

EVANGELISATION AND THE NEW AGE.

- A Challenge To The Church?

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Introduction:

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The Church has always been faced with the problem of having to adapt to new problems and controversies. At significant periods in its history, the Church has been forced into making its opinion on new ideas known. The Church has been continually focussing what it has been about for years. In its earlier years it was missionary, and evangelical. In later years it became institutionalised and yet again had to face problems related with that.

As we move towards the end of the second milenium, the Church is again is having to refine its answers. The Gospel was supposed to be preached to the ends of the earth, yet the reality is that many who have heard of Jesus Christ have turned against what He has said. Popular atheism has come and gone. Spiritualism is now one of the modern trends. People are beginning to become more spiritually aware of themselves, out-side the Church.

I propose to look at the whole area of evangelism in the Church. Rather than being institutional, the Church needs to remember that it is evangelical at its core. From its conception, the apostles have been sent out to preach the Good News. Somewhere the power of this message has diminished due to various challenges. I intend to look then at why people favour ideas such as the New Age, which we are apparently living in, to the Gospel. Many Christians and Catholics have been influenced by the New Age. Confusion exists around what it exactly is and stands for. Christians are divided on the subject of what it is; some reject it, others welcome it and in so doing sometimes reject the

Church. The Church has therefore been forced into coming to an understanding of what people are drawn to. I intend to look at some of the pastoral responses made by the Church and the relevant advice offered.

Many people who feel alienated choose to leave the institutional Church because they are fed up with it or don't know what else to do. They feel that it has nothing to say to them. Michael Paul Gallagher, who has worked extensively in this area has said that,

"alienation is the primary and most frequent form of loss of faith in Ireland." (1)

He then outlines various styles of alienation and how people tend to drift into other areas. Somewhere along the line the impact of faith has diminished. The possible deepness and richness that faith can offer has been mis-directed. Many searching people often end up looking in the wrong places for answers.

"Many leave the Church in a time of spiritual need. They may fail to find the spiritual nourishment in the Church and decide to look elsewhere." (2)

Pat Collins has written extensively in this particular area of faith and would say,

"All of us need to grow in faith. It enables us to...experience the grace of salvation which we first received in Baptism." (3)

As we draw to the end of this century, it is clear that our culture, which is pluralistic and secularised, is presenting the Church with a tremendous challenge. At times, as Christians we are weak and usually we resort to defensive techniques rather than evangelical,

"Instead of gathering new members the Church is losing many of the members it already has...This is a sad and ironic fact when one considers that Jesus came, as He said,"to bring Good News to the poor." Lk 4:18 (4)

There is then a need not to just to look at the direction in which people are going but to re-discover the power of our baptism. It is by virtue of our baptism that we receive our evangelical mandate. So what exactly is meant by evangelism in the Church?

PART ONE:

EVANGELISATION.

What is Evangelisation?

In recent years the Church, both universal and local, has begun to look at the whole question of evangelisation in the world. Evangelisation can be seen as the basic work of the Church in the world when it proclaims the Reign of God. (MK 1:15) Evangelism is said to be,

"proclaiming Christ to those who do not know him; of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring baptism and the other sacraments." (1)

Evangelism can be broken in three aspects;

A1. Evangelism - proclamation of the Gospel to the unchurched within society or culture.

B2. Missionary Activity - cross cultural proclamation of the Gospel.

C3. Pastoral Activity - nourishing and deepening of the Gospel among those already committed to it.

"If it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the local Church evangelises when she seeks to convert, solely through the Divine Power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage and the lives and the concrete milieux which are theirs." (2)

The basic core of evangelisation is then the Good News. Salvation is freely offered through the whole Gospel and liberates all peoples. The preacher of the Good News needs to really own and believe in the salvation that is offered.

"When the Good News is preached its not only the word about the resurrection but the event itself which releases the power of God into our lives and the world. Evangelisation is the announcement and unveiling of the fact that God's saving power is within us."(3)

This is stressing the need for the evangeliser to be evangelised. Evangelisation and conversion are all part of the on-going process which believers take part in.

Al.Evangelism:- Questions are now arising all over Europe for some sort of evangelism. In Europe there are many countries and many more customs. It now seems to be a massive museum to the spread of Christianity, in days of old. Churches of different periods and styles of influence are now just shrines to visiting tourists. Europe, the continent that carried the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth now is home to less believers in God and Church attenders than ever before. A need does exist, the young people are thirsting for the Gospel and are attracted easily by anything that is not institutionalised. Prayer groups and places of Christian prayer, like Taize, all help for the continuation of the Gospel. Is it enough?

The unchurched in the western world are very close to the heart of the Church. Great cities such as Rome, Berlin and Paris, all have groups of people who have never heard the Gospel preached to them in a real way. Whole societies now exist without some form of Christian input. The mission of the Church needs to reach out to these peoples. Many people, especially young people, deviate into the world of drugs, new ideas and live in sub-cultures. These sub-cultures encourage free ideas and an attitude of anything goes. It would seem that the challenge of the Church is to address this problem. Where symbols of the Church were rebuilt after the war, so the message of the Gospel needs to be preached again in a new way. The people in these cities and countries, whether in Europe or where ever, have a right to hear the Gospel preached and the gift of salvation that is freely offered by Christ. Maybe the tactics used in preaching the Gospel need to be addressed. The Church exists to proclaim Christ as saviour and needs to continually reveal Christ to people.

B2.Missionary Activity:- Mission is everything that the Church does in the service of the Reign of God. Proper mission activity would be the preaching of the Gospel to people who have not already heard the Gospel. *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* both affirm the fact that because of its very nature the Church is missionary. The great command to the first apostles was practised by Jesus Christ himself, the greatest missionary.

"Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation." Mk 16:12

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." Mt 28:19

As the first missionaries were preaching the Gospel they were persecuted for doing so. Regardless of this the message continued to spread. Christ came to make known the Reign of God. His message was a liberating one. It was the message that he lived and died for and came to life for. To listen to the Word of God or to witness to the action of God, this called for the "metanoia" experience. This experience is a radical renewal of heart. As Pope John Paul has said in his encyclical on evangelisation,

"since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all."(4)

This availability of the Good News is quite evident in the world. Continents such as Africa and Asia had few Christians at the beginning of the century in comparison with today. Huge progress has been made in regards the methodology of evangelisation and mission. The preaching of the Gospel in these foreign lands has led to a new understanding of mission and what it is all about. Just as Europe has been influenced by European Christianity, so Christianity is now having an African or Asian expression of it, an expression that is very necessary to its survival in these lands. This encouragement is needed because it is the dream of any missionary to see their dream and mission carried on after they leave. Mistakes have been made regarding the preaching of the Gospel in former years, yet on reflection the Church has improved its dynamic style and often leads the way forward. The constant struggle of native religions, the growth of Islam in some countries

and apathy to the Church all hinder the spread of the Gospel. New challenges are emerging and this doesn't make the communication of the Gospel any easier. Pope Paul VI once asked the rhetorical question,

"What has happened to the hidden energy of the Good News?"(5)

He called for a continuation of the proclamation of the Gospel because of its relevancy to the modern world. His anxiety is very real yet also the message is clear. The energy and zeal needs to be re-claimed. He then goes on to deal specifically with the preacher of the Gospel needs to,

"consecrate all his time and all his energies, and to sacrifice, if necessary his own life."(6)

It is a demand of the whole person being involved in the mission of Christ. There is still a power in the message. Time has not diminished the power of the command. The call to preach the Gospel is not just given to those in the ordained ministry, but to all those who are baptised. By mandate of their baptism they are encouraged to bring the Gospel to others. To make real this command in our lives we should not waste our time presuming that someone else will volunteer for the missions. We can proclaim the Gospel wherever we are at, either as priest, teacher, house-wife or whatever role we have in life. Sadly many of those who are baptised remain unconvinced to the power of the message, so that the message remains a secret and hidden from view.

Just as the message of the Reign of God has been accepted by us, as Christians we are called to pass on the message (in either word or deed). If it remains internalised then the message hasn't fully been heard. The message proclaimed by Christ is only realised when,

"The person who has been evangelised goes on to evangelise others."(7)

Pope John Paul, alludes to this in *Redemptoris Missio* as well. He would say that, as Christians we cannot keep our faith private. He would recognize the effect of the modern world on the Church as well,

"..in our world a gradual secularisation of salvation has taken place."(8)

The message is still the same so there is no need to censor it. A more focussed view of the Gospel is called for. In some parts of the world the main challenge to the Church has come from new ideas and new systems of thought. The Church is having to look closely at what these challenges are saying. Geography should not confine the message of the Gospel because as such there is no foreigner in the Church. Change is happening at a much faster rate in the developed world. Whole nations seem to be in a state of flux because of the influence of new ideas, often radical and often vague. Whether it is urbanisation, over population and so on, the evangelical method that is being used, needs to be clearly known to deal with whatever problem. As the Pope has said,

"clearly the ordinary means of pastoral work are not sufficient..."

the proclamation of Christ and the Reign of God must become the means for restoring human dignity."(9)

C3.Pastoral Activity:- The Pope is concerned and does realise that things in the present reality are not easy. Whatever method is used in a given pastoral situation, it should be appropriate to the relevant circumstances. Maybe it is his possible reference to the new age or new reality that we find ourselves living in. In paragraph 37 in *Redemptoris Missio*, he refers the time when St. Paul was preaching the Gospel in Areopagus. It was here that St. Paul had to use language that was appropriate and understandable and at the same time doing justice to the Gospel.(Acts 17:22-31)

The Gospel therefore needs to be translated into the modern language without lessening its content. As the Gospel was proclaimed to the learned of Athens, so also we as evangelisers must transport the message into the present reality we find ourselves. The communication of the message is important especially in a world which seems to be getting smaller. The Pope also cites that the mass media should not be neglected, but utilised for the furthering of the message. The media is the modern tool for the modern evangeliser. We need only look at the example Bishop Fulton Sheen in America where he held captive audiences for years, believers and non-believers, through the medium of radio and television. Many priests and others have been very slow to take up this challenge possibly because of the vulnerability of this front-line preaching of the Gospel. Paul VI referred to this fact that,

"the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time."(10)

Paul here is implying that not all pastors have taken up the challenge to proclaim the Gospel via the mass-media. There is still a fear in some Church circles of using the media, maybe because of the power of the medium. Many feel threatened by it or are fearful of it. It is the Church's loss in that many ideas and trends often can go unchecked. Many new ideas can flourish in this gap. In whatever culture that we find ourselves living in, the challenge is to witness to the Gospel in the language of Areopagus. Because of the smallness of the modern world Christians must remember their duty to witness to the Gospel. Our chosen market-place needs to be the situation that each of us finds ourself in. The call of Christ to the apostles still applies to each of us today. By virtue of our baptism we all need to feel challenged by the call of Christ to,

"go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News."
(Mk 16:12)

There is a call then for constant renewal of what we are about and a need to know exactly what it is I believe. A certainty of faith is called for. The more the Gospel is preached to others the more it will become deepened in ourselves. The mission and responsibility of the Church has not changed. Christ's mandate to the first apostles is still alive and well to proclaim the Gospel. We need to take that responsibility ourselves to carry out the command, because at the end of the day we are all answerable for our own actions.

