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

4 See CCC 348, 2070. Also see the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

5 In contrast, the "laws" of Mathematics are logically necessary:  $2 + 2$  could not possibly be other than 4.

6 We call such events "miracles." See the talk on "A Place for Science in the Catholic Faith."

7 "Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board: *Thou shalt not steal!*" (G.K. Chesterton: *The Innocence of Father Brown*, "The Blue Cross").

8 God could not be other than He is. His being is not "contingent"; it does not depend on anything else.

9 See the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

10 See Frank Sheed: *A Map of Life*, II.

11 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

12 See CCC 2071 and Appendix 1.

13 From the Greek *deka* ("ten") plus *logos* ("word").

14 See Dt 5:22.

15 Ex 31:18; see CCC 2056.

16 Dt 5:22; see CCC 2058.

17 See Ex 25:1-22.

18 See Dt 4:13, 10:4

19 The division used by Catholics and Lutherans was established by St. Augustine. The division used by the Orthodox and others was worked out by the early Greek Christians. See CCC 2066.



Each tablet sheds light on the other, for we cannot adore God — as the first tablet commands — without loving those He created, and we cannot love our neighbours — as the second tablet commands — without loving the God Who created them. Thus the Decalogue unifies our religious and our social life.<sup>21</sup>

### Jesus and the Decalogue

When a man asked what he must do to gain everlasting life, Jesus answered by quoting from the Decalogue.<sup>22</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," He said. "I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfil them."<sup>23</sup> ... Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter of the law, not the smallest part of a letter, shall be done away with until it all comes true."<sup>24</sup>

Jesus unfolded all the law's demands.<sup>25</sup> "You have heard the commandment imposed on your forefathers: 'You shall not commit murder; every murderer shall be liable to judgement,'" He said. "What I say to you is: everyone who grows angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; any man who uses abusive language toward his brother shall be answerable to the Sanhedrin,<sup>26</sup> and if he holds him in contempt he risks the fires of Gehenna."<sup>27</sup>

Jesus also revealed the law's purpose: *to teach us to love*. Asked which law was the greatest, He replied, "'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"<sup>28</sup>

In fact, Jesus' words actually *empower* us to obey the law, just as His words at the Last Supper changed bread and wine into His Body and Blood,<sup>29</sup> or His words to the paralytic enabled the man to pick up his mat and walk.<sup>30</sup>

Ever since St. Augustine,<sup>31</sup> the Decalogue has been central in teaching the Catholic faith.<sup>32</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls it one of its "pillars."<sup>33</sup>

The Ten Commandments are binding.<sup>34</sup> No one can change them. No one can excuse us from obeying them. They apply always, everywhere, and to everyone, Catholic or non-Catholic.<sup>35</sup> They describe serious obligations explicitly, but they imply lesser obligations as well.<sup>36</sup>

### Bondage or freedom?

The Decalogue says "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." It reveals, "in a concrete and inescapable manner, Who God is and who I am. It demands obedience absolutely, thus containing the claim that the One doing the demanding is absolute, having the right to my unquestioned obedience." How do we react?

"Instinctively we want to be masters of our fate; we want to be self-starters. If God should wish us to do something, let Him persuade us, convince us, cajole us. But let Him not command, for command offends our autonomy."

A command "is designed, by its very nature, to interfere with and to sway our daily lives and actions." It "enters what is most mine; *i.e.*, my doing and deciding, and is thus likely to raise my hackles. At the moment it reaches my ears, it has, to

20 See CCC 2067.

21 See CCC 2069.

22 See Mt 19:18-19.

23 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

24 Mt 5:17-18. Literally, "until everything happens."

25 See CCC 2054.

26 Supreme council and highest court of justice at Jerusalem, which tried and sentenced Jesus.

27 Mt 5:21-22. See also Mt 5:27-29.

28 Mt 22:37-40; see Rom 13:9-10.

29 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

30 See Jn 5:8-9. See Mary Healy: *Men and Women Are From Eden*, "Four."

31 354 - 430 AD

32 See CCC 2065.

33 See CCC 13.

34 See CCC 2068.

35 See CCC 2072.

36 See CCC 2073.

a degree at least, already attained its purpose: whether I obey or disobey, I have been effectively notified that I am not my own; I am deprived of my self-produced equilibrium and disturbed in the peace I have created for myself. Even if a command does no more than irritate me, it has had some effect."<sup>37</sup>

We feel that universal obedience to the commandments — often disparaged as "blind" — is beneath our dignity. We even suspect that disobedience "is part of being truly human; that only thus can we be fully ourselves." We think we need evil, "at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being," and so we keep "a little freedom against God."<sup>38</sup>

We resent the commandments; we envy those who do not know them. We are like children whose parents make them brush their teeth after every meal, who do not know how their health will suffer if they disobey, who think that the rule simply cuts down on their play time. We are like teenagers who see speed limits as arbitrary restrictions on their freedom, not realizing that their purpose is to make travel as quick and safe as possible.<sup>39</sup>

"You puzzle me," a man told Father Vince. "On the surface, you uphold the Church's teaching, but underneath, you really are compassionate." He could not see that Father upholds Church teaching *because of* his compassion, not *in spite of* it.

The truth is that we are "blessed," for "what pleases God is known to us!"<sup>40</sup>

God gave the Israelites the Decalogue after *liberating* them from slavery:<sup>41</sup> "I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."<sup>42</sup> It is part of God's *covenant*<sup>43</sup> with us, in which He swore to be our God and make us His people.<sup>44</sup> It has its source in His *love*.<sup>45</sup>

The Decalogue is God's *gift* to us. It tells us how to be free, rather than slaves to sin; how to live a fully human life, in friendship with God and harmony with our neighbours.<sup>46</sup> Far from making Christianity a "no-fun" religion, it makes it possible for us to enjoy God's creation *to the full*,<sup>47</sup> as God intended.

Accordingly, obedience is our proper response.<sup>48</sup> In fact, obedience "offers me the chance of becoming God-like in what is most mine: my deciding and doing."<sup>49</sup> It makes our lives "broad and light, not boring but filled with infinite surprises, for God's infinite goodness is never depleted!"<sup>50</sup> "Obedience is the one key of life."<sup>51</sup>

Now let us look at the first three commandments in detail.

## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT<sup>52</sup>

*"I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them."*<sup>53</sup>

### Faith

We must accept God, worship Him, believe in Him, testify to Him in our lives, and acknowledge His authority. This "obedience of faith" is our first obligation; all

37 Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic: Intervention, Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life, October 6 1994

38 Pope Benedict XVI: Homily, Mass on the 40th anniversary of the close of Vatican II, December 8 2005

39 See Appendix 3.

40 See Bar 4:4.

41 See CCC 2057.

42 See Lv 22:33, 25:38, 26:13; Nm 15:41; Dt 7:8, 8:14; Jgs 2:1, 6:8; 2 Kgs 17:36; Mic 6:4.

43 "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb" (see Dt 5:2, 29:1; 1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr 5:10).

44 See Ex 6:7; Jer 7:23, 11:4, 30:22; Ez 36:28.

45 CCC 396

46 See CCC 2059, 2063, 2070.

47 See Mary Healy: *Men and Women Are From Eden*, Four.

48 See CCC 2060-2063.

49 Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic: Intervention, Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life, October 6 1994

50 Pope Benedict XVI: Homily, Mass on the 40th anniversary of the close of Vatican II, December 8 2005

51 George MacDonald: *Unspoken Sermons*, Second Series, "The Word of Jesus on Prayer"

52 See CCC 2084-2132.

"moral deviation" has its roots in rejection of God.<sup>54</sup>

In particular, we must avoid:

- atheism,<sup>55</sup> whether:
  - practical materialism (restricting our needs and hopes to this world) or
  - atheistic humanism (seeking only economic and social success).<sup>56</sup>
- agnosticism,<sup>57</sup> which can involve a kind of search for God, but can also mean:
  - the practical equivalent of atheism.
  - regarding God as a transcendent Being Which cannot reveal Itself.
  - considering it impossible to prove, affirm, or deny God's existence.
  - indifferentism.
  - a sluggish moral conscience.
  - a flight from life's ultimate questions.
- heresy, apostasy, and schism.<sup>58</sup>
- incredulity, voluntary doubt, and the *entertainment* of involuntary doubt.<sup>59</sup>

Here, "doubt" and "incredulity" do *not* mean the uncertainty of our initial search for God. That is reasonable, like the uncertainty of a man who has just begun to court a woman. They do *not* refer to the questions we ask to learn more. They refer to doubt *entertained* — welcomed and kept in mind — *after* we have come to know Him. That is unreasonable, like the neurotic suspicion of a jealous husband.

For example, consider Thomas' initial refusal to believe that Jesus had risen.<sup>60</sup> Thomas was not a stranger, quite reasonably demanding evidence for a very unlikely story about an unknown person. He was a friend who had lived with Jesus for two or three years and seen His miracles. He should have known Jesus better.<sup>61</sup>

### Trust

The Church often calls trust "hope." However, in its ordinary use, "hope" implies uncertainty ("I hope it won't rain"), whereas our hope in God does not. For example, the Church refers to our "sure and certain hope" of the resurrection.<sup>62</sup>

Jesus revealed His Father to us and said we must "be made perfect" like Him.<sup>63</sup> We cannot achieve this perfection on our own; we must trust God to help us.

We must ask Him for the help we need with confidence, but without losing our fear of offending Him.<sup>64</sup> We must therefore avoid two extremes:

- despair:<sup>65</sup> ceasing to trust that God will save us, thus denying His goodness, His mercy, and His justice (for He keeps His promises), or
- presumption:<sup>66</sup> either
  - relying on our own capacities apart from God; or
  - presuming that God, in His mercy, will save us without our making any changes.

### Agape

The Latin for the Greek *agape* is *caritas*; the English, "charity" or "love." But usually "charity" now means "giving alms," while "love" can mean affection, friendship, or *eros*<sup>67</sup> — natural loves, based on feelings, which cannot be commanded.<sup>68</sup>

*Agape* is supernatural love, based not in the feelings, but in the will. It is utterly

53 Ex 20:2-5

54 See CCC 2087; Rom 1:18-32.

55 See CCC 2124-2126 and the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

56 Arguing that religion impedes this success by raising hopes in a future life.

57 See CCC 2127-2128.

58 See CCC 2089. Also see the talk on "Divisions Among Christians."

59 See CCC 2088-2089.

60 See Jn 21:24-29.

61 See C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces*, "On Obstinacy in Belief." Jesus' rebuke was "not to skepticism in the philosophic sense but to the psychological quality of being suspicious."

62 Prayer at the Cemetery 2

63 See Mt 5:48.

64 See CCC 2090.

65 See CCC 2091.

66 See CCC 2092.

67 Greek for "sexual love," the source of our word "erotic."



selfless, concerned only with the beloved. It is the kind of love God has for us.

Belief in God's *agape* entails an obligation to respond. We must love God above everything else for His own sake and, for His sake, all He has made,<sup>6 9</sup> avoiding<sup>7 0</sup> indifference; ingratitude; lukewarmness; hatred; and *acedia*,<sup>7 1</sup> or spiritual laziness.

### Religion

We have the duty to make known, by our lives, the one true religion, which is found<sup>7 2</sup> in the Catholic Church.<sup>7 3</sup> We are "the light of the world."<sup>7 4</sup> If we are careless about our knowledge of the faith, our religious and moral life, or the way we present it, we contribute to atheism and agnosticism.<sup>7 5</sup>

Our practice of religion must include:

- adoration.<sup>7 6</sup>
- prayer.<sup>7 7</sup>
- sacrifice, principally the Mass.<sup>7 8</sup>
- the making and keeping of promises and vows,<sup>7 9</sup> both
  - those we make in Baptism, Matrimony, and Holy Orders; and
  - those made by consecrated men and women: poverty, chastity, obedience, and enclosure.

We must avoid:

- sacrilege:<sup>8 0</sup> profaning a sacred thing — especially the Holy Eucharist, but also the other Sacraments, liturgical actions, and consecrated persons, things, or places.
- tempting God:<sup>8 1</sup> testing His goodness and power by word or deed, as Satan did when he tried to induce Jesus to throw Himself down from the temple.<sup>8 2</sup>
- simony:<sup>8 3</sup> trying to buy or sell spiritual things.<sup>8 4</sup> For example, priests must ask nothing for administering the Sacraments beyond the offerings the Church authorizes<sup>8 5</sup> on the principle that the workman "is worth his keep."<sup>8 6</sup>

### Idols

Idolatry<sup>8 7</sup> means the worship of idols, like the golden calf,<sup>8 8</sup> and the veneration of false gods, as in polytheism<sup>8 9</sup> and satanism. It also includes making a god of power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, *etc.*<sup>9 0</sup>

To help the Israelites avoid idolatry, God forbade them to make idols. "You saw no form at all on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire," Moses explained. "Be strictly on your guard, therefore, not to degrade

68 See C.S. Lewis: *The Four Loves*.

69 See CCC 2093.

70 See CCC 2094.

71 From the Latin *acedia* ("apathy," "torpor," "sloth"), from the Greek *akedia* ("negligence," "apathy").

72 Or "which subsists" (from the Latin *subsistere* ("stay, remain")). By this verb, Vatican II "sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that 'outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth' (Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 8); that is, in those churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Dominus Iesus*, 16).

73 See the talk on "Bearing Witness: Living As a Catholic."

74 Mt 5:14. See CCC 2105.

75 See CCC 2125.

76 See CCC 2096-2097.

77 See CCC 2098. Also see the talk on "Prayer."

78 See CCC 2099-2100. Also see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

79 See CCC 2101-2103.

80 See CCC 2120.

81 See CCC 2119.

82 See Mt 4:5-7; Lk 4:9-12.

83 See CCC 2121-2122.

84 Named after Simon the magician, who tried to buy the apostles' spiritual power (see Acts 8:20).

85 See *Code of Canon Law*, 281-282, 848, 945-958.

86 See Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18.

87 From the Greek *eidolon* ("phantom," "idol").

88 See Ex 32; Ps 115:4-8, 135:15-18.

89 From the Greek *poly* ("many") plus *theos* ("god").

90 See CCC 2112-2114.

yourselves by fashioning an idol to represent any figure."<sup>91</sup>

However, it is not images *per se* that God forbade, but worshipping and serving them.<sup>92</sup> He Himself commanded the making of images that pointed to salvation,<sup>93</sup> like the bronze serpent<sup>94</sup> and the Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>95</sup>

Many Old Testament rules, formulated originally to help people obey the Decalogue, became unnecessary once God had become Man.<sup>96</sup>

For example, the ancient Jews became ritually unclean if they touched a leper,<sup>97</sup> a corpse,<sup>98</sup> or a menstruating woman,<sup>99</sup> but Jesus did touch them, healing the leprosy<sup>100</sup> and the woman's hemorrhage<sup>101</sup> and raising the corpse to life.<sup>102</sup> The Jews were commanded not to eat certain "unclean" foods,<sup>103</sup> but Peter was told, "What God has purified, you are not to call unclean."<sup>104</sup>

God did not let Moses see His Face,<sup>105</sup> but in Jesus, we do "see our God made visible."<sup>106</sup> In 787, the Church proclaimed that by becoming Man, God the Son had introduced a new "economy" of images. "The honour which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents," she explained, "and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented."<sup>107</sup>

### Idolatry

However, idolatry is not just "false pagan worship." It also includes rejecting or denying God's "unique lordship" by "divinizing" anything else; that is, by attributing powers that are God's alone to any other thing or person.<sup>108</sup>

Accordingly, the following are forbidden:

- superstition:<sup>109</sup> attributing a magical importance to things or rituals (even prayers, sacramentals,<sup>110</sup> or Sacraments).
- magic or sorcery:<sup>111</sup> attempting to harness occult powers and gain supernatural power over others (as in spiritism), whether for good or for evil.
- divination:<sup>112</sup> having recourse to Satan, demons, or the dead (as in spiritism).<sup>113</sup>
- any devices or practices falsely supposed to "unveil" the future:<sup>114</sup> astrology,<sup>115</sup> horoscopes,<sup>116</sup> Ouija boards, mediums, tarot cards, omens, lots, charms, clairvoyance, fortune-telling, palm-reading, psychic reading, *etc.*

Even in the Old Testament, when God spoke "to our fathers by the prophets,"<sup>117</sup> He explicitly forbade fortune-telling, soothsaying, divining, casting

91 Dt 5:15-16

92 See Dt 5:8-9.

93 See CCC 2130.

94 See Nm 21:8.

95 See Ex 25:18-22.

96 "With the old order destroyed, a universe cast down is renewed, and integrity of life is restored to us in Christ" (Easter Preface IV).

97 See Lv 15:19.

98 See Nm 5:2.

99 See Lv 12:2,5.

100 See Mt 8:3.

101 See Mk 5:25-34.

102 See Mk 5:35-43.

103 See Lv 11; Dt 14:3-21.

104 See Acts 10:9-16, 11:5-10.

105 See Ex 33:18-23.

106 CCC 477

107 Seventh Ecumenical Council, at Nicaea. The cross was not represented on public monuments until the fifth century, and then without the figure. Only after another 100 years did historical and realistic images of the crucified Christ appear. (See the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.)

108 See CCC 2113.

109 See CCC 2111.

110 See Pope John Paul II: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 28 (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph," Appendix 2).

111 See CCC 2117.

112 See CCC 2115-2116.

113 See CCC 2117.

114 See CCC 2116-2117.

115 Former name for practical astronomy, a legitimate science, but now "the art of judging the alleged occult influence of stars upon human affairs" (*Oxford Dictionary*).

116 The "signs of the Zodiac" are simply the names of the constellations (groups of stars) which, seen from the earth, fall into line with the sun month by month as the earth orbits the sun.



spells, consulting ghosts and spirits, and seeking oracles from the dead.<sup>118</sup> It was because of "abominations" like these that He drove the original inhabitants out of the Promised Land.<sup>119</sup> Israelites who practised them were put to death.<sup>120</sup>

Now, in the New Testament, God has "spoken to us by a Son."<sup>121</sup> In Him, God "spoke everything to us at once," and "He has no more to say." Therefore, anyone now "desiring some [new] vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour, but also of offending [God], by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty."<sup>122</sup>

Here lies the appeal of *New Age*: "some other novelty," some *alternative*.<sup>123</sup>

Christ is God's "one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word,"<sup>124</sup> and "it is through [His] Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained."<sup>125</sup>

Nevertheless, "idolatry remains a constant temptation."<sup>126</sup> People whose understanding of the faith is weak "mistakenly hold that the Christian religion does not inspire a profound spirituality, and so they seek elsewhere."<sup>127</sup> (Actually, "the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried."<sup>128</sup>)

To those who do "seek elsewhere," the great mystic John of the Cross gives God's answer: "If I have already told you all things in My Word, My Son, and if I have no other Word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on Him alone, because in Him I have spoken and revealed all, and in Him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire.... He is My entire locution<sup>129</sup> and response, vision, and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving Him to you as a Brother, Companion, Master, ransom, and reward."<sup>130</sup>

"Two evils have My people done," God said: "they have forsaken Me, the source of living waters; and "they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water."<sup>131</sup>

*New Age* has been fed by "ancient Egyptian occult practices, Cabbalism, early Christian gnosticism, Sufism, the lore of the Druids, Celtic Christianity, mediaeval alchemy, Renaissance hermeticism, Zen Buddhism, Yoga,<sup>132</sup> and so on."<sup>133</sup> Many of these movements "are explicitly anti-Christian."<sup>134</sup>

For example, *New Age* claims that humans "are born with a divine spark" that makes them "essentially divine, although they participate in this cosmic divinity at different levels of consciousness."<sup>135</sup>

No. "Life in Christ is not something so personal and private that it is restricted to the realm of consciousness. Nor is it merely a new level of awareness. It involves

117 Heb 1:1

118 See Dt 18:9-11.

119 See Lv 18:24-27; Dt 7:1-5, 18:12. Also see Paul Coulter: *Mass Killing in the Old Testament*.

120 See Dt 13.

121 Heb 1:1

122 John of the Cross: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chapter 22, 4. See CCC 65.

123 See the Vatican Working Group on New Religious Movements: *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 3.2, in which "alternative" occurs 29 times. See Appendix 4.