Conclusion:

Having now looked at what evangelisation calls believing Christians to do, I now intend to look one of the greatest phenomena to affect the Church...The New Age. Many believers of Christ often end up rejecting the Church and yet continue to express belief in God. Many Christians and Catholics who have been brought up with Christ at some point in their life, come to a decision point in their life. It is a challenge of whether or not to continue to belong to the Church or God. Many at this cross-roads in their life end up leaving the Church for a while or permanently. Some of those who leave end up in various places. In this area in their life they become very vulnerable. Often they end up being influenced by new ideas, some of the eastern religious philosophies, new religious movements and other groupings of people. Many end up leaving the institutional Church, favouring the evangelical methods of fringe Christian Churches or even non-Christian groups. The paths that they begin to follow often takes them away from the true message of the Gospel. The more that they search in the wrong direction, the more that they end up getting completely lost and disillusioned with everything, including life itself. Often if they believe in God, it is usually by some other name that they know Him. It is a very serious challenge to the Church as an institution. The pillars that once supported people in the past such as family, society and other realities are changing and becoming more complex. Evangelisation has to fit into this reality somewhere. Witness to the Gospel is becoming more and more difficult. Can the expression of faith retain its meaning in the world even when it

takes on some of the traits of Areopagus? I believe it can. When the Gospel is inculturated in a given reality and it takes on all that is good then I believe that is true Gospel. The New Age does pose such a threat but I believe if it is handled properly the Church will become much more stronger. Pope John Paul is also concerned with the present reality,

"We need only think of the phenomena such as urbanisation, de-Christianisation of countries with ancient Christian traditions, the influence of the Gospel and its values in non-Christian countries, the proliferation of messianic cults and religious sects...Even before the Council it was said that some Christian countries had become mission territories, the situation has certainly not improved."(12)

The Church is then faced with a new reality - a New Age where it is not part of grass-root culture, but of a secularised reality. I intend now to examine what the New Age is all about, its beliefs, its origin and practices and the question should the Church be worried.

PART TWO:

THE NEW AGE.

The New Age**Introduction:**

I became interested in the whole area of the New Age quite by accident. I was always amazed at the way many Catholics and Christians in general, could give up their faith to follow another path or direction in life. Many people choose to leave because they have become bored with institutional religion and prefer some of the ways of new religious trends. A lot have become apathetic to what lived Christianity is all about and in turn become attracted into various areas that the New Age has to offer. My interest stems from the fact that a lot of what they are searching for and what they eventually take on, already exists in the Christian faith in some form or other. Michael Drumm has said that the New Age is a,

"bringing together of 8-9 distinct trends for example; health awareness, quiet types of prayer, body awareness and so on."(1)

Many of these trends he would say are very relevant to Christianity and that he would personally use them in his life. Whether it is holistic medicine or mantra prayer from the East, these practises have been around for quite a few centuries.

I hope to look at what exactly the New Age is about and what it is trying to say. The New Age is a massive growth industry, whether it is a personal development workshop or such extremes as the Body

Shop. I hope to examine where the New Age and the Church overlap, if at all. There are aspects of New Age that do contribute to the Christianity and effectively contribute to the growth of the Gospel. However some areas do the opposite so I also will look at those areas as well. What is important, is that whatever enhances the true evangelical message of Gospel needs to be grasped.

What is the New Age?

One can encounter the New Age almost anywhere such as airports, newsagents, bookshops, all offering various types of literature influenced by the New Age. Shops such as the Body Shop highlight the worldwide awareness for bodily or holistic health. Anyone really can be classed as being a New Ager because of the trends they follow or the background they come from (priest, nun, rock musician, house-wife ect). What they all have in common is that they are looking/searching for something to help them on their spiritual search.

It is very difficult to fully comprehend the New Age, because just when you think you have a rounded and balanced understanding of it, you can come across a new thought process and you are as far back as ever. This is the precise reason why many are attracted to it, in that it is nothing specific, yet at the same time a culmination of various ideas and strains of thought. New ideas are continually coming into focus. Whether you are attracted by the mysticism of the east, the various forms of healing, the psychology of Jung;

all are united in a journey leading somewhere into the unknown. Sometimes various exponents of New Age thought make explicit reference to Jesus, so that there is a dynamic of Christianity mixed up in it also. Some Christians are put off by anything that hints of New Age because of some advocate of the New Age and their teachings. Many wrongly write off the New Age because they say that it is cultic, satanic, messianic, influenced by feminism or some other strain of thought. A total rejection as such can hinder the benefit that some of the New Age thought has given to Christianity and the Church. A rejection of the New Age because of something such as satanism, risks the danger of,

"turning Christianity into a ghetto religion."(2)

The New Age is a movement that is continually in a state of flux. Ideas of all extremes seem to connect in the New Age. Knowledge supersedes faith. Some of the ideas presented range from the particular to the universal. A New Ager would share a concern for the future. Some of the ideas that they would present are; world unity, world government and even a Christ suitable for all. The New Age as such is not a religion, yet it is still very religious. Marilyn Ferguson, one of the great writers of the New Age, has described it as ,

" a leaderless but powerful network of people."(3)

It is not just a particular philosophy, yet it has a world vision. It is not a particular science but it would use scientific laws. Cardinal Danneels has described it as,

"an amorphous amalgom of the esoteric and the occult, of myths and magic and about the secrets of life, mixed in with a touch of Christianity and a few ideas derived from astro-physics."(4)

Other notable descriptions of it are as follows,

"It is like an umbrella under which much religious truth shelters...it can be likened to a religious octopus whose tentacles reach out to all who attempt to satisfy the spiritual needs of men."(5)

"At the heart of the New Age is the conviction that humanity is poised between two ages. Man is at the cross-roads between the age of Pisces, the Judaeo Christian era, and the emerging Age of Aquarius, in which he believes himself freed from the restraints of abstracting from evil, and the authoritarianism of the old order."(6)

"The dawning of the New Age, is a revival of all sorts of spiritual and psychic interest, has paved the way for many cultic organisations and belief systems...New Age beliefs are being promulgated in a massive but subtle way."(7)

Many places have been named as the origin of the New Age but because it has no central founder of base, no holy books or central dogma/thought, its difficult to be accurate. Some people believe that its spirituality is bound up in the spirit of the times rather than the spirit of God or grace. From the above quotes, it is easy

to see how people even find it difficult to give a clear definition of what the New Age is about.

Age of Aquarius:

The New Age is often referred to as the Age of Aquarius. Some schools of thought would say that sometime in the 1970's we passed from the Age of Pisces (which stretched from the beginning of Christianity/Judaism), to the Age of Aquarius. The Age of Pisces was seen as the age of authority, because Christianity/Judaism controlled peoples thinking.(8) The Age of Pisces was also viewed as a passage in time which was controlled by men, in that it was male leaders of the countries, nations and even the Church. It is into this realm that alot of mis-understanding regarding feminism takes place. The Age of Aquarius for some women would be the re-claiming of their identity in an equal world. Where the Age of Pisces divided, injustice flourished and in contrast, the Age of Aquarius will be a time for world peace, equality, harmony and wholeness. The Age of Aquarius is then a time of discovery.

Influence of Eastern Religious Traditions:

The eastern religions and belief systems such as Zen Buddhism Yoga, Reincarnation and meditative prayer, all have a strong influence in the New Age. The stillness exercises of the body and the contemplative prayer techniques and way of living, attract many people. Ideas such as the notion of oneness abound in Hinduism

and Buddhism. It is the notion that all is one. God is not separate but God's spirit is everywhere. God is everywhere and all is God. This idea is unacceptable to Christianity, that is, the idea of you and I being God. The New Age would take this slightly further and claim that if you search within yourself and get in touch with that reality, effectively then you can become God. This idea is at odds with Christian tradition.(9) Michael Drumm has said,

"We are Christian not God. There is a distinction." (10)



The ideal is very attractive and can be outlined as follows,

"since all is one (monoism), and all is God (pantheism), and all humanity is God, it follows that all religions are one."
(11)

This ideal is very attractive, multi-faith, multi-cultural and racial societies. The eastern way concentrates more on a personal experience and rules out an outside authority. Because of the rejection of an outside authority, Christianity would find this unacceptable.

Astrology:

Astrology is also something that is very popular with New Agers. It has intrigued humanity for many years. The stars are much older than humanity and can reveal various secrets to us. There is wonder attached to the stars and a revelation of the future. This is a

very subtle form of influence and can be found in most daily papers.

Crystals:

Many of the New Agers can often be seen wearing crystals for various reasons. Some believe that they have the ability to cure and to heal. They acknowledge some sort of spiritual power to them. In some way , the crystals connect with your bodily energy. The crystals in some way connect back with some of the original primal forces of the earth. Whatever is contained within the crystals, there is a belief that they do have some unexplained properties. Various healing methods use crystals also so crystals may have something to offer someone in the New Age.

Channeling:

A channeler is someone who uses this medium in order to get in contact with other spirits, a higher consciousness and beings from the other side. The channeler (person who channels), then repeats the message received from the "other side". Probably the best known channeler is the singer/actress Shirley Mac Laine, who in her book, "Out on a Limb" popularised this medium.(12) In her book she tells of her experiences through channelling.

How did the New Age Emerge?

In the history of the world there have been many paradigm

shifts. Different civilisations at the helm of the world all have made great discoveries for the advancement of the world. Science has proved to be a great transformer in the advancement of ideas. God was very much a part of the European conquerors of knowledge and new lands. It is only recently in the history of modern civilisation that it is fashionable not to believe in God. When the first person ventured into space and did not "find God", religion again began to be questioned. Nietzsche, the German philosopher claimed, "God is Dead" and in this century, the traditional idea and concepts of God have been under threat. People are now becoming very conscious of a world that seems to be going out of control, a world without God. It can be said that it was into this growing vacuum that the New Age grew. As J. Drane put it,

"The New Age movement is a response to the acknowledged failure of the scientific and materialist world view to deliver the goods." (13)

Before we tried to follow the ideas of Newton, then Einstein, now science again is trying to find meaning to life and reality. God's creation as we know it effectively has been referred to by the New Age as a single living body, sustained by the quality of relationships.

Change has happened in all areas of life, family, social and work. Change in the twentieth century has taken place at a much greater rate than ever before. In the western world, people have

lost faith in the traditional institutions. The enlightenment has helped to change the course of the world. Many people, including those in the New Age are uncomfortable with organised religions, so they distance themselves from them. Followers of the New Age are all into harmony and good relations with each other. God assumes the role of a passive observer. For them to depend on God is to be looking in the wrong direction. With people in the New Age coming from various backgrounds,

"mystical traditions of the past such as Gnosticism or Judaism rub shoulders with the speculations of modern science fiction, much of which has a mystical and spiritual character."(14)

People blend the traditions of the East and the West to achieve their higher perspective. In the 1960's, there seemed to be a revolution world wide by young people. The old orders died away. At that time the New Age was identified by youth, but today however it encompasses many age groups and people. The spiritual quest of the New Age fits into this space and vacuum. Whatever gaps organised religion and beliefs cannot answer, they (the New Age) will have one to fit in or suggest. It does appear to fit into the needs and wants of modern society. It is very flexible and adaptable.

One of the great advances that the New Age has encouraged is the role of psychology which is a modern science. One of the Fathers of this science is Carl Jung. The New Age would take his ideas and interpret them in a fresh way. Jung believed in using psychology to get in touch with our inner self, because where our inner self was, God existed.

"Jung embraced spirituality as a vital component of personality." (15)

The New Age likes the ideas of Jung because of the spiritual dimension. Within his thought process there is room for religious thought and mystical experience. The treasure of the unconscious was important to Jung, as was the process of working out who we might be.

What Does The New Age Believe?

When the New Age claims that they have no specific belief, that is only a half truth. In trying to identify the core of the New Age philosophy, Marilyn Ferguson has said,

"the mystical experience of wholeness encompasses all separation...you are joined to a great self... and because that self is inclusive, you are joined to others." (16)

The New Age also believes and blends alot of the religious traditions from the east as we have seen. The blend of the east and the west meet and are compromised in the New Age. The New Age takes on board universal themes and ideas (peace, harmony and green issues ect.) and tries to build an ideal world at peace with each other. It tries to compromise the God of Christianity with reincarnation, karma, ecology, psychology, and does so in an incoherent and indiscriminate way.

Is The New Age A Religion?

The New Age would not be classed as a particular religion as we know it. However it is very religious and it is this dimension that attracts people to it,

"The thing that attracts people to the New Age movement is that it does not appear very religious. But the New Age is fundamentally religious, religion being defined as belief in a higher unseen controlling power: it is mans search for God which tends to project various attributes on to God." (17)

Cardinal Danneels has also said that,

"It is not a religion, but it is nonetheless religious." (18)

The New Age may be associated with a lot of unchristian practises, but that does not make it anti-Christian. It does have many qualities that do enhance the Christian life, such as, contemplation, personal development and the caring for your body in a very new but much older way and so on.