124 CCC 65

125 CCC 816

126 CCC 2113

127 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 1.5. See Appendix 4.

128 G.K. Chesterton: *What's Wrong With the World*, V

129 Direct supernatural communication to the ear, imagination, or intellect.

130 John of the Cross: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chapter 22, 4, after the passage quoted in CCC 65.

131 Jer 2:13

132 See Appendix 7.

133 See *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 2.1. *New Age* "has a marked preference for Eastern or pre-Christian religions" (*Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 2.3.4.2). See Appendix 4.

134 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 6.1. See Appendix 4.

135 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 2.3.4.1. "The Human Potential Movement is the clearest example of the conviction that humans are divine, or contain a divine spark within themselves" (*Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 4, "The human being: is there one universal being or are there many individuals?" See Appendix 4.

being transformed in our soul and in our body by participation in the sacramental life of the Church."<sup>136</sup>

Can we not choose what is good from *New Age* teaching?

No. "It is not possible to isolate some elements of *New Age* religiosity as acceptable to Christians, while rejecting others."<sup>137</sup> To make quite sure we do not offend God by even a hint of idolatry, we must avoid all of it, including:<sup>138</sup>

Alternative religions	Geomancy	Palm reading
Amulets and talismans	Gnosticism	Power of the mind
Animal magnetism, mesmerism	Healing: crystal, faith, energy, magnetic, psychic, pranic	Pyramid power
Animism, paganism	Heavy metal music, death metal music	Reading of omens, tea leaves, animal body parts
Astral projection/travel	Horoscopes	Reiki
Astrology	Magic	Reincarnation, past life readings
Automatic hand writing, spirit writing	Mediumship	Rosicrucians
Cabbala	Mind control programs like Silva mind control	Santeria
Consulting an arbularyo, mangkukulam, mangbabarang, mangtatawas, manghihilot, espiritista	Necromancy	Satanism
Crystal gazing, crystal balls	New Age books like Gnostic gospels (Urencha book), Bible codes, Celestine prophecy	Science of the mind
Consulting spirit guides, familiar spirits, guardian spirits, ancestral spirits	Numerology	Scientology
Cults	Offerings to idols, rituals like food offering, animal sacrifice, blood offerings	Shamanism
Divination using rod and pendulum to find water, treasure, etc.	Opening the "third eye"	Sorcery
Edgar Cayce's teachings and readings.	Oracion (magical incantations)	Spellcasting, casting curses (e.g., evil eye)
Feng shui	Oracles	Spirit of the glass or coin
Fortune-telling	Ouija boards	Spiritualism
Freemasonry, secret societies	Pacts with Satan or other deities or pagan idols	Tarot card reading
		Trance channelling
		Transcendental meditation
		Use of wands
		Voodoo
		Wicca
		Witchcraft

It is claimed that these practices are "spiritual," not "scientific," for "science and technology have clearly failed to deliver all they once seemed to promise."<sup>139</sup> However, Christians know that "spirits," however powerful, may be evil.<sup>140</sup>

We need not investigate all the above forms of idolatry; all we have to do is stay with the Catholic Church. As the captain said to a passenger, "I don't have to know where all the rocks are; I just have to know where the deep water is."

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## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT<sup>141</sup>

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."<sup>142</sup>

God reveals His name,<sup>143</sup> in trust and intimacy, to those who believe in Him, like a person in authority who is normally addressed formally but who reveals his name to certain favoured individuals. We must never abuse this name, but keep it in mind in loving adoration, never speaking it except to praise and glorify it.<sup>144</sup>

We must avoid:

136 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 3.5. See Appendix 4.

137 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 4.2. See Appendix 4.

138 Father Jose Francisco C. Syquia, director of the Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism: *Catholic Handbook of Deliverance Prayer*

139 *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 2.1. See Appendix 4.

140 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall." "In *New Age* there is no distinction between good and evil" (*Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, 2.2.2. See Appendix 4.)

141 See CCC 2142-2159.

142 Ex 20:7

143 See CCC 203-204.

144 See CCC 2143.

- all magical use<sup>145</sup> of God's name.
- abuse or careless use of the name of God, Jesus, Mary, or any of the saints.<sup>146</sup>
- perjury, or false oaths: calling on God as Witness to a lie.<sup>147</sup>
- breaking promises or vows that are made in God's name and thus invoke His "honour, fidelity, truthfulness, and authority."<sup>148</sup>
- blasphemy:<sup>149</sup>
  - uttering outward or inward words of hatred, reproach, or defiance against God.
  - speaking ill or disrespectfully of God, the Church, the saints, or sacred things.
  - using God's name to cover up criminal practices, reduce people to servitude, torture them, or put them to death.

### Taking oaths

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn,'" Jesus said. "But I say to you, do not swear at all.... Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'; anything more than this comes from the evil one."<sup>150</sup>

Certainly, then, we must not use God's holy name for trivial matters. However, speaking about a serious matter — his care for the Church in Corinth — St. Paul said, "I call on God as my Witness."<sup>151</sup>

The Church teaches, therefore, that oaths made for good and serious reasons are lawful.<sup>152</sup> For example, we may take an oath of allegiance to a country, or take an oath in court, where it is demanded by legitimate civil authorities.<sup>153</sup>

### THE THIRD COMMANDMENT<sup>154</sup>

*"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath<sup>155</sup> to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work."*<sup>156</sup>

The Book of Genesis says that in six days, "God created the heavens and the earth."<sup>157</sup> Then He "looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good."<sup>158</sup> "Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work He had been doing, He rested on the seventh day from all the work He had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy."<sup>159</sup>

Let us consider what this means.

Unlike God, humans are *subject to time*; that is, we experience reality moment by moment, one bit at a time. Part of it — our past — has already escaped us. Another part — our future — has not yet come within our grasp.

But God is infinite. There is no reality that has already escaped Him or that He has not yet grasped. He sees everything in the timeless "now" of His "eternal present."<sup>160</sup> Anything He does or is, He does or is without beginning or end. In particular, "the creative act" by which He "founds the world" is "unceasing."<sup>161</sup>

145 See CCC 2149.

146 See CCC 2146.

147 See CCC 2150-2152.

148 See CCC 2147.

149 See CCC 2148.

150 Mt 5:31-37

151 2 Cor 1:23

152 See CCC 2153-2155.

153 See CCC 2154. A truthful and legitimate oath "highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth" (CCC 2151). It invokes God's truthfulness "as a pledge of one's own truthfulness (CCC 2150). If an oath is required by illegitimate civil authorities, we may refuse it. If taking the oath could indicate approval of an authority which unjustly requires it, we should refuse it. When an oath is required for evil purposes, we must refuse it (see CCC 2155).

154 See CCC 2168-2188.

155 Day of rest; from the Hebrew *shabbat* ("cease," "end," "rest)."

156 Ex 20:8-10

157 Gn 1:1

158 Gn 1:31

159 Gn 2:2-3

160 See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity."



God's seventh-day rest, then, does not mark the end of His work. "My Father is at work until now, and I am at work as well," Jesus said when He was criticized for curing people on the sabbath.<sup>162</sup> Nor is God's rest inactivity; rather "it emphasizes the fullness" of what He has accomplished. He looks on all His creation with "a gaze full of joyous delight," but especially on man, its "crown."<sup>163</sup>

The Genesis story has "intense religious significance." First — against all "temptations to divinize the world itself" — it portrays God as Creator and Lord. Second, it calls the world good "insofar as it remains tied to its Origin," God.<sup>164</sup>

### Rhythm

That second point is important for humans, because at the "completion" of His work — at the end of the sixth day<sup>165</sup> — God made man His co-worker,<sup>166</sup> commissioning him "to subdue the earth and all it contains, to rule the world in justice and holiness, and, recognizing God as the Creator of all things, to refer himself and the totality of things" to God.<sup>167</sup>

Genesis shows us how. It portrays what God did "as an example for man."<sup>168</sup> It shows that we, who are subject to time and change, can offer everything to God, Who is timeless and permanent, through a rhythm of work and rest.

Rhythm reconciles *change* and *permanence*. For example, in the rhythm of the seasons, each season is different, yet the same every year. In the rhythm of the liturgical year, fast and feast alternate, but the same fast and feast as last year.<sup>169</sup>

All time belongs to God. He is the God of all days, not just one day.<sup>170</sup> However, the only way humans can acknowledge Him as such is by setting aside time for work and time for rest.<sup>171</sup> The Third Commandment, then, is not just a religious discipline; rather it defines and expresses our relationship with God.<sup>172</sup>

The rhythmic sabbath interruption of work calls us "to rest in the Lord, bringing the whole of creation to Him in praise and thanksgiving."<sup>173</sup> It reminds us that creation is fundamentally His work, for we, His co-workers, are totally dependent on Him. That realization must inspire our work days and fill our rest day.<sup>174</sup>

### The Lord's Day

The Third Commandment appears in the Bible three times.

- The first time, God says, "In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."<sup>175</sup> So the sabbath recalls our *creation*.
- The second time, God explains that the sabbath is to be "the token" — or sign — of His covenant with us, to be kept "throughout the generations."<sup>176</sup> So the sabbath recalls our *covenant with God*.
- The third time, God adds, "Remember that you, too, were once slaves in Egypt,

161 Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 11

162 See Jn 5:1-17.

163 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 11. God "made the heavens," St. Ambrose said, "but I do not read that He found rest there;... I read instead that He made man and that then He rested" (see Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 61).

164 Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 9

165 See Gn 1:27-28.

166 See CCC 306.

167 Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 10. God "entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving [Him] alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures" (Eucharistic Prayer 4).

168 Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 11. It gives us an "anthropomorphic image of God's work" (Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 10).

169 See C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 25. Also see the talk on "The Liturgical Year."

170 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 14.

171 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 15.

172 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 13.

173 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 16. Also see Dn 3:57-90.

174 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 15.

175 Ex 20:8-11

176 See Ex 31:12-17.

and the Lord, your God, brought you from there with His strong hand."<sup>177</sup> As we have seen, this first Pasch foreshadowed the new Pasch, by which Jesus accomplished our re-creation.<sup>178</sup> And in this re-creation, Jesus followed the pattern of the first creation — "whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise."<sup>179</sup>

- On Good Friday, the sixth day of the week, just before the sabbath began at sundown,<sup>180</sup> He shouted from the cross, "Now it is finished!"<sup>181</sup>

- On Holy Saturday, the seventh day of the week, the sabbath, He rested in the tomb.

- On Easter Sunday, the first day of the week,<sup>182</sup> He began the new creation by rising from the dead.

So the sabbath recalls our *re-creation*.

Obedience to the Third Commandment, then, entails not just the interruption of work, but also the celebration of our creation, our covenant with God, and our re-creation through His Son.<sup>183</sup> Only in this celebration will we "experience a tremor of the Creator's joy" when "He saw that all He had made was very good."<sup>184</sup>

### Christ's Day: the Church's day

The "new creation"<sup>185</sup> began when Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, the first day of the week. Accordingly, the early Christians made Sunday a festival,<sup>186</sup> rejoicing in Christ as the "first-born of all creatures"<sup>187</sup> and "the first-born of the dead."<sup>188</sup>

They also marked Sunday as the day when Christ had instituted the Sacrament of Penance,<sup>189</sup> the Holy Spirit had descended on the apostles,<sup>190</sup> Peter had given his first public discourse,<sup>191</sup> and the apostles had performed the first Baptisms.<sup>192</sup>

Even the day's name — "the day of the sun," still used in some modern languages<sup>193</sup> — was appropriate, for Christ is "the light of the world"<sup>194</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended as tongues of "fire."<sup>195</sup>

The early Christians, then, made Sunday an *anamnesis*:<sup>196</sup> not just the *recollection* of past events, but a *celebration* of Christ's living presence as Head of His Mystical Body. It was a communal<sup>197</sup> event, not just individual;<sup>198</sup> they met in their homes, often before sunrise, to celebrate Mass together.<sup>199</sup> "Leave everything on the Lord's Day," the *Didascalia*<sup>200</sup> urged, "and run diligently to your

177 Dt 5:15

178 See the talks on "The History of Our Salvation" and "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

179 Jn 5:17-19

180 See Jn 19:31.

181 All the evangelists report the loud cry (see Mt 27:50; Mk 15:37; Lk 23:46), but only John reports the actual words (see Jn 19:30). Moreover, John reports that Jesus had already said the same thing (see Jn 17:1-4) at the Last Supper — the same event, sacramentally, as Calvary (see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice").

182 See Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1.

183 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 17.

184 See Gn 1:31. See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 17.

185 2 Cor 5:17. See Gal 6:15.

186 "We celebrate Sunday" because of Christ's Resurrection, "and we do so not only at Easter but also at each turning of the week" (Pope Innocent I, 401-417: *Ad Decentium* XXV, 4, 7).

187 Col 1:15

188 Col 1:18. See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 18.

189 The evening of Easter Sunday; see Jn 20:22-23.

190 Pentecost, fifty days after Easter; see Acts 2:2-3.

191 On the day of Pentecost; see Acts 2:14-40.

192 See Acts 2:41. Sunday is not only the proper day for Baptism (see *Code of Canon Law*, 856), but also the day when the Mass may include the "Rite for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water," recalling our Baptism.

193 For example, English "Sunday" and German "Sonntag."

194 Jn 9:5

195 See Acts 2:3.

196 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

197 See Acts 2:42.

198 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 31.

199 See John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 21. Also see Acts 2:46.

200 A third-century Christian text which claims to comprise "the Catholic doctrine of the twelve apostles

assembly, because it is your praise of God."<sup>201</sup>

On Sunday, especially, the Church celebrates Mass. She thanks God the Father for the gifts of the past week; glorifies Him *through, with, and in* Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit;<sup>202</sup> and dismisses us with the command to make our whole life a spiritual sacrifice to God:<sup>203</sup> "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."<sup>204</sup>

"Sunday, before being a precept, is a gift that God makes to His people." The Church "safeguards" this gift with a precept.<sup>205</sup> We have a grave obligation, then, to attend Mass on Sunday, if possible, even when we are on holiday. In 1917 the obligation was embodied in the Church's Code of Canon Law.<sup>206</sup>

### A holy day

Mass<sup>207</sup> is the heart of Sunday, but obeying the Third Commandment means living all of it — family life, social life, relaxation — so that "the peace and joy of the risen Lord emerge."<sup>208</sup> For example, families can eat together, listen to one another, share their faith, and pray together, especially the Church's Evening Prayer.<sup>209</sup> It may be difficult to keep Sunday holy in a non-Christian society, but we should try to please God, not settle for minimalism and mediocrity.<sup>210</sup>

To celebrate Sunday to the full, we must rediscover Christian joy:<sup>211</sup> the joy of the apostles<sup>212</sup> and the women<sup>213</sup> at the Resurrection, the joy to which Christ will welcome us at our death.<sup>214</sup> In a sense, this joy is a virtue — a good habit — and so it has to be *nurtured*.<sup>215</sup> For example, think of the effort we put into evoking joy at Christmas, at Easter, on birthdays, *etc.*

"If you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honourable," God said; "if you honour it by not following your ways, seeking your own interests, or speaking with malice — then you shall delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth."<sup>216</sup>

### Man's day

Sunday, then, is "the Lord's holy day," but it is also "man's day." Jesus, often accused of violating the Lord's Day,<sup>217</sup> said, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."<sup>218</sup> As "Lord of the Sabbath,"<sup>219</sup> He restored its liberating character, carefully safeguarding the rights of God and the rights of man.<sup>220</sup>

Sunday has not always been a secular "day off." Only in the fourth century did Roman civil law decree that "the day of the sun" would be free from work.<sup>221</sup> Since then, in Christian countries, it has been a day of rest as well as worship.

Sunday has "surpassed and fulfilled" the Jewish sabbath,<sup>222</sup> but the reasons that

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and the holy disciples of our Lord."

201 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 46.

202 Words said at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 42.

203 See Rom 12:1. Also see Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 45.

204 Words that may be said in the Dismissal at Mass.

205 Pope Francis: *Desiderio Desideravi*, 65

206 See *Code of Canon Law*, 1248.

207 "Breaking Bread together"; see Acts 20:7.

208 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 52.

209 Liturgy of the Hours: Vespers. See the talk on "Prayer."

210 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 52.

211 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 57. "On the first day of the week, you shall all rejoice" (Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 55).

212 See Lk 24:41.

213 See Mt 28:8.

214 See Mt 25:23.

215 See the talk on "Virtue."

216 Is 58:13-14

217 See Mt 12:2, 12:9-10; Mk 2:24, 3:2; Lk 6:2, 6:7, 13:14; Jn 5:16, 18, 9:16.

218 Mk 2:27

219 Mt 12:8; Mk 2:28; Lk 6:5

220 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 63.