The New Age is not characterised by any special ecclesiastical buildings or religious services. It is important to note that in Christianity the worshipper has a personal, loving faith relationship with God. Christianity is a response to God's invitation, it is both interior and exterior. The holistic approach which was once seen as New Age is now being adapted in Church circles. It echoes the call of Christ to,

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind." (Lk 10:27)

The New Age has shown how religious people can combine their worship and adoration of God by using all their senses and experiences. A danger for them would be, when the New Age tries to achieve the mystical experience, it might be for their own sake rather than for God.

"The main aim of the movement is to realise the full potential of human beings." (19)

Another danger with its religious quest is that when they over-use the various ways of "going within" in prayer, it over affirms the "God within" concept. Marilyn Ferguson refers to the God within as self,

"The separate self is an illusion, when the self joins the Self, there is power...(20)..God is experienced as flow, wholeness, the infinite kaleidoscope of life and death." (21)

The New Age may not have a religious institution but its institution is the personal quest for spirituality. In looking for the experience of God it offers many paths leading to God and others not leading to God. The further you go down the path that leads to God, the higher your energy level gets.

Two Examples of the New Age:

1. **Matthew Fox:**- This is certainly one of the greatest known figures in the New Age. As a Dominican priest, he has helped awareness to grow around the area of creation spirituality. Even though he has distanced himself from his order, he is still very popular in New Age circles. He is developing a style of creation spirituality that would link aspects of eastern mysticism and Christianity. In his book, "Original Blessings" (22), he argues that we need to return to original blessing as opposed to original sin. He would affirm the view of,

"a belief in panentheism, the view that everything is in God and God is in everything." (23)

In other words he rejects pantheism, that everything is God and God is everything.

One of the greatest opponents of Fox would not be the Vatican or his own Order, but Cardinal Ratzinger, who is head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith. He has warned of an infiltration of New Age ideas getting into the Church. Many Catholics attend his seminars, yet Drane has said that Fox,

"has been condemned by Ratzinger as dangerous and deviant."
(24)

How dangerous and deviant Fox is, is not the question. He has heightened the awareness of creation and urged a return to the creation that we all belong to. It cannot be doubted how emphasis he would place on theology, even though he has a very personalised

understanding of it. The Church needs to be very careful when it would attack people like Fox, because many of those involved in the New Age are involved in a serious search for God. The Church needs to be ready to respond. The challenge Fox and others have given the Church is how they will be able to live and work alongside each other.

2. Findhorn:- "The aim of all that happens at Findhorn is personal and social transformation. The rituals of the workshops and the community life are designed to address the crises of materialism, self-alienation and ecological catastrophe which characterise society at large." (25)

Findhorn, which is situated in the North of England, is a place where a lot of the New Age ideas are taken very seriously. Findhorn, like New Grange, Stonehenge, is said to be also a cosmic power point. It specialises in getting in touch with the original spirit of the world. The aim of somewhere like Findhorn is to reach that "higher self", via the inner journey of self discovery. This discovery in turn can then be transported into the local community. In this was the New Age, via Findhorn - the modern place of pilgrimage, now re-enters the local community of the participant. Findhorn is very nature centred and appears to make Gods out of nature.

"Not all New Agers would go this far but it certainly many are trying to re-discover the divine nature of the earth. Findhorn is only a concrete example of many people trying to go back to the natural process." (26)

Findhorn is a re-discovery of the planet and is a place of modern wisdom using old ideas, even if extreme.

What is the New Age Saying to the Church?

Undoubtedly the New Age is having some effect on the Church and its members. Various New Agers are challenging Church members, whether it be through the various therapies offered or even new ways of praying. On a positive note, the New Age is urging people to have a more spiritual dimension in their life. It also would urge that the Church should give better guidance for what is beneficial and faith enhancing. This could be a reference to the fact that some of the modern sciences can be good for you. If the New Age is challenging our perception of God, the Church is ready because over the years it has been refining its arguments.

Questions have been asked as to whether it is a passing notion or reality. I personally don't think so, because the New Age for what it is worth is challenging people to question where they are at in life, via its influence in music, style and so on. Regardless of the manifestations of the New Age, relatively few groups or people would label themselves New Age. The reality is that many of those who are active members in the Church, passively accept some sort of New Age influence in their life (even if they don't accept all its philosophy). Many people just accept certain aspects of the New Age, as John Drane has said,

"The New Age is here to stay, and is well established among the Christian population." (27)

As I have already noted a major part of the New Age thinking that Christianity does not accept, is the idea that you and I are God. Another major obstacle that the New Age has failed to address is serious moral topics. For true people of the New Age there is no such thing as sin. Michael Drumm would argue that for the New Agers,

"sin and evil are a hiccup on the road of our development."
(28)

This basically assumes that along the path of our evolution we will develop and have the potential to be better. In regards moral question^s, Drumm asserts that they have failed to answer and address serious questions such as,

"Why do innocent people suffer? Their logic cannot answer how I can be jealous or hurtful of another individual." (29)

On a positive note, it offers a unity that is somewhat lacking in our lives. We go to school for education, hospital if we are sick and so on. Our loves are continually divided and distinct. The New Age introduces a unity so that we as Christians we should try and seek. It is a call to wholeness and balance in all areas of our life.(30)

The Newness of the New Age:

As Christians we live in the age of Christ. We believe that with Christ a New Age has dawned. The word, "New" has been very important to Christianity since its beginning. In our scriptures, both Old and New Testament, we can find many references to; New Covenant, New Wineskins, New Heavens, New Jerusalem, New Adam. This newness was important to the writers of the New Testament. This means that when the New Age takes on board this word "New", it is looking for a bridge between it and the Christianity. As Christians, we live in the New Age of Christ, so this idea of the New Age is a hijacked, concept taken from Christianity.