221 See the Edict of Constantine, July 3 321.

222 See CCC 2175.



underlie the Third Commandment remain valid.<sup>223</sup> Even for non-Christians, rest is sacred. We withdraw from earthly tasks, which can be burdened by exploitation, poor working conditions, or long hours, and renew our awareness that everything is God's.<sup>224</sup> We put daily concerns into perspective, see the true face of people we live with, and rediscover the beauties of nature.<sup>225</sup>

We must organize Sunday,<sup>226</sup> as far as we can, so that it excludes servile work<sup>227</sup> and activities that are incompatible with the day's holiness.<sup>228</sup> However, we must not let it degenerate into emptiness or boredom. It must offer freedom, spiritual enrichment, and opportunities for brotherly union<sup>229</sup> and aid to others.<sup>230</sup>

In honouring God, we discover ourselves.<sup>231</sup>

### Precepts of the Church<sup>232</sup>

The Church's Precepts<sup>233</sup> detail the "indispensable minimum" for keeping the first three commandments.<sup>234</sup> We must:

- *attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.*<sup>235</sup> We may attend Mass "wherever it is celebrated in a Catholic rite, either on a holy day itself or on the evening of the previous day."<sup>236</sup>
- *confess our sins at least once a year.*
- *humbly receive our Creator in Holy Communion at least during the Easter season.* We may receive the Eucharist twice in one day, but only at Mass.<sup>237</sup>
- *keep holy the holy days of obligation.* In Canada, the only ones not transferred to Sunday are Christmas Day, December 25, and the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, January 1.
- *observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.* The days of fasting (not total, but considerable) are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; the days of abstinence (from red meat and poultry), Ash Wednesday and all Fridays not solemnities.<sup>238</sup> The law of fasting binds Catholics from their 18th birthday (when they reach their "majority") to their 59th;<sup>239</sup> the law of abstinence, from their 14th birthday on.<sup>240</sup> If abstinence on a particular Friday would cause undue hardship to us or our neighbours, we may substitute some specific act of charity.<sup>241</sup>
- *provide for the material needs of the Church according to our ability.* (A good guide is one hour's pay per week.)

223 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 62.

224 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 65. This is all the more urgent now that science and technology have increased the power that man exercises through his work.

225 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 67.

226 "In law, a day is understood to be a space of twenty-four hours, to be reckoned continuously, and, unless expressly provided otherwise, it begins at midnight" (*Code of Canon Law*, 202, §1).

227 That is, the work we do to earn our living.

228 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 67.

229 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 68.

230 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 72. Jesus said, "All this I tell you that My joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12).

231 See Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 61.

232 See CCC 2041-2043.

233 See Appendix 2.

234 CCC 2041

235 *Code of Canon Law*, 1248, §1.

236 "The liturgical day runs from midnight to midnight," but the liturgical celebration of Sundays and solemnities "begins on the evening of the previous day" (see *Roman Missal*, "Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar," 3) with Evening Prayer I (see Pope John Paul II: *Dies Domini*, 49). In the Archdiocese of Vancouver, it begins at 4:00 pm, the earliest time for sundown anywhere in the archdiocese. No connection is made with sundown as the beginning of the Jewish day.

237 *Code of Canon Law*, 917

238 See the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Keeping Friday*, September 28 2006. Also see the talk on "The Liturgical Year."

239 See *Code of Canon Law*, 1252.

240 See the *Code of Canon Law*, 1252.

241 See the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Keeping Friday*, September 28 2006.

**Appendix 1: The Ten Commandments***Exodus 20:2-17**Traditional Catechetical Formula*

I, the Lord, am your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.

1. I am the Lord your God;

You shall not have other gods besides Me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate Me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love Me and keep My Commandments.

You shall not have strange gods before Me.

You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain; for the Lord will not leave unpunished him who takes His name in vain.

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

Honour your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord, your God, is giving you.

4. Honour your father and your mother.

You shall not kill.

5. You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

7. You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him.

9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

**Appendix 2: The Precepts of the Church**

1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
2. You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
3. You shall humbly receive your Creator in Holy Communion at least during the Easter Season.
4. You shall keep holy the holy days of obligation.
5. You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.
6. You shall provide for the material needs of the Church according to your ability.

### Appendix 3: God: the All-Punishing, All-Pardoning Father

From *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, Volume II:  
To Arthur Greeves, September 12 1933

Supposing you are taking a dog on a leash through a turnstile or past a post. He tries to go through on the wrong side and gets his lead looped round the post. You see that he cannot do it, and therefore pull him back.

You pull him back *because* you want to let him go forward. He wants exactly the same thing, namely to go forward, but for that very reason he resists your pull, or, if he is an obedient dog, yields to it reluctantly, as a matter of duty, in opposition to his own will, although in fact it is only by yielding to you that he will ever succeed in getting where he wants.

If the dog could understand, we would say to him, "If by your will you mean what you really want to do, namely to get forward along the road, I not only understand this desire but also share it. Forward is exactly where I want you to go. If by your will, on the other hand, you mean your will to pull against the collar and try to force yourself forward in a direction which is no use, then, of course, I understand it; but just because I understand it, I cannot possibly share it. In fact, the more I sympathize with your real wish (the wish to get on), the less I can sympathize with your resistance to the collar."

God not only understands, but also shares, our desire for fullness of life, complete and ecstatic happiness. He made us for no other purpose than to enjoy it. However, He knows, and we do not, how it can be attained, really and permanently. He knows that most of our efforts to reach it actually put it further and further out of our reach.

For example, take a sin of lust. The overwhelming thirst for rapture is good and even divine. However, it will never be quenched in lust, as we try to quench it. If we submit to the collar and come round the post to the right side, God will guide us as quickly as He can to what we really wanted all the time.

It may not be very like what we now think we want, but it will be more like it than some of us suppose. In any case, it will be the real thing, not a consolation prize or substitute. If we had it, we would not need to fight against sensuality as something impure; rather we would spontaneously turn away from it as something dull, cold, abstract, and artificial.

When we are tempted to sin (that is, to take the pleasures God has made in the wrong ways, or at the wrong times), we must remember that just because God wants for us what we really want, and just because He knows the only way to get it, He must, in a sense, be quite ruthless towards sin (even what we think of as trivial sin).

He is not like a human authority who can be begged off or caught in an indulgent mood. The more He loves us, the more determined He must be to pull us back from our way, which leads nowhere, into His way, which leads where we want to go.<sup>1</sup> However, there is no possible hope of getting where we want to go except by going God's way.

We must get rid of the idea (which surfaces in every temptation) that there is some place apart from God into which He forbids us to trespass, some kind of delight which He does not appreciate or arbitrarily forbids, but which would really delight us if only He would allow it. "God probably doesn't exist, so go ahead and enjoy yourself," as the sign says.

The truth is that apart from God there is literally nothing. The life we desire is either what God is trying to give us as quickly as He can, or else a false picture of what He is trying to give us, a picture which would not attract us for a moment if we saw the real thing. He knows what we want, even in our worst sins, and He is longing to give it to us.

<sup>1</sup> This is why George MacDonald calls God "the all-punishing, all-pardoning Father" (George MacDonald: *What's Mine's Mine*, Chapter XX). "We go the wrong way again and again, and each time He forgives us, just as the dog's master repeatedly extricates the dog, even after he has tied the whole leash around the post.



## Appendix 4: Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life

### A Christian Reflection on the "New Age"

#### *Editors' Note*

This document is based on a provisional report published in 2003 by the Vatican's Working Group on New Religious Movements. For the sake of brevity, clarity, and ease of reading, we have edited it, principally to eliminate repetition, to re-order the subject matter more coherently, and to distinguish between *New Age* thought and Catholic doctrine more clearly. However, we have not omitted any of the subjects addressed in the Vatican text, available from [vatican.va](http://vatican.va).

The result is not a model of logic or coherence. In fact — as the Vatican text itself states, "any attempt to understand and evaluate *New Age* — like this one — is bound to evoke the criticism that it cannot do justice to its subject, for *New Age* tries to break out of what it sees as the constriction of rational discourse."

The Church "has always valued the role of reason in justifying faith and in understanding God, the world, and the human person," it says. But "*New Age* preaches the systematic fusion of elements that have generally been clearly distinguished in Western culture.... It is not playing with words to say that *New Age* thrives on confusion."

*New Age* terms in the text can be found in the glossary at the end.

#### FOREWORD

This document is a *provisional report* on the complex phenomenon known as *New Age*, which is influencing many aspects of contemporary culture.

It is the fruit of reflection by the *Working Group on New Religious Movements*, composed of staff members from the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Interreligious Dialogue (the principal redactors for this project), the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

We address it primarily to Catholics engaged in preaching the Gospel and teaching the faith at any level in the Church, so that they can consider how *New Age* responds to the spiritual hunger of contemporary men and women and explain to them how it conflicts with the Catholic faith.

It would be unwise and untrue to say that all of *New Age* is bad. Nevertheless, in view of its underlying non-Catholic — sometimes even anti-Catholic — visions, it cannot be reconciled with Catholic doctrine or spirituality.

#### **To those who are searching**

However, we also direct this document to those seeking the fullness of life, with a genuine yearning for a deeper spirituality — something that will touch their hearts and make sense of a confusing and often alienating world.

As Pope John Paul II said to a group of bishops from the United States: "Pastors must honestly ask whether they have paid sufficient attention to the thirst of the human heart for the true 'living water,' which only Christ our Redeemer can give" (see Jn 4:7-13).

Many people feel that Catholicism no longer offers them — or perhaps never did offer them — something they need. When their understanding of the Catholic faith is weak, they mistakenly hold that it does not inspire a profound spirituality, and so they seek elsewhere.

The fact that they do may be blamed — at least in part — on a lack of serious attention in their own communities to themes which, in fact, the Catholic Church

does address: the importance of man's spiritual dimension and its integration with the whole of life, the search for life's meaning, the link between human beings and the rest of creation, and the necessity for personal and social transformation.

They see something right in *New Age's* criticism of the materialism of daily life; the reduction of medicine and psychiatry to the purely chemical; and unrestrained individualism, which promotes egoism and ignores our neighbours, the future, and the environment.<sup>1</sup>

We are convinced that these people have a true thirst for God, but we know that *New Age* cannot satisfy it. Instead, like Pope John Paul, we offer them the Gospel message, relying on its "perennial freshness" and its "capacity to transform and renew those who accept it."<sup>2</sup>

### A challenge

To meet the challenge of *New Age*, pastoral workers must respond to Saint Peter's instruction: "Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and a clear conscience" (1 Pt 3:15).

They must also recognize and understand the deep longing for God implanted in the hearts of those who ask. They must present Jesus Christ to them as the Way to happiness, the Truth about God and man, and the fullness of Life.

Therefore, they must know and understand authentic Catholic doctrine and spirituality, root themselves more and more firmly in their faith, come closer and closer to Christ, and always be ready to follow Him. They must also know and understand *New Age* as a cultural current.

Accordingly, this document describes the *New Age* movement as we meet it today in our culture, compares it with the Catholic faith, and makes some pastoral suggestions.

It does not provide complete answers to all the questions raised by the movement, for that would make it very long, and the information is available elsewhere. Those who wish to study the subject more deeply can consult the bibliography.

We invite *all* Catholics to read this document, so that they can respond to the *New Age* adherents they meet in everyday life. The pastoral effectiveness of the Church in the third millennium depends largely on how well they are prepared to communicate the Gospel message effectively.

### A timely document

Astrologers believe that somewhere near the start of the third millennium, two thousand years after the birth of Christ, the Age of Pisces — which they call the Christian age — draws to a close and the Age of Aquarius begins. Hence the term *New Age*.

Scientifically, "Aquarius" is the name of a constellation in the Zodiac. It is taken from ancient astrological mythology, but it has come to signify the desire for a radically new world.

Some people say that the *New Age* is already passing, and they refer to the "next" age.<sup>3</sup> However, the Internet, television, radio, bookshops, and the plethora of self-help groups seem to tell a different story. In the West, today, *New Age* is very much alive and part of the cultural scene.

Moreover, the ease and speed with which we can now communicate — thanks to the technological revolution of the last few years — have brought *New Age* ideas to people of all ages and backgrounds, and many Catholics are not sure what it is all about.

The Internet, especially, has acquired enormous influence, especially on younger people. It is a congenial and fascinating way of acquiring information. But it can also be a vehicle of misinformation. Not every website labelled "Catholic" or "Christian" reflects Church teaching, and *New Age* websites range from the serious to

the ridiculous.

People need — and have a right to — reliable information on the differences between Catholicism and *New Age*. For both these reasons, now seems to be the right moment for a Catholic assessment of the movement.

## CHAPTER I HISTORY

### Western esotericism

The name "*New Age*" seems to have come from Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry at the time of the French and American Revolutions, but there is little in it that is new. In reality, it is only a contemporary variant of Western *esotericism*.

Esotericism can be traced back to the Gnostic groups that arose in the early days of Catholicism. As it developed, it progressively rejected God as a Person and increasingly paid attention to other entities. These entities — invented, adapted, and added to as necessary — were often inserted into Catholic belief as intermediaries between God and humanity.

Esotericism gained momentum at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Growing in parallel with scientific world-views, it acquired rational "justification" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

*New Age* itself was born of esotericism when people rejected science and technology, which had failed to deliver what they had seemed to promise, and turned to the spiritual realm for the humane, the beautiful, the meaning of life, and liberation from the oppression and alienation of Western society.

Because its early exponents searched so widely, *New Age* became very eclectic. At first sight, it seems to signify a "return to religion," but that religion is not Catholicism, or even Christianity.

### Part of the main stream

Initially, the Garden community at Findhorn in North-East Scotland and the Centre For The Development Of Human Potential at Esalen in Big Sur California were the *New Age* movement's two power-houses. To some extent, they still are.

However, the first clear signs of the *New Age* movement in Western culture were the 1969 festival at Woodstock in New York State and the musical *Hair*, whose song "Aquarius" outlined the movement's main themes.<sup>4</sup>

The idealism of the 1960s and 1970s no longer seems revolutionary. Its links with left-wing political ideology have faded, psychedelic drugs are much less prominent, and it is no longer predominantly adolescents who are involved.

A great deal has happened in the meantime. The "spiritual" and "mystical" tendencies formerly restricted to the counterculture are now an established part of the main stream, affecting such diverse areas as medicine, science, art, and religion. Western culture has become more aware of politics and ecology. There is a growing global consciousness and increasing fear of a looming ecological crisis.

### Uncertainty

All this has had an enormous impact on lifestyles. Today, many people today live in uncertainty.<sup>5</sup> They find the elements that were once central in Western society untrustworthy or lacking in genuine authority. Examples are Catholicism, which they see as patriarchal and authoritarian; political institutions, which seem to be unable to improve the world; and allopathic medicine, which fails to heal people radically.

This uncertainty has created a climate where people look inward — to themselves — for meaning and strength. They also search for alternative institutions, which they hope will respond to their deep needs and unsatisfied hungers.

The unstructured and chaotic life of the alternative communities of the 1970s no longer attracts them. They now search for discipline and structure. These are key elements in the immensely popular "mystical" or "fatalistic" movements, in which



people communicate with another world to discover their fate, or destiny, or learn how to tune in to the right "frequencies" to make the most of themselves.

### Exaltation of 'self'

Much of *New Age*, then, is a reaction to contemporary culture. However, there are many ways in which it is that culture's offspring. The ground was prepared for it by the spread of relativism; the growth of antipathy or indifference to the Catholic faith; and the general acceptance of Darwin's theory of biological evolution in a "spiritualist" form, according to which the spiritual evolves from the physical.

Individuals in modern Western society, shaped by the Renaissance and the Reformation, do not want to be weighed down by patriarchy, extrinsic authority, or tradition; they are not inclined to rank "official" judgements above their own; they think of religion as a private affair; and they do not feel the need to "belong" to institutions — in spite of the fact that loneliness is one of modern life's great scourges.

In such a culture, people respond readily to a movement that celebrates the sacredness of the *self* — self-actualization, self-motivation, self-reliance, *etc.* — together with the primacy of freedom and human rights. It is not by coincidence that *New Age* shares many of the values of enterprise culture, the "prosperity Gospel," and the consumer culture.

In fact, the "consumer mentality" accounts for the growing number of people who claim that they can blend Catholicism and *New Age* thought by taking what strikes them as the best of both.<sup>6</sup> In this blending, they frequently step outside traditional theism, for certain *New Age* practices reduce God in order to advance the human individual.

Thus *New Age* appeals to people imbued with the values of modern culture, widely accepted even before *New Age* appeared.

### Rapid growth

*New Age*, which exalts "cosmic unity," has grown up in an era which almost universally exalts diversity. Western culture has replaced tolerance — a grudging acceptance of the idiosyncrasies of a person or a minority group — with a conscious disrespect for normality.

For many people, normality is now a morally loaded concept. In their minds, it is linked with absolute norms and beliefs and it indicates an inability to tolerate other views and convictions. It is in this atmosphere that alternative life-styles and theories have really "taken off": now it is not only acceptable, but positively desirable, to be different.<sup>7</sup>

People are involved with *New Age* in various ways and on many levels. Most of them do not belong to a group or movement; few are aware of its underlying principles. Most have been attracted by certain therapies or practices without knowing their backgrounds; others are simply occasional consumers of products labelled "*New Age*."

For example, people who use aromatherapy or listen to "*New Age*" music are usually interested in their effects on their health or well-being; only a few try to understand their theoretical (or "mystical") significance.

Such an approach is typical of consumers in a society where amusement and leisure are so important. *New Age* has adapted well to the laws of the market, and it has spread widely for that reason. In fact, it can be seen as a label for products created by applying marketing principles to a religious phenomenon<sup>8</sup> — a way of profiting from people's spiritual needs.

### Fed by the mass media

Like much of contemporary economics, *New Age* is a global phenomenon held together and fed with information by the mass media. In fact, it is arguable that the mass media created it. Certainly, they are responsible for the wide and rapid spread

of the notions held by its "believers" and sympathizers.

Insofar as *New Age* is a community, it is like a cybercommunity created by the Internet. Both are very loose associations in which relationships can be totally impersonal or only selectively interpersonal. Accordingly, there is no way of telling whether *New Age* was created by chance or by design.

For most people, *New Age* is a loose set of beliefs, therapies, and practices, which they select and combine without regard to compatibility or consistency. They see the world as cold, harsh, and heartless, plagued by economic instability, political uncertainty, and climatic change; they welcome the warmth *New Age* claims to bring by exalting feelings, instincts, emotions, and optimism.

*New Age* appeals to their unquenchable longing for "spirituality." It "does not demand any more faith or belief than going to the cinema,"<sup>9</sup> and yet it claims to satisfy that longing.

What *New Age* offers is often called simply "spiritual," rather than "religious," but it has much closer links to Eastern religions than many "consumers" realize. It is important for devotees to recognize these links before they join a "prayer-group," but it is also important for employees, because in a growing number of companies they are required to practise meditation and mind-expanding techniques as part of their work life.

### Attraction for Catholics

New ways of psychologically affirming the individual have become very popular among Catholics, even in retreat-houses, seminaries, and institutes of formation for religious. For example, some Catholic groups have used the Gnostic enneagram for character analysis.

There is also increasing nostalgia and curiosity about ancient wisdom and ritual, leading to the remarkable growth in popularity of esotericism and Gnosticism. Many Catholics are attracted to what is known — correctly or otherwise — as "Celtic" spirituality,<sup>10</sup> or to the religions of ancient peoples. Courses on spirituality and ancient or Eastern religions are a booming business. Books on such subjects are frequently labelled "*New Age*" for commercial purposes.

However, *New Age's* connections with those religions are not always clear. In fact, they are often denied. A full Catholic discernment of *New Age* thought and practice reveals that, like early Gnosticism, it is a compendium of positions that the Church identifies as heterodox — ancient Egyptian occultism, Cabbalism, early Christian Gnosticism, Sufism, the lore of the Druids, Celtic Christianity, mediaeval alchemy, Renaissance hermeticism, Zen Buddhism, Yoga, etc.<sup>11</sup>

*New Age* may respond in some way to human nature's legitimate spiritual longings, but it conflicts with Christian revelation.

## CHAPTER II BACKGROUND

### *New Age* Matrix

The matrix, or framework, of *New Age* thought is the esoteric-theosophical tradition that was widely accepted among European intellectuals in the 18th and 19th centuries. It involved freemasonry, spiritualism, occultism, and theosophy.

According to this world-view, correspondences, analogies, and influences link the invisible world to the visible: macrocosm to microcosm, planets to metals, planets to human body parts.

Nature is a living being, shot through with networks of sympathy and antipathy, animated by a light and a secret fire that humans try to control. People can contact the upper or lower worlds through rituals, imagination (an organ of the soul, or spirit), or mediators (angels, spirits, devils). By a spiritual itinerary of transformation, they can be initiated into the mysteries of God, the cosmos, and the self.

The goal is *gnosis*, the highest form of knowledge, equivalent to salvation. It

involves a search for the oldest and highest traditions in philosophy and religion and a secret (esoteric) doctrine that is the key to all "exoteric" traditions — those accessible to everyone. Esoteric teachings are handed down from master to disciple in a graduated program of initiation.

### Blavatsky

By the nineteenth century, esotericism had been largely secularized. Alchemy, magic, and astrology had evolved or been integrated into chemistry, science, and astronomy. Causal laws, evolution, psychology, and religious studies were typical of the culture of the time.

However, the earlier esotericism survived. It reached its clearest formulation in the work of Helena Blavatsky, a Russian medium. In 1875 she and Henry Olcott founded the Theosophical Society in New York.

The Society's goal was to fuse Eastern and Western traditions by forming "a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, caste or colour"; encouraging "the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science"; and investigating the "unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man."

However, for them, all these terms had theosophical meanings. By "universal brotherhood," they rejected what they saw as the "irrational bigotry" and "sectarianism" of Christianity. The "laws of nature" were psychic or occult. "Science" meant the occult sciences; "philosophy," *occulta philosophia*; and the "study of comparative religions," the search for a "primordial tradition" like the Hermeticist *philosophia perennis*.<sup>1 2</sup>

In her writings, Blavatsky promoted the emancipation of women and attacked the "male" God of Judaism, urging a return to the mother-goddess of Hinduism and the practice of feminine virtues.

Blavatsky's work was continued by Annie Besant, in the vanguard of the feminist movement, and by Wicca and the "women's spirituality" movement of today.

### James, Jung

In her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Marilyn Ferguson has a chapter on the precursors of the Age of Aquarius — those who first talked of self-transcendence and the expansion of consciousness. Two of them were the American psychologist William James and the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung.

James defined religion as experience, not dogma, and taught that humans can become architects of their own destiny by changing their mental attitudes. Jung stressed the transcendence of consciousness and defined the collective unconscious as a store of symbols and memories shared with people of all ages and cultures.

In the words of Wouter Hanegraaff, both these men contributed to a "sacralization of psychology" — now an important element of *New Age* thought and practice.

Jung, he said, "psychologized esotericism" and "sacralized psychology" by filling it with esoteric speculation. The result was an identification of God with the human psyche, for both are "mind."<sup>1 3</sup> Accused of psychologizing Christianity, Jung replied that "psychology is the modern myth and only in terms of the current myth can we understand the faith."<sup>1 4</sup>

Jung's psychology sheds light on many aspects of Christian faith — particularly evil — but his religious convictions varied so much during his life that he left behind only a confused image of God. However, the cult of the sun seems to have been central.

So does his identification of God as a human's vital energy (libido).<sup>1 5</sup> This is "the god within" he spoke of, the divinity he postulated in every human being. "This comparison is no mere play on words," he said.<sup>1 6</sup>

The correspondence of the inner world to the outer lies in the collective unconscious, he said; the path to the inner universe, where God is, lies in the



unconscious.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the identity of psychology and spirituality became firmly embedded in the Human Potential Movement, developed at the Esalen Institute in California. Its "transpersonal psychology," strongly influenced by Jung and Eastern religions, offers a contemplative journey in which science meets mysticism. Stressing bodiliness, expanding consciousness, and the collective unconscious, it urges us to realize our potential by searching for "the god within" — the god that, deep down, we already are.

To reach that god, we must go beyond our ego and achieve a "peak experience," a "mystical" experience of fusion with God and the cosmos, through meditation, parapsychological experiences, or hallucinogenic drugs.

### CHAPTER III NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

*New Age* is not a "new religious movement" in the usual sense of the term; nor is it what we normally mean by a "cult" or a "sect." It is much more diffuse and informal, spread across cultures in music, films, seminars, workshops, retreats, and therapies.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than a single, uniform movement, it is a loose network of practitioners who think globally but act locally, who do not necessarily know each other and meet rarely, if ever. Its structure is syncretistic, incorporating many diverse elements, so its members can share interests and links to various degrees and at various levels of commitment.

Some people, therefore, call *New Age* a "milieu"<sup>18</sup> or an "audience cult."<sup>19</sup> However, others describe it as "a very coherent current of thought,"<sup>20</sup> a deliberate challenge to modern culture.

Many *New Age* trends, practices, and attitudes are, indeed, part of a broad, easily identifiable reaction to mainstream culture, whether or not they carry the *New Age* label. (Some people dislike the term *New Age* and use "alternative spirituality" instead.)

Accordingly, we can describe *New Age* as a broad social "movement," like the Civil Rights movement or the Peace Movement.

In spite of the fact that *New Age* responds to religious questions and needs, it is controversial to call it a "religion." In fact, many of its adherents carefully distinguish between "religion" and "spirituality," for *New Age* rejects organized religion. In fact, at its heart is the belief that the age of particular religions is over.

*New Age* is best located in the broad category of "esoteric religiosity,"<sup>21</sup> which exalts human experience.

However, any attempt to understand and evaluate it — like this one — is bound to evoke the criticism that it cannot do justice to its subject, for *New Age* tries to break out of what it sees as the constriction of rational discourse.

#### What is new

The term *New Age* clearly suggests a momentous turning-point in history. Astrologers predict that it will occur early in the third millennium, with a change from the Age of Pisces, dominated by Christianity, to the Age of Aquarius.<sup>22</sup> (The high profile of the "Age of Aquarius" — which is a vision, not a theory — in the *New Age* movement is due largely to the influence of theosophy, spiritualism, anthroposophy, and their esoteric antecedents.)

This prediction of change seems to express a wish for change, not so much in the world as in the way we relate to it — what *New Age* calls a change to "a new paradigm for living."

Sometimes we are urged not to watch passively for change, but to change culture and evoke new spiritual awareness actively. At other times, change is described as the progression of a natural cycle that is inevitable.

However, *New Age* is broad enough to incorporate ideas with no explicit link to the change of age. Examples are a planetary spirituality alongside separate religions; planetary political institutions that complement local bodies; participatory, democratic, and global economic entities; the integration of professional medicine with self-healing; greater emphasis on communication and education; a more androgynous self-understanding; and the integration of science, mysticism, technology, and ecology.

Others are a change from mechanistic Newtonian physics to quantum physics; from masculinity and patriarchy to femininity; and from reason — called "left brain," rational thinking — to feeling, emotion, and experience — called "right brain," intuitive thinking.

The desire for change is not new. *New Age* has been described as "a modern revival of pagan religions with a mixture of influences" that come from eastern religions, modern psychology, philosophy, science, "and the counterculture that developed in the 1950s and 1960s."<sup>23</sup>

### Syncretistic

What is "new" about *New Age* is that it is a "syncretism of esoteric and secular elements,"<sup>24</sup> all supporting the proposition that the time is ripe for a fundamental change in individuals, society, and the world.

*New Age* calls this fundamental change a "paradigm shift." The term was made popular by the American science historian Thomas Kuhn, who defined "paradigm" as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on, shared by the members of a given community."<sup>25</sup>

A paradigm shift is a revolution: not just a gradual development, but a wholesale transformation of perspective. Kuhn stressed that competing paradigms are incommensurable and cannot co-exist.

A paradigm shift in religion and spirituality, therefore, is not simply a new way of stating traditional beliefs. It is a radical change in world-view; it calls into question not just the content of the former view, but also its way of interpreting that content.

Perhaps the best example is the way *New Age* has totally recast the life and significance of Jesus Christ — a recasting that can in no way be reconciled with Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

*New Age* is a complex reaction to the dominant ideas and values of western culture, calling for nothing less than a cultural revolution. At the same time, ironically, its idealistic criticism is typical of the culture it criticizes.

Some people even suggest that the *New Age* "movement" itself is precisely the "paradigm shift" to what is called "a significantly better way of life."<sup>27</sup>

### Self-contradictory

*New Age* focusses on the *self*: its value, capacities, and problems — what it is and what it will become.<sup>28</sup> *New Age* argues that while individuals cannot change the world directly, they can change themselves. Changing their own consciousness will, indirectly, change the world, for each individual is a fragmented image of the whole. And to change one's own consciousness, one must look for the "god within."

However, the more one looks within oneself, the smaller the extent of what one sees.

"Looking within" may lead not to democratic participation in a new, peaceful planetary order, but to a disempowerment that will leave people open to manipulation.

*New Age* condemns science and reason for treating organic wholes as the sum of their parts.

But it is arguable that the current preoccupation with planetary problems (ecological issues, depletion of resources, over-population, the economic gap between north and south, the nuclear arsenal, political instability) discourages engagement in smaller, closer, equally real, political and social questions. We must remember that

"charity begins at home."

*New Age* holds that the traditional view of the cosmos — based (it says) on monotheism, transcendence, alterity, and separateness — leads to fragmentation and division between real and ideal, relative and absolute, finite and infinite, human and divine, profane and sacred, past and present, male and female, soul and body, spirit and matter, Heaven and earth, transcendent and immanent, religion and science, Yin and Yang, subject and object, life and death, psyche and soma, the self and its fragments, *etc.* This "dualism," it claims, is artificial.

Accordingly, *New Age* teaches unity through fusion, or melting, thus eliminating alterity.

But this is only a vision, not a working solution for current problems.

#### **Past vs. present**

*New Age* replaces the language of sin and salvation with the morally neutral language of addiction and recovery, ignorance and illumination, *etc.*

In doing so, it imports Eastern religious practices piecemeal and re-interprets them to suit Westerners. What it calls "extra-European influences" are sometimes merely "pseudo-orientalizations" of Western culture.

Being suspicious of anything Graeco-Roman or Judaeo-Christian (*e.g.*, traditional science and medicine, patriarchal structures in politics and religion), *New Age* authoritatively promotes oriental practices precisely because they are different, not because they have been demonstrated to be superior (*e.g.*, holistic medicine, Eastern religions).

*New Age* thought seems to be driven more by the desire for a complete break with the past than the desire for a better future.

#### **Spiritual vs. commercial**

*New Age* training courses (formerly called "Erhard seminar trainings") combine counter-cultural values with the mainstream desire to succeed financially — inner satisfaction with outer success.

Findhorn's "Spirit of Business" retreat — which even employs magic — transforms the experience of work, but also increases productivity; it makes those involved not only more authentic and spontaneous, but also more prosperous.

*New Age* business training resonates with humanistic phrases like "learning environment," "bringing life back to work," "humanizing work," "fulfilling the manager," "people come first" and "unlocking potential." It appeals to businesspeople who want personal growth, happiness, and enthusiasm, but also commercial productivity.<sup>29</sup>

It is questionable, then, whether *New Age* training focusses more on individual benefits or the commercial good. Or, does it, in the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, increase profits so as to "reduce the number of those who will eat at humanity's table"?<sup>30</sup>

#### **New Age ideology**

*New Age* has been called a "conspiracy," but it seems more like a spontaneous cultural change beyond human control. However, it does have some of the characteristics of an ideology.

For example, it shares with a number of internationally influential groups the goal of superseding or transcending all particular religions in favour of a universal religion that could unite humanity.

Closely related to this goal is a very concerted effort by a number of institutions to invent a "Global Ethic": an ethical framework that would reflect the global nature of contemporary culture, economics, and politics.

Further, the Gaia hypothesis — which entails the worship of Mother Earth — certainly colours the politicization of ecological questions.



### New spirituality

*New Age* is often called a "new spirituality." As we have seen, much of it comes from ancient religions and cultures, but what really is new is that it consciously promotes the search for an alternative to Western culture and its Judaeo-Christian religious roots.

And here we come to a central question: what does spirituality mean in *New Age* thought? The answer is crucial in determining the differences between Christianity and *New Age* — for Christianity invites us to look outward, to "the new advent" of God, Who calls us to live in the dialogue of love.<sup>3 1</sup>

In *New Age* thought, spirituality means an inner experience of harmony and unity with the whole of reality, which heals the individual's feelings of imperfection and finiteness. Through "spirituality," humans discover their profound connectedness with the sacred universal force, or energy, that is the nucleus of all life.

When they have made this discovery, they can set out on a path to perfection, which enables them to sort out their personal lives, clarify their relationship to the world, take their place in the universal process of becoming, and participate in the new genesis of a world in constant evolution.

In effect, *New Age* spirituality is a cosmic mysticism<sup>3 2</sup> based on awareness of a universe burgeoning with dynamic energies, cosmic energy, vibration, light, God, love, and the supreme Self. All refer to the same reality: the primal source present in every being.

While it is not Christian, *New Age* spirituality is not Buddhist either, for it does not involve self-denial. The dream of mystical union with the cosmos seems to lead, in practice, to a merely virtual union, which, in the end, leaves people more alone and unsatisfied than before.

### Two elements

*New Age* spirituality consists of two distinct elements, one metaphysical, the other psychological.

The metaphysical component — basically a new form of *gnosis* — comes from *New Age's* esoteric and theosophical roots. Access to the divine is by knowledge of hidden mysteries: "what is real" behind what is only apparent, the origin before time, the transcendent beyond what is merely fleeting, the primordial behind the merely ephemeral, the other behind the self, the cosmic divinity beyond the incarnate human. Esoteric spirituality "is an investigation of being beyond the separateness of beings, a sort of nostalgia for lost unity."<sup>3 3</sup>

Here we see in *New Age* the gnostic matrix of esoteric spirituality. "The children of Aquarius" tend to choose from each historical religion "only the esoteric nucleus, whose guardians they claim to be. They somehow deny history and will not accept that spirituality can be rooted in time or in any institution. Jesus of Nazareth is not God, but one of the many historical manifestations of the cosmic and universal Christ."<sup>3 4</sup>

The psychological component of *New Age* comes from the encounter between esoteric culture and psychology. *New Age* is therefore an experience of personal psycho-spiritual transformation, seen as analogous to religious experience.

For some people, it takes the form of a deep mystical experience — perhaps after a personal crisis, perhaps after a long search. For others it comes from meditation, therapy, or paranormal experiences that alter states of consciousness.<sup>3 5</sup>

### Spiritual narcissism

Several authors describe *New Age* spirituality as spiritual narcissism or pseudo-mysticism. One of them is David Spangler — himself a *New Age* proponent — who, in his later works, distanced himself from *New Age's* more esoteric aspects.

In the more popular forms of *New Age*, he wrote, "individuals and groups are living out their own fantasies of adventure and power, usually in an occult or millenarian form," whose principal characteristic "is attachment to a private world of

ego-fulfilment and a consequent (though not always apparent) withdrawal from the world."

In these forms, he said, "the *New Age* has become populated with strange and exotic beings — masters, adepts, extraterrestrials; it is a place of psychic powers and occult mysteries, of conspiracies and hidden teachings."<sup>36</sup>

Spangler lists "negative" aspects of *New Age*: "alienation from the past in the name of the future; attachment to novelty for its own sake...; indiscriminateness and lack of discernment in the name of wholeness and communion — hence the failure to understand or respect the role of boundaries...; [and] confusion of psychic phenomena with wisdom, of channeling with spirituality, of the *New Age* perspective with ultimate truth."<sup>37</sup>

Spangler also lists "positive" aspects: he says that *New Age* is an image of change and an incarnation of the sacred, a movement in which most people are "very serious seekers after truth," working in the interest of life and inner growth.

David Toolan, an American Jesuit who spent several years in the *New Age* milieu, observes that its devotees discover the inner life and are fascinated by their responsibility for the world. However, he said, they are also easily overcome by individualism and the consumer mentality. In addition, he noted the commercial side of many *New Age* products and therapies.

#### CHAPTER IV NEW AGE AS WE MEET IT TODAY

*New Age* has affected our whole culture: people we converse with, religious teaching, and publicity material for meditation groups, therapies, etc.

Accordingly, Catholics in the West (and, increasingly, elsewhere) come into contact with *New Age* frequently. If they are to respond adequately to something so alluring, complex, elusive, and, at times, disturbing, they must be able to recognize its language.

Many *New Age* practices seem to be innocuous, and many Catholics freely adopt them. Nevertheless, these practices communicate, even if only indirectly, a mentality that can influence thinking and inspire a very non-Catholic view of reality.

In this chapter, therefore, we describe some *New Age* elements that we might encounter in daily life, but which we cannot possibly accept if we want to be faithful to Christ and His Church.

##### Package deal

It is impossible to separate individual elements of *New Age* religiosity — innocent though some may appear — from their overarching framework. *New Age's* Gnostic nature forces us to judge it in its entirety.

Because *New Age* denies Christian revelation, faithful Catholics cannot judge it to be positive or innocuous. Nor can they accept some of its elements while rejecting others. Therefore, especially in a culture marked by religious relativism, we must warn seriously against any attempt to blend *New Age* religiosity and Catholic faith.

As Saint Paul said, we must reject "myths" that "promote speculations rather than the plan of God that is to be received by faith" (1 Tim 1:3-4).

*New Age* speaks about God, human beings, and the world. Some of what it says is explicitly opposed to Catholicism, some is innocuous — labelled *New Age* for marketing purposes only — and some has hidden or unacknowledged links with Eastern religions.

##### God

*New Age* holds that God is not a Person — or even three Persons, as Jesus Christ revealed: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

God did not create the world, it claims, and He does not sustain it in being. In fact, He does not even transcend it; he is an "impersonal energy" immanent in the



world, an extension or component of the cosmos, the life-force or soul of the universe.

This energy, says *New Age*, together with the world itself, form a "cosmic unity" that is monistic and pantheistic (or, more precisely, panentheistic): "all is one." God is its "life-principle," the "basic energy," the "spirit or soul of the world," the sum total of the world's consciousness. In a sense, therefore, everything is God.

Here we see the panentheism that pervades all *New Age* thought and practice. It prevents any possibility of reconciliation with Catholicism.