"Most aspects of the New Age are very old aspects of the Christian tradition." (31)

Russell Chandler claims that it was a women called Alice Bailey who first coined the term of us living in a New Age. (32) It was because of her writings and influence that the notion of the dawning of the New Age became popular. Regardless of where the New Age originated, what is certain is that Christianity has been around for a long time and will continue to be around in years to come. Maybe what the New Age is telling the Church is that it needs to return to its roots and re-discover the dream of the New Covenant and re-build the New Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

In many western countries, lifestyles have changed dramatically in recent years. Many of the mainline Churches are all experiencing a decline in people attending. Belief in God has declined significantly. Many new religious movements and non-Christian groups are beginning to fill the gap that is left. The Christian tradition is seemingly on the wane. The New Age is very much connected with all these trends. All of the Churches have been involved in reacting against the new trends. Christian book-shops all contain literature and both affirmative of the New Age and also reactionary to it. Cardinal Ratzinger, who is head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith, has warned bishops to be aware of radically new ideas entering their particular Churches. A lot of the literature written by Catholics has not been very favourable to the New Age. Balanced view-points are rare.

The New Age and the Church do have very similar ideas. They both have similar concerns, for example, personal freedom, green issues, peace and world harmony and so on. As I will point out later dialogue is beginning to occur in some circles and this is to be encouraged. G.K. Chesterton once remarked,

"when man ceases to believe in God, he doesn't believe in nothing, he believes in anything."

It is important for Christians to know how much true spirit is

actually part of the New Age. Some strands of New Age thought does try to undermine Christianity. There is a need for the Church to be clear about where she stands. This can only take place through dialogue. Many people are looking for a sense of community in society and the Church, yet often end up nowhere and ecclesiastically homeless. The New Age seems to be addressing the future, and so does the Church. A tension does exist, regarding how to go about dialogue and to move forward.

I intend to examine what pastoral replies and implications have arisen. It is important to realise that we are living in a new era and a New Age. People are now very spiritually aware. People need to realise that what they end up following outside the Church, possibly existed in the Church. The committed Catholic/Christian needs to take Christ's command seriously and by virtue of their baptism, evangelise and witness to the Gospel. It is then the New Age of evangelism.

PART THREE:

PASTORAL RESPONSES TO THE NEW AGE.

Pastoral Responses

In the opening chapter, I examined what exactly the Church had to say by way of evangelism. In *Redemptoris Missio*, the call was clear in that the ordinary means of pastoral work and proclamation of the Gospel were not enough. (1) The Church has always been attacked for being behind in addressing certain key issues. The Good News that has been so valid during the Age of Pisces, is seemingly on the decline. I now hope to look at some of the responses the Church has given on the matter. In some areas, Church members and leaders have entered into dialogue with some of the non-Christian groups (who are usually made up of people who have been disillusioned with the institutional Church). In this dialogue, a re-discovery has taken place and challenges have been set. In Ireland, the Western Bishops have said,

"Perhaps the very presence and growth of these groups are signs to us in the Church; indications of needs to which we (the Church) do not minister. They hint at a spiritual hunger among some of our people that is often unrecognised." (2)

Because of the complexity of the New Age, a uniform response might be difficult. Many different Christian groups have given totally different opinions. Many find that it is difficult to reconcile various attributes of the New Age to Christianity. Fundamentally, in various areas it is contrary to Christian doctrine, such as re-incarnation, channelling of other beings and so on. Some of the evangelical Christians seem to be leading a response, usually an

out-right rejection of the New Age. Fundamental Christian groups tend to demonise the New Age because of their interpretation of scripture. This is probably the worst possible that you could be made. To write off the New Age on just this point alone would not be very fair. It is because of this poor understanding of the New Age that a more balanced viewpoint is needed.

The Catholic response to the New Age has tended to be very different and varied. Different schools of thought argue for and against the New Age. Recently a more balanced viewpoint has begun to appear, rather than just pure reactionary. Many now would see the ecumenical challenge that the New Age is offering. Some schools of thought would encourage the use of listening to the New Age, or the taking up of some of the possible inroads to the New Age, as a form of dialogue. Ultimately, there are areas where the paths cross, so why not use them.

Ralph Raith is quoted (3) as saying, that he would encourage inter-religious dialogue. It is important to remember that some form of dialogue is needed. Where the New Age overlaps with our opinions, that could be used as a catalyst for initiating further dialogue (religion, health, psychology ect.). It is acknowledged that Catholics and Christians would like to learn from anything that is positive in the New Age. There are aspects of Jungian psychology that Christian spirituality could be built on. The New Age holistic vision of the universe and the role of humanity can all be harmonised with Christian thought. The New Age reference to health (good nutrition, no drugs ect), can be rooted very easily in

Christian thought. The New Age is directing Christians back to some basic points that have been rejected over the years.

Vatican Response:

In May 1986, the Vatican issued its response to the modern trends in the world. It released a report on "Sects, Cults and New religious Movements." (4) It was compiled in response to a questionnaire which was sent out to Episcopal Conferences around the world. It examines the growth of New Religious Movements and how the local Churches have responded. It suggests its own pastoral response by saying that any response should be built on sound principles of ecumenism. It calls for a pastoral renewal in the area of how to address the situation. It doesn't exactly name the New Age, but it would be included under its terminology for New Religious Movements. It acknowledges that this phenomena is,

"to be seen not so much as a threat to the Church, but rather a pastoral challenge." (5)

There is then, a call for renewal in the Church on a pastoral level. A renewal of education and of faith matters. It outlines some of the reasons that people are attracted to this area (sense of community, search for wholeness, Answers, recognition). The Vatican does acknowledge that there has been a breakdown of traditional social structures, due to various factors; industrialisation, urbanisation, migration and so on. This has led

to the knock on effect of people feeling confused, insecure, and unsure of the personal future. It uses strong images to illustrate where people are at,

"frustrated, homeless, marginalised, loss of direction..." (6)

It is because of whole nations searching, that the Church has called for a pastoral response on every level. It says that this search for some sort of "presence" is a search for God in their lives. Because people are searching for community and for answers, these new movements have offered the stimulus for ecclesial and spiritual renewal. In the Church, we need to restore our sense of community, as one of welcome and outreach. (7) It also urges us not just to look at our own tradition, but traditions as well. It urges a personal and holistic approach. Here the report suggests that people should be continually moving from old truths to new truths.(8) Our faith should not lie dormant, but needs to be more evangelical in expression.