Catholics believe that God is absolutely different from the world — in fact, incommensurable — and yet is present in everything, while "man is essentially a creature" — something created — "and remains so for all eternity, so that an absorption of the human *I* in the divine *I* will never be possible."<sup>3 8</sup>

The *New Age* universe is closed, containing "God" as well as ourselves and all other spiritual beings. Divinity exists in every being, "from the lowest crystal of the mineral world up to and beyond the galactic god himself, about whom we can say nothing at all," for he "is not a man but a great consciousness."<sup>3 9</sup>

According to *New Age*, the concept of "God the Father" results from a patriarchal, Judaeo-Catholic idealization of male domination of women. Eastern or pre-Catholic religions — including ancient agricultural rites and fertility cults — are "uncontaminated" by this image.

Instead of God the Father, *New Age* worships Gaia — Mother Earth — who bridges the gap between the world and the transcendent Father-God of Judaism and Catholicism. Her "divinity" pervades the world, eliminating judgement by God the Father.

### Angels

A common element in *New Age* is extraordinary manifestations, especially of paranormal entities.

In *New Age* "channeling," "mediums" go into trances in which they may lose control of their bodies or faculties, while their personalities are taken over by other entities (as in spiritualism). The accompanying language is almost always of love and light.

As spiritual friends and counsellors, angels — utterly different from those of the Bible — have become the centre of a new industry of books and paintings.

*New Age* describes angels unsystematically; in fact, it holds that too much precision is unhelpful, since, it claims, "there are many levels of guides, entities, energies, and beings in every octave of the universe... They are all there to pick and choose from in relation to your own attraction or repulsion mechanisms."<sup>4 0</sup> They can be invoked "non-religiously" to promote relaxation aimed at better decision-making and control of one's life.

Some *New Age* "mystics" claim to be able to "fuse" people and spirits. Others make spirits — described as powerful energies in the natural world and on the "inner planes" — accessible through rituals, drugs, and other techniques for reaching altered states of consciousness.

### Christ

"Divine energy" that is consciously received, according to *New Age*, is "christic" energy. The innermost "psychic" level on which this "divine cosmic energy" is "heard" is called "holy spirit."

The phrase "the cosmic Christ" means a pattern — a potential — that can be repeated in many people, places, and times. It is seen in the person of Jesus Christ, but it is by no means limited to him.

"The cosmic Christ ... leads a new exodus from the bondage and pessimistic views of a Newtonian, mechanistic universe — ripe with competition, winners and losers, dualism, anthropocentrism," and the boredom that comes from picturing the universe as a machine bereft of mystery and mysticism.



"The cosmic Christ is local and historical, indeed intimate to human history. The cosmic Christ might be living next door or even inside one's deepest and truest self."<sup>4 1</sup>

In *New Age* language, "Christ" is a title that can be applied to the many historical figures who have consciously perceived themselves to be divine and can thus claim to be *avatars*, or "universal masters." Jesus of Nazareth is one of them, Buddha another.

The historical Jesus, says *New Age*, is distinct from the eternal, impersonal, universal Christ — an entity that could not possibly have suffered on the cross. Much of what we know about Jesus is contained in the Bible, but the Bible must be interpreted carefully to purify it of the "formal religion" that inhibits access to its esoteric essence.<sup>4 2</sup> We can find more about Jesus from other documents, like the neo-Gnostic gospels and the Akasha Chronicles. We can find even more from spirit guides and ascended masters.

This statement of *New Age* belief might not satisfy every devotee, but it catches the *New Age* tone: we are all divine and must be encouraged to realize our divinity.

Rejecting all possibility of an interpersonal relationship with Jesus, it is inspired by Blavatsky's theosophy, Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, and Alice Bailey's "Arcane School." Members of these groups not only promote their founders' ideas, but also work with *New Age* to develop what some observers call "New Age truth."<sup>4 3</sup>

Catholics know that Christ — the anointed One — is the Jesus of Nazareth Whom the Gospels speak about: the son of Mary and the only Son of God, true Man and true God, the image and the full revelation of God the Father, the one Saviour of the world. "For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfilment of the Scriptures; He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."<sup>4 4</sup>

Thus He revealed the Father's love for us (Jn 3:16). Through His Church and her Sacraments He continues to do so. By grafting us on to Him like branches on to a vine, He lives in us, freely sharing His divine life with us. He, therefore, is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6).

But according to *New Age*, truth is not objective; we each find our own truth through good vibrations, cosmic correspondences, harmony, and ecstasy. "There are a thousand ways of exploring inner reality. Go where your intelligence and intuition lead you. Trust yourself."<sup>4 5</sup>

Catholics look not to impersonal cosmic powers, but to the loving care of God; they promote not cosmic biocentrism, but love of neighbour; they are not locked into a fixed cycle of cosmic events, but are focussed on the historical Jesus — especially His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

In the early days of the Church, believers faced up to Gnosticism, applying the terms used for cosmic deities to Christ Himself; e.g. in Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians:

"He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in Him were created all things in Heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible. Thrones, dominations, sovereignties, powers — all things were created through Him and for Him. Before anything was created, He existed, and He holds all things in unity.

"Now the Church is His Body; He is its Head. He is the beginning, the first to be born from the dead, so that He should be first in every way; because God wanted all perfection to be found in Him and all things to be reconciled through Him and for Him — everything in Heaven and everything on earth — when He made peace by His death on the cross" (Col 1: 15-20).

Those early Catholics knew that there was no new astrological age to come; the "new age" they celebrated was the fulfilment of all things, which had already begun in Christ.

"Time is indeed fulfilled by the very fact that God, in the Incarnation, came

down into human history. Eternity entered into time: what 'fulfilment' could be greater than this? What other 'fulfilment' could be possible?"<sup>4 6</sup>

### Salvation

Ancient Gnosticism taught that we are each born with a "divine spark," which links us to the divinity of the whole cosmos. We are all essentially divine by nature, although we participate in the cosmic divinity at various levels of consciousness.

Our goal, or salvation, is enlightenment: participation in the universal consciousness by the melting of our identity into the universal being, every part of which has contact with every other part.

In sharp contrast, the Catholic Church teaches that God created the universe in order to share the communion of His Trinitarian life with created persons. Accordingly, He made man in His image and likeness — male and female He created them (Gn 1:27) — and He loves them.

However, God wanted "to communicate His own divine life" to them in order "to adopt them as His sons in His only begotten Son," so that they might know Him, respond to Him, and love Him "far beyond their own natural capacity."<sup>4 7</sup>

The human person, then, is a mystery fully revealed only in Jesus Christ;<sup>4 8</sup> man becomes authentically human only in his relationship with Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4 9</sup>

However, in order that man "might of his own accord seek his Creator" and "cleave" to Him in love — thus "freely" attaining the perfection God planned for him — God created him "subject to his own free choice" (Sir 15:14), a rational being who can initiate and control his own actions. God gave him the power "to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions" on his "own responsibility."<sup>5 0</sup>

"By free will, then, one shapes one's own life."<sup>5 1</sup>

Using similar language, but with underlying assumptions that are fundamentally different, *New Age* holds that we are each — by human nature — a creative source of the universe. For example, magic (the occult, one of whose extreme forms is Satanism) can give us the divine power we need. In fact, we each create our own reality, choosing the circumstances of our lives — even our own illness and health.

Moreover, genetic engineering will enable the human race to create itself anew, by deciphering the genetic code, altering sexuality, and controlling population.

### Self

*New Age* teaches that salvation is reached by a journey comprising self-realization, self-redemption, and self-fulfilment.<sup>5 2</sup>

Along the way, it claims, there is no sin, but only imperfect knowledge, which results in alienation from the cosmos. We do not need revelation or salvation from outside, but merely our own truth and our own "divine spark." We achieve salvation for ourselves by mastering psycho-physical techniques. If one life is not enough, we can be reincarnated.

In contrast, Catholics believe that because of the sin of our first parents, we are prone to sin — which offends God and our neighbours and damages ourselves — and that only God can reconcile us, bringing us back into the communion of love. This reconciliation was achieved for us by Jesus Christ, and our salvation depends on our accepting it.

*New Age* holds that until we reach salvation, we are subject to the determining influences of the stars (a belief the Church calls superstition). However, by making contact with our higher selves (through the appropriate techniques), we can "reproduce mystical states at will" and achieve an ever greater harmony between the self and the divine cosmic energy, overcoming all forms of dualism.

These techniques include Yoga, Zen, dance, drugs, fasting, biofeedback, mantras, hypnosis, transcendental meditation, tantric exercises, sensory isolation, holotropic breathing, sleep deprivation, and peak-experiences like reliving our birth or travelling

to the gates of death. They can all alter our states of consciousness and lead to spiritualization, perfection, enlightenment, cosmic unity, and self-fulfilment.

(Others may be accessible only to a privileged spiritual "aristocracy.")

The preparatory techniques include meditation, which harmonizes the body and releases self-healing energies to help us acquire self-control and psychic concentration on our "self-transformation."<sup>53</sup>

The philosopher Nietzsche taught that Catholicism has prevented humanity's full flowering. Emancipated from Catholicism, he said, the human person can achieve perfection: self-fulfilment according to values that we ourselves create and achieve by our own strength, so that we can speak of a "self-creating self." A perfected human — one who has realized his potential — is more different from an unperfected human than the latter is from an anthropoid.

"We are authentic when we take charge of ourselves, when our choice and reactions flow spontaneously from our deepest needs, when our behaviour and expressed feelings reflect our personal wholeness."<sup>54</sup>

For *New Age*, our goal is fusion (melting) into the whole — the relativization or abolition of all difference and opposition in a cosmic harmony.

Catholics believe that our goal is incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, which means not fusion, but communion with Him and all His other members — like the union of a body's members. In Heaven, we will not lose our identity, but find it.

Fusion would abolish *love*. For a true love, there must be two different persons. A Catholic searches for unity in the capacity and freedom of the other person to say "yes" or "no" to the gift of love. A Catholic sees union as communion, unity as community.

In contrast, *New Age* (especially transpersonal psychology) regards isolated, individual personalities as pathological. Catholics must question, therefore, what we will mean by "I" and "me" when we have fully re-invented our selves. Ultimately, self-fulfilment, self-realization, self-redemption, and self-transformation mean self-destruction.

But "the real danger" to individual personality from *New Age* "is the holistic paradigm. *New Age* is thinking based on totalitarian unity and that is why it is a danger."<sup>55</sup>

### The "god within"

*New Age* literature denies the existence of a divine Being "out there," distinct from His creation. Rather, they preach "the god within." They claim that by nature we are gods, and we discover our unlimited power by peeling off layers of inauthenticity<sup>56</sup> through various techniques.

In *New Age*, *theosis* means recognizing and accepting our divinity. "Our understanding of God has to be interiorized: from the almighty God out there to God the dynamic, creative power within the very centre of all being: God as Spirit."<sup>57</sup>

Although the language sounds familiar, this belief cannot be reconciled with Catholicism. In the Preface to Book V of *Adversus Haereses*, Saint Irenaeus refers to "Jesus Christ, Who, through His transcendent love, became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."

The Catholic Church teaches that we are divinized not by our own efforts, but by God's free gift of a new kind of life, His life, at Baptism. This new life is not merely a new level of awareness. Nor is it something so personal and private that it is restricted to the realm of consciousness.

It requires not exaltation of the self, but awareness of incompleteness and sinfulness. It involves being transformed in soul and body by participation in the sacramental life of the Church. It ends not with our fusion into a "cosmic whole," but with our insertion into the Holy Trinity as a distinct being in the heart of unity.



### Prayer and mysticism

In *New Age*, a "spiritual life" means experiencing altered states of consciousness. "Mysticism" means achieving the exhilaration of being one with the universe, letting oneself sink into the great ocean of being.<sup>5 8</sup> "Purification" means overcoming unease or alienation by the illumination that comes from immersion in the whole. "Conversion" means using various techniques to transform one's consciousness and release the divinity within.

In Catholicism, the "spiritual life" means God's life. Gradually, in our spiritual life, through God's graciousness, our relationship with Him becomes deeper, our brotherhood with all other men and women closer, and our stewardship over the universe more effective.

"Mysticism" means a close meeting with God in love, possible because of God's descent toward us, particularly the humblest of us — the weakest and least gifted in the eyes of the "world."

A Catholic's way "of getting closer to God is not based on any technique in the strict sense of the word. That would contradict the spirit of childhood called for by the Gospel. The heart of genuine Catholic mysticism is not technique: it is always a gift of God; and the one who benefits from it knows himself to be unworthy."<sup>5 9</sup>

For Catholics, "conversion" means turning back to the Father, through the Son, in docility to the Holy Spirit. The closer our relationship with God — always and in every way a free gift — the more acute our need to be converted from sin, spiritual myopia, and self-infatuation, which all obstruct self-abandonment to God and openness to other men and women.

Meditation "techniques" exist, but they must be free of presumption and pretension. Catholic prayer is not an exercise in self-contemplation, stillness, or self-emptying, but "a raising up of the mind and heart to God," a dialogue of love, "a flight from 'self' to the 'You' of God."<sup>6 0</sup> It invites us to a complete surrender to God and genuine solidarity with our brothers and sisters.<sup>6 1</sup>

Even when he is alone, praying in secret, a Catholic is conscious that he prays for the good of the Church, in union with Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and together with all the saints.<sup>6 2</sup>

*New Age* meditation techniques confuse psychology and spirituality; they induce a pleasant state of comfort in mind or body, sometimes intense, but that is all.

They may prepare us for prayer by inducing silence and relaxation, but no *New Age* technique takes account of God's search for the human heart, which, logically, precedes true prayer and makes it possible. Silence can lead to emptiness, rather than God.

### Good vibrations

*New Age* phenomena as diverse as the Findhorn garden and Feng Shui stress the importance of being "in tune" with nature or the cosmos.

*New Age* does not distinguish between good and evil. Human actions, it claims, result from either illumination or ignorance, so nobody can be condemned and no one needs forgiveness. Believing in the existence of evil can create only negativity and fear, to which the answer is love.

But *New Age* love does not have to be translated into deeds; it is more an attitude of mind. Love is energy — a high-frequency vibration — and the secret to happiness, health, and success is tuning in, so as to find one's place in the great chain of being.

Backed by various theories, *New Age* teachers and therapists claim to know the key to the correspondences among all the elements of the universe. They offer this knowledge to pupils so that they can modulate the tone of their lives and enter into absolute harmony with everyone and everything around them.<sup>6 3</sup>

### Suffering

Some *New Age* writers view suffering as self-imposed, or bad *karma*, or at least a

failure to harness one's own resources. Others concentrate on overcoming suffering by wealth and financial success.<sup>64</sup>

Catholics know that "in the cross of Christ not only is the redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed....

"The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has his own share in the redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the redemption was accomplished.... Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ."<sup>65</sup>

### Wholeness

*New Age* puts "wholeness," or the "holistic," at its centre. Achieving "wholeness" means overcoming all forms of "dualism," seen as a product of an unenlightened past.

Such dualism includes what Catholics consider to be real, fundamental differences: between Creator and creation, man and nature, spirit and matter, man and woman. The so-called "dualism" of good and evil — wrongly thought to have its roots in Judaeo-Catholicism — actually comes from Gnosticism, especially Manichaeism, which the Catholic Church condemned as a heresy.

*New Age* blames science and rationalism for treating organic wholes as though they can be understood in terms of their smallest components. It also condemns their ignoring of spiritual entities like the soul — which, *New Age* holds, is merely a contingent "epiphenomenon" of material processes.

The "holistic" pervades the *New Age* movement, from holistic health to unitive consciousness, from ecological awareness to global "networking." It was a principal "sign of the times" in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

### Holistic health

It is said that formal (allopathic) medicine limits itself to curing specific, isolated ailments. Accordingly, alternative therapies — which claim to consider the whole person and to "heal" rather than "cure" — have gained enormous popularity.

Holistic health, as it is called, concentrates on the role of the mind in physical healing. The connection between mind and body is said to be in the immune system or the Indian *chakra* system.

*New Age* holds that illness and suffering come from working against nature. In tune with nature, one can expect a much healthier life, and even material prosperity. Some *New Age* healers even claim that holistically healthy humans need not die.

To get in touch with our inner divinity and any parts of ourselves that have been alienated or suppressed, we develop our human potential, especially in altered states of consciousness induced by either drugs or mind-expanding techniques. According to "transpersonal psychology," a shaman mediates between the world of humans and the transpersonal realms of spirits and gods.

Some holistic health methods are derived from ancient cultural traditions — religious or esoteric; others are connected with the psychological theories developed in Esalen 1960-1970.

They include acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractics, kinesiology, homeopathy, iridology, massage, and various kinds of "bodywork" (such as orgonomy, Feldenkrais, reflexology, Rolfing, polarity massage, and therapeutic touch); meditation and visualization; nutritional therapies; psychic healing; herbal medicines; healing by crystals, metals, music, or colours; reincarnation therapies; twelve-step programs; and self-help groups.<sup>66</sup>

In all of them, the healing source is said to be within ourselves, something we reach when we are in touch with our inner energy (or cosmic energy).

### Reincarnation

*New Age* views our "journey through life" as really a series of journeys: successive



reincarnations of the soul in different bodies. This is not the cycle of *samsara* — which means purification through punishment — but a gradual ascent toward perfection, the full development of our potential. Since there is only one mind, some of us can act as channels for higher beings.

Our limited personality, it is said, is like a shadow or a dream created by the real, or higher, self. Our higher self is our real identity, a bridge between humanity and the divine mind — a mind that preserves the memories of previous incarnations.

Originally, among Hindus, reincarnation was based on the *atman*, or divine kernel of personality (later *jiva*), which moved from body to body in a cycle of suffering (*samsara*), determined by the law of *karma* and thus linked to behaviour in past lives. One could hope to be born into a better state and, ultimately, liberated from the body entirely.

Among most Buddhists, what moves from body to body is not a soul, but a continuum of consciousness. Life is a possibly endless cosmic process, even for the gods.

Spiritualism, theosophy, anthroposophy, and *New Age* all view reincarnation as participation in cosmic evolution.

In the West, since Lessing, *New Age* has understood reincarnation as a process of learning and progressive individual fulfilment. This theory is said to answer the "unresolved" questions of good and evil and dispenses with Catholic teaching on Hell. It holds that when the soul is separated from the body, the individual can look back on his whole life up to that point; when the soul is united to its new body, there is a preview of its coming life. People can access their former lives through dreams and meditation techniques.<sup>6 7</sup>

*New Age's* belief in reincarnation calls into question both responsibility and freedom. It also — like "cosmic unity" — calls into question what we mean by the "self." As Paul Williams (formerly Buddhist, now Catholic) says, "my reincarnation as a cockroach would not be *me*."<sup>6 8</sup>

Catholics hold that a human is a distinct being, who lives one life, for which he or she is fully responsible: "it is appointed that men die once, and after that be judged" (Heb 9:27). We believe in "the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."

### Social commitment

Much of *New Age* teaching is unashamedly promotion of the self, but some of its leaders claim that it is unfair to judge the whole movement by a minority of selfish, irrational, and narcissistic people, or to allow ourselves to be dazzled by some of their more bizarre practices.<sup>6 9</sup>

In a large body of social teaching, the Catholic Church states that "solidarity" and "social love" are demanded by both our human and our Christian brotherhood: among the poor, between rich and poor, among workers, between employers and employees, among peoples, and among nations. We must practise it in distributing the world's goods, paying people for their work, and resolving socio-economic problems.

### The earth

*New Age* claims that classical mechanics has to be rejected in favour of "holistic" quantum mechanics, which treats matter as waves or energy rather than particles. The universe is a network of links, an ocean of energy. In the "great chain of being," every part is an image of the whole; the whole is in everything and everything in the whole.

That, says *New Age*, includes humans. Each is a hologram, an image of the whole — although everyone vibrates on his own frequency — in a relationship of complementarity with others.<sup>7 0</sup>

All these links, it says, make the planet one: uncreated, eternal, and self-



sufficient. The energy that animates it is "spirit." By an inner dynamism, it evolves from inert matter to "higher and perfect consciousness," which results in the reconciliation and unity of all that exists.

"War is unthinkable in a society of autonomous people who have discovered the connectedness of all humanity, who are unafraid of alien ideas and alien cultures, who know that all revolutions begin within, and that you cannot impose your brand of enlightenment on anyone else."<sup>7 1</sup>

Even now, says *New Age*, the world itself is divine. There is no alterity ("otherness") between God and the world, soul and body, intelligence and feeling, or heaven and earth; all is one immense vibration of energy.

In fact, as James Lovelock claims in *The Gaia Hypothesis*, "the entire range of living matter on earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts."<sup>7 2</sup>

Every human being is a neuron in the earth's central nervous system. But the global brain needs an institution with which to rule: a world government, "a spiritual aristocracy in the style of Plato's Republic, run by secret societies."<sup>7 3</sup>

"Science has given us insights into wholes and systems, stress and transformation. We are learning to read tendencies, to recognize the early signs of another, more promising, paradigm. We create alternative scenarios of the future. We communicate about the failures of old systems, forcing new frameworks for problem-solving in every area."<sup>7 4</sup>

In stark contrast, Catholics believe that when God created the world, He "entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind, to take care of them, master them by labour, and enjoy their fruits.

"The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence.

"The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men."<sup>7 5</sup>

"God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in His own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives."<sup>7 6</sup>

### A global response

According to *New Age* sources, both Catholicism and Western faith in science "had to face a severe break first manifested in the student revolutions around the year 1968."<sup>7 7</sup>

The wisdom of older generations was suddenly robbed of significance and respect, they say, while the omnipotence of science evaporated. Accordingly, the Church now "has to face a serious breakdown in the transmission of her faith to the younger generation."<sup>7 8</sup>

*New Age* has replaced these former pillars of consciousness and social cohesion by religiosity, rituals, and beliefs that many people thought had died with the coming of Christ. However, esotericism never really disappeared.

Late in the nineteenth century, Asian religions became very popular in the theosophical movement. According to *New Age*, its popularity reflected "growing awareness of a global spirituality, incorporating all existing religious traditions."<sup>7 9</sup>

Through Green politics, *New Age's* concentration on holism has become evident as a fascination with nature and a resacralization of the earth as Mother Earth, or Gaia, whose "executive agent" is the whole human race. Since humans cannot act as



one without harmony and understanding, it is claimed that global government and global ethics are inevitable.

## CHAPTER V WARNING

*New Age* offers "alternatives": either an alternative vision of reality, or an alternative way of improving one's current situation — through magic.<sup>80</sup> In particular, it offers an alternative to our Judaeo-Christian heritage.

We have to choose between them. "No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn" (Lk 16:13).

Many of the movements that have fed *New Age* are explicitly anti-Catholic. The attitude of *New Age* itself is not neutral; despite its claim to encompass all religions, it cannot tolerate true Catholicism, and it even presents some arguments justifying anti-Catholic behaviour.<sup>81</sup>

At first, this anti-Catholic attitude was confined to those who were deeply involved in the movement, but recently it has begun to permeate all levels of the "alternative" culture.

Although its motive is said to be the elimination of division, *New Age* consciously blurs differences that are fundamental to Western culture and the Catholic religion: between Creator and creation, humanity and nature, religion and psychology, and subjective and objective reality. In fact, it deliberately and systematically joins what human reason has separated. Accordingly, it rejects reason — the foundation of Catholic faith — stigmatizing it as cold, calculating, and inhuman.

It is noteworthy that reason, in fact, is universal and freely available to everyone, unlike the mystery intrinsic to esotericism and Gnosticism.

*New Age* preaches that people create their own reality. How do people with severe handicaps or incurable diseases feel when it is suggested that they have brought their misfortunes upon themselves, or that their inability to change things points to a basic weakness?

This question is not just academic: it has profound implications for the Church's pastoral approach to death and bereavement, especially as she faces the increasing popularity of a Westernized version of Eastern reincarnation.

We recall what Pope John Paul II said in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*:

"It is not inappropriate to caution those Christians who enthusiastically welcome certain ideas originating in the religious traditions of the Far East — for example, techniques and methods of meditation and ascetical practice. In some quarters these have become fashionable, and are accepted rather uncritically. First one should know one's own spiritual heritage well and consider whether it is right to set it aside lightly.

"Here we need to recall, if only in passing, the brief but important document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "on certain aspects of Christian meditation." Here we find a clear answer to the question "whether and how Christian prayer can be enriched by methods of meditation originating in different religions and cultures."<sup>82</sup>

"A separate issue is the return of ancient Gnostic ideas under the guise of the so-called *New Age*. We cannot delude ourselves that this will lead to a renewal of religion.

"It is only a new way of practicing Gnosticism — that attitude of the spirit which, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting His word and replacing it with purely human words.

"Gnosticism never completely abandoned the realm of Christianity. Instead, it has always existed side by side with Christianity, sometimes taking the shape of a philosophical movement, but more often assuming the characteristics of a religion or

para-religion in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian."<sup>3</sup>

## CHAPTER VI RECOMMENDATIONS

### The woman at the well

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord. He is at the heart of every Catholic action and every Catholic message. So the Church constantly returns to meet her Lord.

The Gospels recount many meetings with Jesus: the shepherds in Bethlehem, two thieves crucified with Him, the elders who listened to Him in the temple, and the disciples walking mournfully to Emmaus.

But His meeting with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well (Jn 4) has been described as "a paradigm for our engagement with truth."<sup>4</sup>

It is Christ — the Way, the Truth, and the Life — Who offers us the water of life, not Aquarius (Latin for "water-carrier"); hence the title of this document.

At first, the woman did not know what Jesus meant by 'living' water (Jn 4:11). Nevertheless, she was fascinated — not only by the Stranger Himself, but also by His message — and she listened.

After her initial shock at finding that Jesus knew her (see Jn 4:17-18), she opened herself to His word: "I see you are a prophet, Sir" (Jn 4:19).

"You worship what you do not know," Jesus said; "we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). Then He revealed Himself as the Messiah: "I who am speaking to you — I am He" (Jn 4:26).

The woman "put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people" all about this Man (Jn 4:28). Then they, too, "started walking toward Him" (Jn 4:30) and they, too, accepted His identity: "Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard Him ourselves and we know that He really is the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42).

From the woman, they had heard *about* Jesus; now they knew *Him* in Person and understood His significance for them all. Their minds and their hearts were engaged.

All this took place by a well. Jesus offered the woman "a spring ... welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14).

Jesus' graciousness is a model for pastoral effectiveness. This approach could draw people who have been attracted to the water-carrier Aquarius but who are still seeking the truth, especially if they have been disillusioned. We must invite them to listen to Jesus, Who offers us not ordinary water, but the hidden spiritual depths of "living water."

As we do so, we must tacitly acknowledge their sincerity. We must also be patient, as any good teacher knows. We must let them respond in their own way, at their own pace, and let God do the rest.

The invitation to meet Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the water of life, will be more appealing if the one who makes it has been profoundly affected by his own encounter with Jesus — not someone who has simply heard about Him, but someone who knows "that He really is the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42).

A person embraced by the Truth is energized by a new sense of freedom, especially from past failures and fears. "The one who strives for self-knowledge, like the woman at the well, will affect others with a desire to know the truth that can free them too."<sup>5</sup>

### Other suggestions

- The Catholic Church has its own very effective networks, which could be better used. For example, the numerous pastoral centres, cultural centres, and centres of spirituality could provide a forum for discussion, study, and genuine dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

First, however, those who are actively diffusing *New Age* religiosity in the



Church would have to be corrected, not only to stop the spread of error, but also to make them effective in promoting true Catholicism.

There are also some excellent institutions that specialize in dealing with all these questions.

- Some *New Age* groups welcome opportunities to explain their philosophy and activity. Catholics should be careful in approaching them, and those who do should be persons who know the Catholic faith and spirituality, can explain them, and can reflect critically on *New Age* thought and practice.

It is extremely important for them to check the credentials of people, groups, and institutions that claim to offer guidance and information on *New Age*. What starts out as impartial information can become active promotion of, or advocacy on behalf of, "alternative religions."

Some international institutions actively promoting respect for "religious diversity" claim religious status for questionable organizations. Genuine dialogue always respects diversity, and never seeks to blur distinctions by fusing religious traditions. However, *New Age* envisages eliminating particular religions in favour of a new, universal spirituality.

- Some local *New Age* groups call their meetings "prayer groups." Anyone invited to join them must first know the object and content of true prayer — in the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, to the Father.<sup>67</sup> If they do join, they must look for signs of genuine Catholic spirituality, rejecting false worship and eschewing any initiation ceremony.

Many people wrongly think that there is no harm in 'borrowing' from the "wisdom" of the East, and there is nothing wrong with learning how to meditate, but they must determine whether the object or content of the exercise relates to the revelation of Jesus Christ, to some other revelation, or to the hidden depths of the self.

For example, despite what the promoters of Transcendental Meditation claim about its religious neutrality, Catholics have occasionally committed themselves to Hinduism unknowingly.

- Much of what is proposed by radical elements of the ecological movement is difficult to reconcile with Catholic faith. In general, a concern for the environment is a sign of concern for what God has given us; it may even be a sign of Catholic stewardship; but "deep ecology" is often based on pantheism and sometimes on Gnosticism.<sup>68</sup>

In Catholic schools, we must teach proper respect for creation and give due recognition to Catholic groups that promote care for the earth as God's creation, entrusted to man.

- The start of the third millennium is a propitious moment for evangelization. People are unusually open to reliable information on the Catholic understanding of time and salvation history.

Our priority should be not on showing what is lacking in non-Catholic religions, but on explaining the sources of our own faith. We must resist pressure to bury our gifts (see Mt 25:24-30), for we can be proud of what we have been given.

One of the most useful tools is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. There are also the lives of the saints and the Church's art, aesthetics, and music. Dialogue between Catholics and people attracted to *New Age* will be more successful if it uses symbolic language and appeals to the emotions.

Of course, it is of paramount importance to start with a good knowledge of the Scriptures. But, most of all, it is important to meet the Lord frequently in prayer and Sacrament, for it is then that our everyday life is hallowed, and we are enabled to understand the richness of Catholicism.

- Perhaps the simplest, most obvious, and most effective tool is the rich spiritual heritage of Catholic religious orders.

All of them have strong traditions of meditation and spirituality — proven techniques and experiences of real prayer — that could be made available

through courses or "open houses." At the same time, they could help to clarify what is lacking or wrong in *New Age*.

### Go, the Mass is ended!

One exponent of *New Age* has compared mainstream religions to cathedrals and *New Age* to a worldwide fair. Indeed, *New Age* can be seen as an invitation to Catholics to bring the message of our cathedral to the fair.

But Catholics need not — indeed, must not — wait for a formal invitation. We must leave the cathedral, nourished by word and Sacrament, to bring the Gospel into everyday life: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord!"

In his *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II remarked on how other religions are responding to today's interest in spirituality. "We who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Savior of the world, have a duty to show the depths of our relationship with Christ."<sup>8 9</sup>

To those still shopping in the worldwide fair, it is the witness of Catholics that will appeal most: their trust, calm, patience, cheerfulness, concrete love of neighbour, and authentic personal prayer.

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#### A SELECT NEW AGE GLOSSARY

- *Age of Aquarius:* Each astrological age of about 2146 years is named according to one of the signs of the Zodiac, but the "great days" go in reverse order, so the current Age of Pisces is about to end, and the Age of Aquarius will be ushered in. Each Age has its own cosmic energies; the energy in Pisces has made it an era of wars and conflicts. But Aquarius is set to be an era of harmony, justice, peace, unity etc. *New Age* thus accepts historical inevitability. Some reckon the age of Aries as the time of the Jewish religion; the age of Pisces, Christianity; and Aquarius, a universal religion.
- *allopathic:* The word comes from the Greek *allos* ("opposite") plus *pathos* ("suffer"). It was coined by German physician Samuel Hahnemann in the 1800s to describe medicine that combats disease with drugs or surgery, which produce effects different from or incompatible with those of the disease.
- *alterity:* The word comes from the Latin *alter* ("the other of two") Otherness; distinctness.
- *androgyny:* Not science's hermaphroditism (existence with the physical characteristics of both sexes), but an awareness of the presence in every person of male and female elements; it is said to be a state of balanced inner harmony of the *animus* and *anima*. In *New Age*, it is a state resulting from a new awareness of this double mode of being and existing that is characteristic of every man and every woman. The more it spreads, the more it will assist in the transformation of interpersonal conduct.
- *anthroposophy:* A theosophical doctrine originally popularized by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who left the Theosophical Society after being leader of its German branch 1902-1913. It is an esoteric doctrine meant to initiate people into "objective knowledge" in the spiritual/divine sphere. Steiner believed it had helped him explore the laws of evolution of the cosmos and of humanity. Every physical being has a corresponding spiritual being, and earthly life is influenced by astral energies and spiritual essences. The *Akasha Chronicle* is said to be a "cosmic



- memory" available to initiates.<sup>90</sup>
- *channeling*: Psychic mediums claim to act as channels for information from other selves, usually disembodied entities living on a higher plane. It links ascended masters, angels, gods, group entities, nature spirits, and the higher self.
  - *Christ*: In *New Age*, the historical figure of Jesus is but one incarnation of an idea, energy, or set of vibrations. For Alice Bailey, a great day of supplication is needed, when all believers will create such a concentration of spiritual energy that there will be a further incarnation, which will reveal how people can save themselves.... For many *New Age* people, Jesus is nothing more than a spiritual master who, like Buddha, Moses, and Mohammed, among others, has been penetrated by the cosmic Christ. The cosmic Christ is also known as christic energy, which is at the basis of each being and the whole of being. Individuals must be initiated gradually into awareness of this christic characteristic. In *New Age* terms, "Christ" represents the highest state of perfection of the self.<sup>91</sup>
  - *crystals*: Reckoned to vibrate at significant frequencies, they help self-transformation. They are used in various therapies, meditations, visualizations, and astral travel, or as lucky charms.
  - *depth psychology*: the school of psychology founded by Jung, a former disciple of Freud. Jung recognized that religion and spiritual matters were important for wholeness and health. The interpretation of dreams and the analysis of archetypes were key elements in his method. Archetypes are forms which belong to the inherited structure of the human psyche; they appear in the recurrent motifs or images in dreams, fantasies, myths, and fairy tales.
  - *eclectic*: The word comes from the Greek for "select" or "choose." Originally, it described ancient philosophers who did not hold any single philosophy, but selected the doctrines that pleased them from every school of thought.
  - *enneagram*: The word comes from the Greek *ennéa* ("nine") plus *gramma* ("sign"). It is a diagram composed of a circle with nine points on its circumference, connected within the circle by a triangle and a hexagon. It was originally used for divination, but has become known as the symbol for a system of personality typology consisting of nine standard character types. It became popular after the publication of Helen Palmer's book *The Enneagram*,<sup>92</sup> but she recognized her indebtedness to the Russian esoteric thinker and practitioner Gurdjieff, the Chilean psychologist Naranjo, and author Ichazo, founder of Arica. The origin of the enneagram remains obscure, but some maintain that it comes from Sufi mysticism.
  - *enterprise culture*: A capitalistic culture which encourages people to take risks in the hope of making a financial profit.
  - *Esalen*: A community founded in Big Sur, California, in 1962 by Michael Murphy and Richard Price, whose aim was to arrive at a self-realization of being through nudism and visions, as well as "bland medicines." It has become one of the most important centres of the Human Potential Movement, and has spread ideas about holistic medicine in the worlds of education, politics, and economics through courses in comparative religion, mythology, mysticism, meditation, psychotherapy, expansion of consciousness, etc. Along with Findhorn, it is seen as a key place in the growth of Aquarian consciousness. The Esalen Soviet-American Institute co-operated with Soviet officials on the Health Promotion Project.
  - *esotericism*: The word comes from the Greek *esotéros* ("that which is within"). Usually, it refers to an ancient and hidden body of knowledge available only to initiates, who portray themselves as guardians of truths hidden from the majority of humankind. The initiation process takes people from a merely external, superficial, knowledge of reality to the inner truth and, in the process, awakens their consciousness at a deeper level. People are invited to undertake this "inner journey" to discover the "divine spark" within them and achieve salvation, which means discovery of the self.
  - *evolution*: In *New Age*, it is much more than biological evolution; the physical



model is projected on to the spiritual realm, so that an immanent power within human beings propels them towards life forms that are superior spiritually. Human beings are said not to have full control over this power, but their good or bad actions can accelerate or retard their progress. The whole of creation, including humanity, is seen as moving inexorably towards a fusion with the divine through reincarnation, which is said to begin before birth and continue after death.<sup>93</sup>