"Our pastoral concern should not be one-dimensional; it should extend not only to the spiritual, but also to the physical, psychological, social and political dimensions." (9)

Overall it is looking for a recovering of our whole liturgical expression, creativity in faith is a must. The conclusion to be drawn is that these movements have given a strong challenge to the Church. This in turn will provide the stimulus for own renewal and greater pastoral efficiency, not only from priest but all members

in the Church. It is a call for us all to collaborate in the challenge. It is a partnership under the umbrella of our call to proclaim the Good News continually. In no way does the Vatican pass judgement or evaluate the New Religious Movement. It has been said that the purpose of the document,

"is an exercise in self-examination. It contains critical reflections on the Church's pastoral ministry...It is interesting to note that the document is more concerned with young Catholics who abandon their faith and joining one of the new religions, than reclaiming people who have left." (10)

It is a report aimed more at those who minister to the Gospel and what they might try and do to cope in a given pastoral situation. It is also generally aimed at a recovery of,

"internal evangelisation aimed at helping Catholics rediscover their identity as well as the riches of their faith in Christ." (11)

There is then a fundamental requirement of all Christians to re-discover the power of our own evangelism. It is true that at present there are new ways of being religious and new ways of being Church. The Church needs to reclaim its identity in this new religious age. Positively, the time is being viewed as a time of opportunity rather than a time of threat. A basic strengthening of the traditional structures is not enough, new approaches are needed. The New Age has highlighted a possible area of growth in the Church. There is a need then to continue,

"ministering to the needs of the faithful, not merely through improved programmes of biblical and religious instruction, but also through the development of spiritual opportunities that cater to the religious needs of the faithful." (12)

Not to rise to the challenge of the new spiritualities and religious options will be to miss the opportunity of recognising the, "sign of the times", of which we are living in. The Vatican then has set a pace, so how have its leaders reacted?

Other response to the New Age have come from the likes of Cardinal Danneels. He issued a pastoral on New Religious Movements and included as large section on the New Age, which he refers to is as a "New Religion". (13) What is important to note is that he doesn't connect the New Age with satanism which other Catholic writers have done. He does affirm the good aspects of the New Age and effectively states that if something like meditation or Yoga is good then encourage it. (14) It is a hope-filled letter, which doesn't reject the New Age but encourages an examination of where the New Age and Christianity overlap. He concedes that some of the New Age criticism of Christianity is unfounded. He also notes, that on certain doctrinal issues the New Age is incompatible with Christianity. Regarding those who follow the New Age he says,

"What deep anxiety must fill the hearts of our contemporaries that they should turn to this unlikely mixture for their salvation." (15)

The reality that Danneels is highlighting is the fact that much of what people are seeking outside the Church can really be found within it.

"spiritual seekers need not look outside the Church in their quest for peace, harmony and union with God." (16)

Whatever response is offered to the New Age, it should be compatible to the principles of inter-religious dialogue and evangelisation. While admitting moral and doctrinal differences, the New Age is here to stay, whether it has peaked or not.

Danneels would say that Christian prayer is partly introspection and implies a duality with God.(17) Christian prayer was taught by Christ and has Christ present in it. It is Trinitarian, ecclesial and grace filled. Grace is essential to Christian prayer, because as Christians we believe that we have all our resources contained within it. This is a major difference in regards prayer. Christianity would also argue that we are fundamentally good, yet because of sin something has been broken and on our own we cannot correct it. As Christians we are sinful persons and without the gift of grace we can do nothing. The law of God has an importance in our life. New Agers would find it difficult to accept suffering, especially the fact that Christ saved the world by suffering. As Christians we believe,

"suffering that is lived in union with Christ's cross is

redemptive...God in his wisdom choose suffering, to reveal his love for us." (18)

For us the pain of death is different from say reincarnation (nirvana). Death only happens once and is a passage into eternal life. It is incarnation not reincarnation that is important for Christians. The cross is one the central realities of Christians,

"Christmas and Easter can never be transcended. Energy continues to flow from the cradle and from the cross." (19)

The cross is not an alternative. The New Age finds it difficult to accept the cross. The New Age after everything leaves us quietly on our own, still searching. After searching and ending up in the New Age, people can turn a full circle, search high and low and still end up where they started from. They still have to save themselves.

"The Good News is different, we are saved freely by the One who for us and for our salvation, descended from Heaven...Another came to save us." (20)

Cardinal Poupard, who is President for the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers, has also given a response to the New Age. His main idea is that people are failing more and more to cope with the rigours of modern society. People are now faced with various paths to follow and need real guidance.

"people need tools of judging what is true from false." (21)

His real concern is that people seem to settle for immediate satisfaction instead of a more lasting happiness. He quotes Cardinal Arinze (President for Inter-Religious Dialogue),

"The New Religious Movements often attract people who are hungry for something deeper in their religious lives. The danger is that they offer short-term good but long-term confusion." (22)

Faith is more important to people trying to live better lives. If something like the New Age takes a soft line or an easier option, then is it truly good?

"If a spirituality is to be in keeping with the Christian vision, it must include the cross...a willingness to embrace the pain of love in the spirit of Christ." (23)

Therefore this is affirming all that is good within the New Age spiritualities, so long as it doesn't deviate from the Christian message.

Sign of the Times:(24)

The Vatican response admitted that more could be done for the needs of the faithful. The New Age could therefore, be taken as a real challenge, by Christians to respond in faith, to the challenge of the New Religious Movements in our society. While it could be said that the New Age may poach some Christians,

(willingly/unwillingly), what it is really doing is forcing Christians to encourage a renewal and rediscovery. The New Age could be the "Sign of the Times", referred to in *Gaudium et Spes* (25), which called for Christians to re-examine and reform in the light of the Gospel.

"The New Age presents an excellent opportunity for the Christian Church better to understand and execute its mission, to adopt and react more meaningfully to the challenging needs and conditions of the modern age, to express its teachings clearly to an ecumenical audience and to reform and renew in the light of the Gospel." (26)

Conclusion:

There is then a need to clarify both New Age and Christian doctrine. The Church needs to develop a more positive way of relating to and influencing individuals attracted to the New Age. There is then a need to understand whatever similarities exist, yet at the same time avoiding outright condemnation. Encouragement needs to be given to those areas of the New Age that can be harmonised with Christian doctrine and spirituality. The Church is constantly in need of renewal and there is ultimately the possibility that the New Age may be pointing to these areas for the Church to look at. (27)

To say that the Church has entered into a new era would not be enough. The sign of the times is present and needs to be recognised for what it is worth, that is, a time of opportunity. There is a need

for a possible compromise because both sides cannot be right. It would be wrong to demonise everything in the New Age, or on the other hand, to baptise everything as well. What is true to be said of all the responses to the New Age, is that they do agree that there is an emerging religious consciousness in the world. It is one that has the possibility to lead and teach the Church many new ideas, by bringing back the old. Dialogue is being encouraged and that is a lead that needs to be taken up. Michael Drumm has said,

"It is fatal for Christian Churches to allow the New Age to monopolize all the traits of the New Age." (28)

He argues that you can go back to the tendencies of the New Age and Christianise them; if you demonise them, you can never return to it. What the New Age has failed to address adequately, is the whole area of sin. The Gospel does set moral and ethical demands, yet the New Age has problems in dealing with moral and ethical problems. As I have noted earlier, the New Age, has problems with the cross of Christianity. It also has problems with such questions such as, why do the innocent suffer? Christians have tackled this topic for centuries and the bible also contains writings to that effect.(cf.Job.) To claim that we are God or that we are giving glory to ourselves rather than God, is contrary to Christian tradition. As Christians, we need to give glory to God first, then ourselves. We would reject the notion of Pantheism (all is God), but would accept the term Panentheism,(God in all). As Christians, we can look for a relationship of God and us, where at best all the New Ager can do is harmonise a high level of energy within, and still can feel isolated in the end.

There is a need for the Church to reclaim a sense of what is mystical in its tradition. Drumm would argue that there is a need to recapture the wonder and awe in the Church. We have lost the sense of mystery and awe in our tradition. We need to,

"strive and stir up wonder and get away from morality." (29)

There is also the need for the prophetic material, so that the moral and dogmatic traditions are kept alive. Christians are called to interpret the world here and now. We need to question the reality we live in, otherwise secularism would take over. There is then a strong call, from both the New Age and also within the Church, to return to the sense of wonder and awe. It is a call to recapture some of the wonder lost in the pre-Vatican liturgies, yet, retaining all that is positive in Vatican II. Maybe the mystery that the New Age has utilised, the Church needs to recapture. Drumm concludes with the words similar to a prophet,

"The New Age is either the greatest threat to Christian religion or one more revelation as to what it is all about."

(30)

I believe that there is a need to rekindle the authentic spirit of the Gospel. If the New Age is revealing something that is true, then as Christians we cannot reject it. If the Gospel can be preached more effectively in the reality that we live in, then the language and words that St. Paul used in Areopagus, could be the method that we could use today for the Church of tomorrow. As I

have noted, Christianity and the New Age do overlap and I would suggest that these areas could be the "Areopagus" for today's missionaries and proclaimers of the Gospel.

Missionary activity as I have noted contains cross cultural proclamation of the Gospel and any area of similarity could be used as a possible foundation to begin on. Another important point to remember is that some people still belong to the Church, yet at the same time have a lot of New Age tendencies. People in this situation can still witness to the Gospel in a real way, especially to those New Agers who do not have any special regard for Christianity. Pastoral sensitivity is needed to deal with people who have an interest in either the Church or the New Age. A lot can be learned from this group by listening and being sensitive to them. As the first apostles constantly reviewed their style of proclamation of the Gospel, the message has remained the same. Whether the Church is Roman, European, American, the possibility exists that the Church could be New Age, yet remaining traditional. The style of proclamation may change, but the call to us all in this New Age of Christ remains the same,

"Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel."

(Mk 16:12)

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4. Ibid P.63.

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1. Evangelii Nuntiandi, n.17.
2. Ibid, n.18.
3. New Dictionary of Theology, P.358.
4. Redemptoris Missio, n.10.
5. Evangelii Nuntiandi, n.4.
- 6 .Ibid, n.5.

7. Ibid, n.24.
8. Redemptoris Missio, n.11.
9. Ibid, n.37.
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12. Ibid, n.32.

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4. Danneels, Cardinal Godfried; Christ or Aquarius, P.25.
5. Cole, What is the New Age?, P.6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ritche, Jean; The Secret World of Cults, Angus & Robertson,

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12. MacLaine, Shirley; Out on a Limb. Although the book is primarily Autobiographical, large sections deal with her personal experiences of Channeling.

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27. Ibid. P.205.

28. Drumm, 3R Communications.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Chandler, P.47.

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1. Redemptoris Missio, n.37.
2. Tiereny, New Elect, P.112. This is a statement given by the Western Bishops on the present reality.
3. The Way, Vol.33, P.226, "A Christian Response to the New Age",
by J. Saliba.
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5. Ibid, Para. 16.
6. Ibid, Para. 3.
7. Ibid, Para, 3.1.
8. Ibid.
9. Theological Studies, P.18, Vol. 53, P.3-39 "Vatican Response to
the New Religious Movements", by John Saliba.
10. Ibid, P.28.
11. Ibid, P.37.
12. Ibid, P.37.
13. Danneels, P.24.

14. Ibid, P.33-35.
15. Ibid.
16. The Way, Vol 33, P229, J.Saliba.
17. Danneels, P.37.
18. Ibid, P.40.
19. Ibid, P.43.
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21. Gallagher/Poupard, What Can Bring Us Happiness?, P.95.
22. Ibid, P.93.
23. Ibid, P.97.
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25. Ibid.
26. The Way, Vol.33. P.230.
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