- *exoteric*: The word comes from the Greek *exotéros* ("that which is outside"). Intended for, or likely to be understood by, the general public.
- *expansion of consciousness*: If the cosmos is one continuous chain of being, then all levels of existence — mineral, vegetable, animal, human, cosmic, and divine — are interdependent. Human beings become aware of their place in this holistic vision of global reality by expanding their consciousness well beyond its normal limits. *New Age* offers a great many techniques to help people reach higher levels of perception, so as to overcome the separation among subjects and between subjects and objects in the process of knowing, ending in a total fusion of what normal, inferior, awareness sees as separate or distinct.
- *feng-shui*: A form of geomancy; an occult Chinese method of deciphering the hidden presence of positive and negative currents in buildings and other places, based on knowledge of earthly and atmospheric forces. "Just like the human body or the cosmos, sites are places criss-crossed by influxes whose correct balance is the source of health and life."<sup>94</sup>
- *Findhorn*: A holistic farming community started by Peter and Eileen Caddy, which grew enormous plants by unorthodox methods. The founding of the Findhorn community in Scotland in 1965 was an important milestone in *New Age* movement. In fact, Findhorn was seen as embodying *New Age's* ideas of transformation, for universal consciousness, harmony with nature, a transformed world, and channeling were part of Findhorn from its foundation. This community became a model for other groups such as Alternatives in London, Esalen in Big Sur, and the Open Center and Omega Institute in New York.<sup>95</sup>
- *gnosis*: In a generic sense, a form of knowledge that is not intellectual, but visionary or mystical, thought to be revealed and capable of joining the human to the divine. In the first centuries of Christianity, the Fathers of the Church struggled against Gnosticism, inasmuch as it was at odds with faith. Some see a rebirth of gnostic ideas in much *New Age* thinking, and some authors connected with *New Age* actually quote early Gnosticism. However, with *New Age's* greater emphasis on monism, pantheism, and panentheism, some people use "neo-gnosticism" to distinguish *New Age* gnosis from ancient gnosticism.
- *Great White Brotherhood*: Blavatsky claimed to have contact with the mahatmas (masters), exalted beings who together constitute the "Great White Brotherhood." She saw them as guiding the evolution of the human race and directing the work of the Theosophical Society.
- *hermeticism*: Philosophical and religious practices and speculations linked to the writings in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Alexandrian texts attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistos. When they first became known, during the Renaissance, they were thought to reveal pre-Christian doctrines, but later studies showed they dated from the first century of the Christian era.<sup>96</sup> Alexandrian hermeticism is a major resource for modern esotericism, and the two have much in common: eclecticism, a refutation of ontological dualism, an affirmation of the positive and symbolic character of the universe, and the existence of the fall and later the restoration of mankind. Hermetic speculation has strengthened belief in an ancient fundamental tradition or a so-called *philosophia perennis*, mistakenly considered as common to all religious traditions. Certain high and ceremonial forms of magic were developed from Renaissance Hermeticism.
- *holism*: A key concept in *New Age's* "new paradigm," providing a theoretical framework for the integration of modern man's entire world-view. In contrast with



the increasing fragmentation in science and everyday life, "wholeness" is a central methodological and ontological concept. Humanity fits into the universe as part of a single living organism, a harmonious network of dynamic relationships. The classic distinction between subject and object, for which *New Age* blames Descartes and Newton, is rejected and a bridge made between science and religion. Humanity is part of a universal network (eco-system, family) of nature and world, and must seek harmony with every element of this quasi-transcendent network. When one understands one's place in nature — in the cosmos, which is divine — one also understands that "wholeness" and "holiness" are the same. The clearest articulation of this concept is the "Gaia" hypothesis.<sup>97</sup>

- *human potential movement*: Since its beginnings (at Esalen, California, in the 1960s), it has grown into a network of groups promoting the innate human capacity for creativity through self-realization. Various techniques for personal transformation are being used in management training programs, ultimately for economic reasons. Transpersonal technologies, the movement for inner spiritual awareness, organizational development, and organizational transformation are all presented as non-religious, but employees who take part in these programs find themselves being exposed to a non-Christian "spirituality." For example, there are clear links between Eastern spirituality and psychotherapy; Jung's psychology and the Human Potential Movement have been influenced by Shamanism and "reconstructed" forms of Paganism like Druidry and Wicca. Generally, "personal growth" is the form "salvation" takes in the *New Age* movement; people will be delivered from suffering and weakness by developing their human potential through increasing awareness of our inner divinity.<sup>98</sup>
- *initiation*: The admission of a person or a group, by means of certain rituals, is admitted to membership in a religious community, a secret society (e.g. Freemasonry), or a mystery association (magical, esoteric-occult, gnostic, theosophical etc.).
- *karma*: The word comes from the Sanskrit *Kri* ("action, deed"), a key notion in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, but its meaning has not always been the same. In the ancient Vedic period it meant the ritual action, especially sacrifice, by which a person gained access to the happiness or blessedness of the afterlife. When Jainism and Buddhism appeared (about six centuries before Christ), *Karma* lost its salvific meaning; it was henceforth held that the way to liberation was knowledge of the Atman or "self." In the doctrine of *Samsara*, *karma* was understood as the incessant cycle of human birth and death (in Hinduism) or of rebirth (in Buddhism).<sup>99</sup> *New Age* sees the "law of karma" as the moral equivalent of cosmic evolution. It no longer has anything to do with evil or suffering, which are merely illusions experienced as part of the "cosmic game." Rather, it is the universal law of cause and effect, part of the tendency of the interconnected universe towards moral balance.<sup>100</sup>
- *monism*: The metaphysical belief that differences among beings are illusory. There is only one universal being, of which every thing and every person is a part. Inasmuch as *New Age* monism includes the idea that reality is fundamentally spiritual, it is a contemporary form of pantheism (sometimes explicitly a rejection of materialism, particularly Marxism). Its claim to resolve all dualism leaves no room for a transcendent God, so everything is God.
- *Monte Verità*: The name means "Mount of Truth." A utopian community near Ascona in Switzerland whose yearbooks expound the intention of creating a world religion. Since the end of the 19th century it has been a meeting point for European and American exponents of *New Age* politics, psychology, art, and ecology. The Eranos *New Age* conferences have been held there every year since 1933.<sup>101</sup>
- *mysticism*: *New Age* mysticism entails turning inward rather than turning outward to God. It means fusion with the universe, an ultimate annihilation of the individual in the unity of the whole. Experience of divinity is held to be



experience of self, so one looks within to discover authentic wisdom, creativity, and power.

- *neopaganism*: A title often rejected by *New Age*, it is a current that runs parallel to *New Age* and often interacts with it. In reaction against traditional religions — specifically the Judaeo-Christian heritage of the West — many people have revisited ancient indigenous, traditional, or pagan religions. Anything that preceded Christianity — often matriarchal, magical, or Shamanic — is considered to be more genuine, closer to the spirit of the land or the nation, an uncontaminated form of natural religion, in touch with the powers of nature. *New Age* holds that humanity will be healthier if it returns to the natural cycle of agricultural festivals and affirmations of life. However, some "neo-pagan" religions are recent reconstructions, whose relationship to paganism is questionable, especially when they have modern ideological components like ecology, feminism or, occasionally, racial purity myths.<sup>1 0 2</sup>
- *New Age music*: A booming industry. Sometimes explicitly "Celtic" or Druidic, the music is very often promoted as a means of achieving harmony with oneself or the world. Some *New Age* composers claim that it is intended to build bridges between the conscious and the unconscious, but probably it does so when, besides melody, there is meditative and rhythmic repetition of key phrases. Some is meant to attract people further into the *New Age* movement, but most is simply commercial or artistic.
- *New Thought*: A 19th century religious movement founded in the United States, it was a popularized form of idealism, which taught that evil is merely an illusion. The basic reality was mind, which was the cause of all the events in one's life. Accordingly, it taught, we must take responsibility for every aspect of our situation.
- *occultism*: The word means "hidden." Occult knowledge and practices lead to the secret "perennial philosophy," an idea derived from ancient Greek magic and alchemy and Jewish mysticism. It is kept hidden by a code of secrecy imposed on those initiated into the groups and societies that guard the knowledge and techniques involved. In the 19th century, spiritualism and the Theosophical Society introduced new forms of occultism which have influenced *New Age*.
- *pantheism*: The word comes from the Greek *pan* ("all") and *theos* ("God"). It refers to the belief that everything is God or, sometimes, that everything is God. Every element of the universe is divine, and the divinity is equally present in everything.
- *panentheism*: The belief that God is in everything.
- *parapsychology*: Includes extrasensory perception, mental telepathy, telekinesis, psychic healing, and communication with spirits via mediums or channeling. Despite fierce criticism from genuine psychologists, parapsychology has become popular. It fits the view popular in some *New Age* thought that human beings have extraordinary psychic abilities, although often in an undeveloped state.
- *philosophia perennis*: a group of universal philosophical problems, principles, and ideas (e.g. God, freedom, immortality) that perennially constitutes the primary subject of philosophical thought.
- *planetary consciousness*: Heir to movements in the early 20th century that promoted a world government, this world-view developed in the 1980s, fostering loyalty to humanity rather than to a nation, tribe, or other established social group. It is part of the Gaia hypothesis.
- *positive thinking*: The conviction that people can change physical reality and external circumstances by altering their mental attitude: either by thinking positively and constructively or by becoming aware of negative thoughts. Positive thinkers are promised health and wholeness, often prosperity, and even immortality.
- *prosperity gospel*: An umbrella term for ideas — popular among charismatic evangelical preachers — that the Christian faith brings material and financial

success.

- *rebirthing*: In the early 1970s Orr described rebirthing as a process by which people identify and isolate areas in their consciousness that underlie unresolved problems in their lives.
- *reincarnation*: Linked by *New Age* to the concept of ascendant evolution towards divinity. Unlike Indian religions or those derived from them, *New Age* views reincarnation as progression of the individual soul towards a more perfect state. What is reincarnated is immaterial or spiritual: namely consciousness, that personal spark of energy that shares in cosmic or "christic" energy. Death is nothing but the passage of the soul from one body to another.
- *Rosicrucians*: Western occult groups involved in alchemy, astrology, theosophy, and kabbalistic interpretations of Scripture. The Rosicrucian Fellowship contributed to the revival of astrology in the 20th century, and the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis associated financial success with the ability to materialize mental images of health, riches, and happiness.
- *shamanism*: Practices and beliefs linked to communication with the spirits of nature or dead people, by which the spirits take ritualized possession of a shaman, who serves as a medium. It includes a romanticized view of indigenous religions, stressing their closeness to nature. It has been adopted by *New Age* because it stresses healing and harmony with the forces of nature.
- *spiritualism*: Attempts to contact the spirits of the dead. 19th century spiritualism is seen as one of the currents flowing into the *New Age*. Developed from the ideas of Swedenborg and Mesmer, it became a new kind of religion. Blavatsky was a medium, and so spiritualism had a great influence on the Theosophical Society, although she was concerned to contact entities from the distant past. Spiritualism can be found in Afro-Brasilian religions and in some of the Japanese new religious movements.
- *syncretism*: The amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.
- *theosophy*: The word comes from the Greek *theos* ("God") plus *sophos* ("wisdom"). Originally referring to mysticism, it has been linked to the Greek Gnostics and Neoplatonists, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and Jakob Boehme. The name was given new emphasis by the Theosophical Society, founded by Blavatsky and others in 1875. Theosophical mysticism is monistic and it looks for the hidden forces by which matter and spirit, human and divine, interact. It claims to offer mystical redemption or enlightenment.
- *transcendentalism*: A 19th century movement of writers and thinkers in New England, who shared belief in the essential unity of creation, the innate goodness of the human person, and the superiority of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of the deepest truths. Its chief member was Emerson, who moved from orthodox Christianity, through unitarianism, to a new natural mysticism that integrated concepts from Hinduism with popular American concepts like individualism, personal responsibility, and the need to succeed.
- *wicca*: An old English term for witches, it now refers to a neo-pagan revival of ritual magic. It was invented in England in 1939 by Gardner, who based it on scholarly texts claiming that medieval European witchcraft was an ancient nature religion persecuted by Christians. Called "the craft," it grew rapidly in the 1960s in the United States, where it encountered "women's spirituality."



## Endnotes

- 1 See Massimo Introvigne: *New Age and Next Age*, Casale Monferrato, 2000
- 2 Pope John Paul II: *Address to the Bishops of the USA*, 28 May 1993
- 3 See *ibid.*
- 4 "When the Moon is in the Seventh House, and Jupiter aligns with Mars, then Peace will guide the Planets, and Love will steer the Stars. This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius... Harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding; no more falsehoods or derision — golden living, dreams of visions, mystic crystal revelation, and the mind's true liberation."
- 5 Paul Heelas: *The New Age Movement; The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, 1996
- 6 See *ibid.*
- 7 See the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development: *Our Creative Diversity*, Paris, 1995.
- 8 See Christoph Bochinger: "New Age" und Moderne Religion: *Religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*, 1994, Chapter 3.
- 9 See P. Heelas: *op cit.*
- 10 See Gilbert Markus OP: "Celtic Schmelting" in *Spirituality*, November-December 1998 and January-February 1999.
- 11 See Marilyn Ferguson: *The Aquarian Conspiracy, Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*, Los Angeles, 1980. In late 1977, she sent a questionnaire to 210 "persons engaged in social transformation," whom she calls "Aquarian Conspirators." She reported that "when respondents were asked to name individuals whose ideas had influenced them, either through personal contact or through their writings, those most often named, in order of frequency, were Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Aldous Huxley, Robert Assagioli, and Jiddu Krishnamurti." Others frequently mentioned were "Paul Tillich, Hermann Hesse, Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Buber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Tarthang Tulku, Alan Watts, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Muktananda, David Suzuki, Thomas Merton, Willis Harman, Kenneth Boulding, Elise Boulding, Erich Fromm, Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Frederic Spiegelberg, Alfred Korzybski, Heinz von Foerster, John Lilly, Werner Erhard, Oscar Ichazo, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Joseph Pearce, Karl Pribram, Gardner Murphy, and Albert Einstein."
- 12 See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture; Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, 1996. His list of the Theosophical Society's objectives comes from the final (1896) version; earlier versions had stressed the irrationality of "bigotry" and the urgency of promoting non-sectarian education. Hanegraaff quotes J. Gordon Melton's description of *New Age* religion as rooted in the "occult-metaphysical" tradition (*Ibid.*, p. 455).
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Thomas M. King SJ: *Jung and Catholic Spirituality*, in *America*, 3 April 1999. He notes that *New Age* devotees speak of I Ching, astrology, and Zen, while Catholics speak of the Christian mystics, the liturgy, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He also lists Catholics and Catholic institutions clearly inspired and guided by Jung's psychology.
- 15 See W. Hanegraaff: *op cit.* 16 Carl Jung: *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, quoted in W. Hanegraaff: *op cit.*
- 17 See Michel Lacroix: *L'Ideologia della New Age*, Milano, 1998. The word "sect" is used here not in any pejorative sense, but rather to denote a sociological phenomenon.
- 18 See W. Hanegraaff: *op cit.*
- 19 See Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge: *The Future of Religion, Secularisation, Revival and Cult Formation*, Berkeley, 1985.
- 20 See M. Lacroix, *op cit.*
- 21 The Swiss "Theologie für Laien" course entitled *Faszination Esoterik* puts this clearly.
- 22 The term was already in use in the title of *The New Age Magazine*, published by the Ancient Accepted Scottish Masonic Rite in the southern USA as early as 1900. See M. York, *The New Age Movement in Great Britain*, in *Syzygy: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture*, California. Estimates of the time range from 1967 to 2376.
- 23 Irish Theological Commission: *A New Age of the Spirit? A Catholic Response to the New Age Phenomenon*, Dublin, 1994
- 24 W. Hanegraaff: *op cit.*
- 25 See Thomas Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1970.
- 26 See Alessandro Olivieri Pennesi: *Il Cristo del New Age*, Vatican City, 1999.
- 27 See P. Heelas: *op cit.*, quoted in M. Ferguson: *op cit.* The August 1978 journal of the Berkeley Christian Coalition puts it this way: "Just ten years ago the funky drug-based spirituality of the hippies and the mysticism of the Western yogi were restricted to the counterculture. Today, both have found their way into the mainstream of our cultural mentality. Science, the health professions, and the arts, not to mention psychology and religion, are all engaged in a fundamental reconstruction of their basic premises."
- 28 See P. Heelas: *op cit.*
- 29 See *ibid.*
- 30 See Michel Schooyans: *L'Évangile face au désordre mondial*, Paris, 1997. This quotation comes from its preface, by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, translated from Italian.
- 31 See Pope John Paul II: *Dominum et vivificantem*, 53.
- 32 See Carlo Maccari: *La "Mistica Cosmica" del New Age*, in *Religioni e Sette nel Mondo*, 1996/2.
- 33 See Jean Vernet, "L'avventura spirituale dei figli dell'Acquario," in *Religioni e Sette nel Mondo* 1996/2, p. 42f.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 See J. Gordon Melton: *New Age Encyclopedia*, Detroit, 1990.
- 36 David Spangler: *The Rebirth of the Sacred*, London, 1984
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith: *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 1989, 14. Also see Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 19; and Pope John Paul II: *Fides et Ratio*, 22.
- 39 See Benjamin Creme: *The Reappearance of Christ and the Masters of Wisdom*, London, 1979.
- 40 See Chris Griscom: *Ecstasy is a New Frequency: Teachings of the Light Institute*, New York, 1987.



- 41 Matthew Fox: *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, San Francisco, 1988
- 42 See Alessandro Olivieri Pennesi: *Il Cristo del New Age*, 1999.
- 43 See Ron Rhodes: *The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement*, Grand Rapids, 1990.
- 44 Nicene Creed
- 45 William Bloom: *The New Age, An Anthology of Essential Writings*, London, 1991
- 46 Pope John Paul II: *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 9
- 47 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 52
- 48 See Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- 49 See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 355-383
- 50 See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1730-1731.
- 51 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1731
- 52 See P. Heelas: *op cit*.
- 53 M. Lacroix: *op cit*
- 54 Edwin Schur: *The Awareness Trap, Self-Absorption instead of Social Change*, New York, 1977
- 55 M. Lacroix: *op cit*
- 56 See Brendan Pelphrey: *I said, "You are Gods," Orthodox Christian Theosis and Deification in the New Religious Movements*, in *Spirituality East and West*, Easter 2000
- 57 Adrian Smith: *God and the Aquarian Age, The new era of the Kingdom, Great Wakening*, 1990
- 58 See the Argentine Bishops' Conference Committee for Culture: *Frente a Una Nueva Era, Desafío a la Pastoral en el Horizonte de la Nueva Evangelización*, 1993
- 59 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *op cit*, 23
- 60 *Ibid*, 3
- 61 *Ibid*, 13
- 62 See *ibid*, 7.
- 63 See W. Hanegraaff: *op cit*. The system of correspondences is clearly inherited from traditional esotericism, but it has a new meaning for those who (consciously or not) follow Swedenborg. While every natural element in traditional esoteric doctrine had the divine life within it, Swedenborg held that nature is a dead reflection of the living spiritual world. This idea is very much at the heart of the post-modern vision of a disenchanted world and various attempts to "re-enchant" it. Blavatsky rejected correspondences, and Jung emphatically relativised causality in favour of the esoteric world-view of correspondences.
- 64 For example, Deepak Chopra: *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* and José Silva: *Sales Power: the Mind Method*.
- 65 Pope John Paul II: *Salvifici Doloris*, 19
- 66 W. Hanegraaff: *op cit*
- 67 See Reinhard Hümmel: *Reinkarnation*, in *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen*, 2000.
- 68 Paul Williams: *Buddhism From a Catholic Perspective*, Catholic Truth Society. Also see Paul Williams: *Unexpected Way: On Converting From Buddhism to Catholicism*, Bloomsbury, 2002. Williams was Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy and co-director of the Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol for 20 years. He became a Catholic in 2002.
- 69 See David Spangler: *The New Age*, Issaquah, 1988
- 70 David Spangler: *Actualité des Religions*, September 1999
- 71 M. Ferguson, *op cit*
- 72 Quoted in the Maranatha Community: *The True and the False New Age*, Manchester, 1993
- 73 M. Lacroix: *op cit*
- 74 M. Ferguson: *op cit*
- 75 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2402
- 76 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2417
- 77 Michael Fuss: *New Age and Europe — A Challenge for Theology*, in *Mission Studies*, 1991
- 78 *Ibid*
- 79 *Ibid*
- 80 See P. Heelas: *op cit*
- 81 See Elliot Miller: *A Crash Course in the New Age*, Eastbourne, 1989. For the vehemently anti-Christian stance of spiritualism, see R. Laurence Moore: *Spiritualism*, in Edwin S. Gaustad (ed): *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, New York 1974, and R. Laurence Moore: *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, New York, 1977.
- 82 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *op cit*, 3
- 83 John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994
- 84 Helen Bergin OP: *Living One's Truth*, in *The Furrow*, January 2000
- 85 *Ibid*
- 86 See Pope John Paul II: *Ecclesia in Africa*, 103. The Pontifical Council for Culture has published a handbook listing these centres throughout the world: *Catholic Cultural Centres*, Vatican City, 2001
- 87 See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *op cit*
- 88 Lack of information can allow those responsible for education to be misled by groups whose real agenda is inimical to the Gospel, especially in schools, where there is a captive, a curious young audience. See the caveat in Massimo Introvigne: *op cit*.
- 89 Pope John Paul II: *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33
- 90 See J. Badewien: *Antroposofia*, in H. Waldenfels (ed) *Nuovo Dizionario delle Religioni*, San Paolo, 1993
- 91 See Raúl Berzosa Martínez: *Nueva Era y Cristianismo*, Madrid, 1995
- 92 Helen Palmer: *The Enneagram*, New York, 1989
- 93 See the Argentine Bishops' Conference Committee for Culture: *op cit*.
- 94 J. Gernet: *Divination et Rationalité*, Paris, 1974
- 95 See John Saliba: *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement, A Critical Assessment*, London, 1999
- 96 See Susan Greenwood: *Gender and Power in Magical Practices*, in Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (eds): *Beyond New Age, Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh, 2000
- 97 See M. Fuss, *op cit*
- 98 For a brief but clear treatment of the Human Potential Movement, see Elizabeth Puttick: *Personal Development: the Spiritualization and Secularization of the Human Potential Movement*, in Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (eds): *Beyond New Age, Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh, 2000
- 99 See Carlo Maccari: *La "New Age" Di Fronte alla Fede Cristiana*, Leumann-Torino, 1994
- 100 See W. Hanegraaff: *op cit*
- 101 See M. Fuss: *op cit*.
- 102 On this last point, see Eckhard Türk: "Neonazismus," in *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen*, 2000



## Appendix 5: "I, your God, am a Jealous God"

## Introduction

Christ betrothed the Church to Himself at the Last Supper/crucifixion.<sup>1</sup> Now He has gone to prepare a place for her, like a Jewish bridegroom. Eventually, He will come back and take her with Him so that she may be where He is.<sup>2</sup>

As a faithful Husband, Christ confides in His Church, telling her things He tells no one else<sup>3</sup> and giving her everything He has, including His Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, it is only through her that His gifts reach us.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, anyone now looking elsewhere for some vision or revelation offends Him, "by not fixing his eyes" entirely upon Him, but "living with the desire for some other novelty."<sup>6</sup>

Despite our Catholic faith, "idolatry remains a constant temptation."<sup>7</sup> We think of it as "false pagan worship," and we resolve that we would never sin that grievously. However, it includes rejecting or denying God's "unique lordship" by "divinizing" anything else: attributing to any other thing or person powers that are God's alone.<sup>8</sup>

A Catholic who seeks "spirituality" *in any form* outside the Catholic Church is like the unfaithful wife in the Book of Hosea, who, like Hosea's own wife Gomer,<sup>9</sup> does not desert her husband, but wants to see what other men can offer.<sup>10</sup>

## Breaking the First Commandment

Today, the temptation to idolatry comes mainly from the *New Age* movement, which offers us an alternative form of "spirituality."

Not all of us become deeply involved in it, like Moira Noonan, who, through *New Age* pain-control techniques, became a serious *New Age* teacher and practitioner for over 20 years before she returned to the Catholic Church. Many of us just dabble in it — by reading our horoscope, for example — perhaps without even recognizing its *New Age* associations. In any case, we think the matter unimportant.

But, as Noonan warned, "when you start dabbling in the *New Age*, you break the First Commandment. It's as simple as that."<sup>11</sup> And the First Commandment is "the foundation of our faith"<sup>12</sup> — "You shall have no other gods besides Me."

Not all Christians apostasize, like Paul Williams, who, for 20 years, was Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy and co-director of the Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol before he became a Catholic in 2000. But many Catholics join "prayer groups" that start with Buddhist calming meditation.<sup>13</sup>

"The fact is, whether you like it or not," Williams says, "that the choice of the means already determines the result.... Anyone who devotes himself to practices and methods that are not home-grown in the soil of his own faith will imperceptibly be led toward the faith that developed these practices as a genuine expression of itself. Today, many people are going through this painful experience, even though many do not dare admit even to themselves that they have strayed from the path."<sup>14</sup>

Speaking from his own experience, Williams says that Christians who practise Buddhist meditation "are flirting with heresy," and that "all too often, preferring their own opinion to orthodoxy, they leave the Christian faith."

1 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

2 See Jn 14:3.

3 St. Paul says that it is "through the Church" that God's wisdom "is made known" even "to the principalities and powers of Heaven" (see Eph 3:10-11).

4 See Acts 2:1-4; Jn 14:16-17,26.

5 See CCC 819.

6 John of the Cross: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chapter 22, 4. See CCC 65.

7 CCC 2113

8 See CCC 2112-2114.

9 See Hos 3:1.

10 See Hos 2.

11 Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Part Three, "The First Commandment."

12 Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Chapter Five

13 See the talk on "Prayer," Appendix 3.

14 Paul Williams: *Buddhism from a Catholic Perspective*, On Meditation. Williams is quoting Gabriel Bunge OSB: *Earthen Vessels: the Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition*.

### Adultery

In the Old Testament, God described idolatry as adultery.<sup>15</sup> In the Book of Deuteronomy, He explicitly forbade idolatrous "abominations."<sup>16</sup> It was because of them that He drove the original inhabitants out of the Promised Land.<sup>17</sup> He commanded that Israelites who practised them be "cut off" from their people.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, God sounded just like a jealous husband: "Let there be, then, no man or woman, no clan or tribe among you, who would now turn away his heart from the Lord, our God, to go and serve these pagan gods! Let there be no root that would bear such poison and wormwood among you.

"If any such person, upon hearing the words of this curse, should beguile himself into thinking that he can safely persist in his stubbornness of heart,... the Lord's wrath and jealousy will flare up against that man, and every curse mentioned in this book will alight on him. The Lord will blot out his name from under the heavens and will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for doom, in keeping with all the curses of the covenant inscribed in this book of the law."<sup>19</sup>

### Jealousy

We usually think of jealousy as a negative emotion, as in Shakespeare's *Othello*. But jealousy is not always negative. Again and again, God described Himself to the Israelites as "a jealous God."<sup>20</sup> St. Paul told the Corinthians that he was jealous of them "with the jealousy of God Himself."<sup>21</sup>

Jealousy is often confused with "envy" — one of the seven capital sins. "Envy" is defined as "grudging contemplation of the more fortunate"<sup>22</sup> and "sadness or discontent at the excellence, good fortune, or success of another."<sup>23</sup>

"Jealousy" is defined not only as "suspicious vigilance" (its negative sense), but also as "solicitude for the preservation of rights; apprehension of being displaced in the love or good-will of a friend, lover, or spouse."<sup>24</sup>

If you see someone "moving in" on your relationship with your spouse, you are right to feel and express jealousy (in its positive sense). Similarly, the fact "that our God is 'jealous' for us is the sign of how true His love is."<sup>25</sup>

### 'A Tangled Web'

In her book *A Tangled Web*, Lucy Maud Montgomery describes how, when two people love each other, they notice even the *slightest* infidelity — like criticism (even mild criticism) of one's spouse to a third person.

Gay and Noel were not married, but they were "almost engaged" when Noel arrived to take Gay to a dance. Gay went out to watch for him, but just missed his car as it swept round a curve. When she returned to the house, she found Noel on the porch, talking to her cousin Nan, who had just arrived from the city for a visit.

A strange, icy, little ripple ran all over Gay.

*(How could she say that he should have walked down the road to meet her?)*

But that night Gay and Noel got engaged, and everything became perfect.

Gay could never quite remember when the first faint shadow fell across her happiness.... Nan and Noel were such friends.

*(How could she protest? After all, they would soon be cousins.)*

But still — there were moments when Gay felt like an outsider, as they talked to each other a patter she couldn't talk.

15 See, for example, Ez 22:23 - 23:27; Hos 4:12-14.

16 See Dt 18:10-11.

17 See Dt 18:12.

18 See Lv 18:29.

19 Dt 29:17-20

20 See Ex 20:5, 34:14; Dt 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; Jos 24:19; Na 1:2.

21 2 Cor 11:2; also see 1 Cor 10:21-22.

22 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*

23 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*

24 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*

25 CCC 2737



Since Nan was a visitor, she and Noel took her about with them.

*(How could she refuse? At least she couldn't, and Noel didn't seem to want to.)*

Gradually, she began to feel left out.

*(But there was so little to take hold of — too little to put into words or even thoughts. She couldn't expect Noel to take no notice of anyone but herself!)*

Then came the afternoon when she overheard Nan and Noel talking casually over the phone. They didn't say a word the whole world mightn't have heard. *(But it was the suggestion of intimacy — of something everyone else was excluded from. Why, Noel was talking to Nan as he should talk only to her!)*

For the first time Gay felt the sting of jealousy. But when Noel arrived later he was as loving as ever and Gay went to bed laughing at herself.

*(She was a little fool to get worked up over nothing!)*

Then one evening, Noel did not show up. In the morning he phoned to say that Nan had asked him to pick her up at her mother's on his way to Gay's.

*(What else could he have done? Of course he had had to say yes!)*

But Nan's mother was hosting a party and they had pressed Noel to stay. By the time they had got back to Gay's, it was too late for him to see her. He would be up as soon as he could.

Noel came four nights later — bringing Nan with him. The three sat on the verandah steps and chatted. At least, Nan and Noel did. Gay was a bit silent. At last she got up and wandered away.

*(Surely he'll follow me!)*

But he stayed with Nan. At last Gay went back to the house alone, by a route that avoided them.

Finally the day came when Noel phoned to say he couldn't take her to the dance that night. She asked her friend Roger to take her instead.

*(I have to know — I have to be sure — that Noel hasn't gone to the dance with Nan.)*

The first thing she saw when she got there was Noel and Nan sharing a sandwich.

She turned and ran, sick and cold with agony.

*(I must keep running. If I stop, my heart will break.)*

The end came with a letter from Noel breaking their engagement.

### An alarm bell

Infidelity "is never a sudden, spontaneous, totally unexpected act. It is always preceded by a longer drama." (And so is our apostasy from the Catholic faith.) "A spouse's jealousy is an alarm bell to be heeded." Only the "self-centered think that all jealousy is purely suspicious and evil."<sup>26</sup>

A loving husband does not wait until adultery has occurred: he begins to feel jealous as soon as his wife starts looking elsewhere. And the same goes for a wife.

Of course, no human can center his life on another, however beloved; but God has made us for Himself, and no one can take His place.<sup>27</sup> "You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind."<sup>28</sup> Being omniscient, God knows the very instant our allegiance strays, and, jealous with the jealousy of a loving husband, He sounds the alert immediately.

If we expect Him to tolerate our "dabbling" in *New Age*, we are like Noel in Montgomery's story. We must shun every sign of it — as Noonan did when she "cleaned house," destroying all her *New Age* books and other paraphernalia — and remain utterly faithful to Christ,<sup>29</sup> "altogether sincere toward the Lord."<sup>30</sup>

26 Walter Wangerin: *How to Stop Adultery Before It Starts*"; see the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness," Appendix 4.

27 C.S. Lewis wrote to Sheldon Vanauken after his wife had died, "You have been brought to see (how true and how very frequent this is!) that you were jealous of God. So from us you have been led back to us and God; it remains to go on to God and us" (Sheldon Vanauken: *A Severe Mercy*, Chapter IX)

28 Mt 22:37

29 See Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Part One, 17.

In His jealousy, God will not *tolerate* our *New Age* dabbling. However, His "passionate love for His people" — for humanity — "is at the same time a forgiving love."<sup>31</sup> He does not pretend that we are innocent,<sup>32</sup> but He forgives our guilt; He does not make us comfortable when we are down, but raises us up.

"Failures will be forgiven; it is acquiescence that is fatal: the permitted, regularized presence of an area in ourselves that we still claim for our own."<sup>33</sup>

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30 Dt 18:13

31 Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 10

32 See Ex 34:7.

33 C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, "A Slip of the Tongue"



## Appendix 6: What Can I Say?

In her book *Ransomed From Darkness*, Moira Noonan recounts how she longed to escape from the effects of her "psychic abilities," which were creating "confusion and anxiety" — unlike the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which bring peace.

She asks readers who meet someone in that state to "please evangelize them."

Speaking of "other former psychics who were raised Catholic and have come back to their faith," she says that they were "actually looking for the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit," but they "were looking in the wrong places."

"Such people are ripe to be evangelized," she says. "Don't feel shy. Talk to them. Tell them Jesus is the Prince of Peace."<sup>1</sup>

Noonan advises staying away from the *New Age* milieu. "God makes it very clear: stay away from mediumship, sorcery, and fortune-telling of all kinds. Jeremiah warned the people not to look for signs of the future in the stars. The Bible makes it clear, over and over: don't go to this kind of place."<sup>2</sup>

"Do not go to the mediums or consult fortune-tellers, for you will be defiled by them," God told the Israelites.<sup>3</sup> That includes psychics, spirit guides, and clairvoyants, says Noonan — "all contemporary terms for the kind of occult professionals the Lord was referring to in this passage."<sup>4</sup>

If we take Noonan's advice, we are unlikely to come in contact with psychics. However, we are quite likely to hear *New Age* words and phrases from friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. How can we respond, without (on the one hand) betraying Christ and (on the other) getting into a theological discussion?

Here are some ideas, from my own experience.

- A man who had bought all the salt he could find for his frozen driveway had returned the excess. Now, with the return of cold weather, he was trying unsuccessfully to buy more. A woman nearby said to me, "Now, *that's* karma!" I replied, "Oh, please don't say that to me; I'm a Christian!"
  - I am often asked whether my CZ earrings are my birthstone. I always give the same answer: "Oh, I'm not superstitious." Sometimes I have to repeat it. I give the same reply when I am asked what my Zodiac sign is.
  - I often hear, "I'm not religious, but I am spiritual." I say, "Oh, good! I hope you know that there are evil spirits as well as good."
  - If a concept is described explicitly as *New Age*, I dismiss it with, "Oh, that's not new — that's ancient Gnosticism."
  - When people claim that God is not "out there," but part of the universe, no more than the universe, or within us, I say, "The God I worship is much bigger — too big to fit into the universe! But you're right: He *is* in me, because I've been baptized."
  - If a term used by the Catholic Church is employed in a *New Age* sense, I say, "I'm Catholic, and that's *not* what we mean by ..."
  - If I can't think of anything else, I just say, "No. I can't agree. I'm Catholic."
- I try to observe what St. Peter said: "Be ever ready to reply, but do it gently and respectfully."<sup>5</sup> A smile always helps!

Nearly always, the only response I get is a blank stare — but at least I've refused to go along with *New Age* ideas!

The human race is engaged in "dire combat with the powers of evil."<sup>6</sup> Our "opponent, the devil, is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"; we must "resist him, solid in [our] faith."<sup>7</sup> And we have St. Michael on our side.<sup>8</sup>

1 Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Chapter Five

2 Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Chapter Five. Noonan cites Dt 18:9-14; Lv 20:27; and Acts 16:16-18.

3 Lv 19:31

4 Moira Noonan: *Ransomed From Darkness*, Chapter Eighteen.

5 1 Pt 3:15

6 CCC 409

7 See 1 Pt 5:8.

8 See the talk on "Prayer," Appendix 1.



## Appendix 7: Is Yoga Permissible for Christians?

### The question

The Church has not spoken definitively on Christians' practice of yoga. We may practise yoga in Christian freedom,<sup>1</sup> provided we do not embrace any underlying non-Christian philosophy or religion.<sup>2</sup>

Can yoga postures be separated from non-Christian beliefs, like the manipulation of "forces" or "energies" forbidden by the First Commandment?<sup>3</sup>

### The considerations

Many Christians answer *no*, claiming that the dangers of the occult remain, especially in harnessing forbidden "forces"<sup>4</sup> to achieve altered states of consciousness.

They argue that if a yoga posture *is* separated from its underlying philosophy, any superiority it might have over other postures will vanish. Only if the underlying philosophy is adopted, they claim, will the necessary spiritual "forces" be unleashed.

Some of these arguments border on superstition. They are like those St. Paul criticized when, speaking of food that had been offered to idols, he said, "We know that an idol is really nothing, and that there is no God but one."<sup>5</sup> *Of themselves*, yoga stretches and exercises are morally neutral and may be physically beneficial; they are no more different from other poses than meat from a pagan temple is different from other meat.

Nevertheless, many people see yoga as "spiritual" and "prayerful" — as can be expected, given yoga's philosophical and religious underpinnings. Any Catholic who practises it must be clear that he is merely exercising physically, except insofar as *anything* we do can be offered to God as a prayer. *Of itself*, yoga is no more spiritual or prayerful than swimming or weightlifting.

### Scandal

Practising yoga, like eating food offered to idols, is a social event, so we must take care not only not to deceive ourselves, but also not to "scandalize" others.<sup>6</sup>

However we ourselves see yoga, we must not become "an occasion of sin" to those whose understanding is "weak."<sup>7</sup>

### Precautions

Some yoga programs explicitly claim to be Christian (*e.g.*, *PrayerMotion*, *Catholic FIT*, *Pietra Fitness*, *SoulCore*, and *Cathletix*), but many include spiritual elements incompatible with Christianity.

A Catholic considering yoga (or any other exercise program based on a non-Christian philosophy or religion) should first become familiar with two documents: *On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*<sup>8</sup> and *Jesus Christ, The Bearer of the Water of Life*.<sup>9</sup> Then he should separate, scrupulously and completely, his practice of yoga from any religion or philosophy that is contrary to Catholicism.

Perhaps he could ask his instructors some questions in advance:

- Are they aware of non-Christian elements in classical and contemporary yoga?
- What, if anything, do they do to ensure that they avoid them?
- Are they aware of the possibility of scandal?
- If so, how do they avoid it?
- Where did they themselves learn yoga?
- Are they aware of the Church's documents on Christian meditation and *New Age*?

1 See 1 Cor 8.

2 See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*.

3 See CCC 2110-2117.

4 See CCC 2110-2117.

5 See 1 Cor 8:4.

6 See the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments."

7 See 1 Cor 8:1-13.

8 From the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

9 From the Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue. See Appendix 3.