

**JESUS CHRIST THE BEARER
OF WATER AND LIFE**

*Pontifical Councils for Culture and
for Interreligious Dialogue*

**REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS ON
ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE**

Ruperto Santos

**ANNOUNCING THE GOOD NEWS
OF PEACE**

Fausto Gomez, OP

**CONSULTATIVE WORDS:
CONSECRATED VIRGINS**

Javier Gonzalez, OP



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

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Keys to Successful Governance: Vision for 2004 Election

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

We feel that the heat of election 2004 is starting to affect the political climate in the country. Some groups have declared intention for candidacy. It is during this time that the people should look into specific guidelines for proper choice of candidates. The book entitled *Filipino Spiritual Culture, Social Transformation and Globalization* have given some guidelines.

1. *Sharing of Vision* - It is important for the electorate to identify what kind of vision the candidates have either for national and local government. The people must be able to embrace the same vision.
2. *Create Opening of Change* - When the new leadership is installed changes are expected. It is hoped that the opening for changes be done through democratic process. Wait-and-see attitude may prevail; but it is good that the people will give the benefit of the doubt to new leadership.

3. *Confidence Building* - Inaction should never prevail. Environment for new inertia should be created. Concrete direction like campaign against illegal gambling, pornography, drugs, etc. must be articulated as soon as possible. If done conscientiously the people will slowly develop confidence in new leadership.
4. *Maximize Changes in Policy Environment* - The local government has been given ample room for innovation and collaboration with private sectors. There will be new areas that would need testing as the new leadership would discover. Maximization of the parameters of new policies will necessarily create empowerment to the staff and other lower level officers and eventually people with the hope that government will harvest satisfying fruits for the good of the constituency.

The guidelines mentioned have been tested in a particular city: Naga. We hope that all who will welcome these guidelines which serve as keys to a successful governance will see bright light in the first decade of the millennium where we are in.

Announcing the Good News of Peace

FAUSTO B. GOMEZ, OP

On January 1, 2003, John Paul II issued a significant *Message for the World Day of Peace* entitled *Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment*. The 2003 Message focuses on the great social encyclical of Beato John XXIII, forty years later, and underlines the relevance of this social encyclical today when peace in the world is precarious and constantly threatened. In his excellent Message, the Holy Father invites Christian communities to celebrate the 40th anniversary of PT properly (see *Message*, no. 10).

I wish to celebrate it by reflecting on peace and peacemaking. We begin our journey with the question: *What is the meaning of peace?*

1. THE MEANING OF PEACE

"All things desire peace," St. Augustine tells us. John XXIII expresses a similar universal desire in the first paragraph of his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963): "All men of every age have most eagerly yearned for peace on earth."

And yet, we look at our world and see wars, violence, division, injustice, oppression, and un-love.

We all desire peace and, therefore St. Thomas adds, "we desire to obtain what we desire" (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 29, 2). Hence, all men and women of good will have to work for peace. *What is peace?*

In human perspective, peace is one of the deepest longings of humankind. It stands for order, prosperity, happiness, and love. It is the Greek *eirene* (harmony) and the Latin *pax* (order) - and much more! In biblical dimension, peace is *shalom*, personal and social harmony, wholeness, total well-being, God's gift (Ps 29:11) and human task, salvation. It is interesting to note that the word *Islam* comes from the Arabic word *Salama*, which means Peace.

For the Christian, **God** is *the God of peace* (I Thess 5:23). In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II hopes that God become more who He is, that is, a name of peace and a summons to peace (NMI, 2001, 55). In his *Message for Peace 2002*, the Holy Father writes: "Killing in the name of God is an act of blasphemy and a perversion of religion;" "it is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name;" "genuine religious belief... is the chief antidote to violence and conflict" (*Message for Peace 2002*, nos. 6, 7, and 14).

Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, and *the Prince of Peace* (Is 9:5). He is our peace (Eph 2:14). He enters our world bringing peace on earth (Lk 2:14). His usual greeting is "Peace be with you" (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19-21). Jesus is the preacher of the Gospel of peace (Eph 6:15). He proclaims the Kingdom of God, which means "righteousness and peace and joy" (Rom 14:17). Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ is the Peacemaker: He reconciles the human person with God,

humans to humans (Eph 2:14-18), and the whole universe to himself (Col 1:20). Jesus Christ the Lord leaves our world, after granting the gift of peace to the disciples: "Peace I bequeath to you, my peace I give you, this is my gift to you" (Jn 14:27).

With the Father, Jesus the Risen Lord sends to us the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Peace. Peace is one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). It is a gift of God that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7): a gift to the just, who walk by the way of peace (Is 59:8; Lk 1:79), to those who are faithful to him, "to everyone who does good" (Rom 2:10). Indeed, "happy are the gentle" (Mt 5:4), "happy are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). Being at peace (Rom 14:17), working for peace, God's children walk towards perfect peace - at the end of time when there will be no more tears, "no more death, and no mourning or sadness" (Rev 21:4).

In Christian perspective, the most influential theologians on peace are St. **Augustine** and St. Thomas Aquinas. Augustine says that peace is well-ordered concord, **tranquility of order**. Tranquility of order does not mean, on one hand, the calmness of death - of the cemetery -, and, on the other hand, the social order (disorder) of dictatorship, where we have dominating and dominated classes of people. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that real peace is based on freedom (cf. II-II, 29, 1, ad 1).

Thomas Aquinas speaks of peace as *personal and social peace*. Social peace is concord, or union of wills of different persons, while personal peace is union among the appetites and desires of the same individual (cf. II-II 29, 1). Integral peace - personal as well as social - is, radically, peace at the depth of the soul of the individual. In *Pacem in Terris* (no. 165), John XXIII underlines this radicalism of peace. For his part, John Paul II accentuates social peace as universal peace: "Peace is either for all or for none" (SRS, 26).

The Angelic Doctor also speaks of *true and false peace*. True peace is "concerned only with what is good," and it is found in good persons, while false peace is related to evil things and found in wicked men (**II-II**, 29, 2, ad 3). False peace today refers in particular to *evil silence*, that is, when one who ought to speak does not: for instance, keeping silent in the face of glaring injustices, terrible poverty, and wasting of resources by the rich and powerful.

Thomas Aquinas distinguishes, furthermore, between *perfect and imperfect peace*. With St. Augustine, he describes perfect peace as the ultimate end, complete happiness, and possession of God in heaven. Perfect peace is *eschatological peace*, peace at the end of time, a peace that we have to anticipate imperfectly in this world by our peacemaking. Peace on earth, then, is imperfect and, therefore, a limitless process towards perfection, towards eschatological peace. Today we stress significantly the dynamic nature of peace: "Peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly" (Vatican II, GS, 78).

Peace involves various elements, virtues, and values. It is the ever-ripening fruit of the *practice of virtues*: "I loved the peace that virtue brings and hated the discord caused by corruption and falsehood" (St. Augustine, *Confessions*). Christian virtue ethics, rooted in the Gospel of Jesus, leads to peace and not conflict (cf. Eph 2:12-22).

The **four columns** of the building of peace are truth, freedom, justice and love (PT, 35; GS, 26). In his significant *Message for the World Day of Peace 2003*, John Paul II underlines the essential importance of these **four pillars or essential conditions for peace** (*Message 2003*, nos. 3 and 4).

Truth, John Paul II said in another *Message for Peace* (January 1, 1980), "is the driving power of peace because it

reveals and brings about the unity of man with God, with himself and with others." Truth - the truth of natural law, or the law of being human - is required to build peace: truth builds peace if every individual is conscious of his/her rights and of the duties towards others. "Those who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other" (John XXIII, *PT*, 30 and 91).

Freedom, which is freedom for the good and freedom in the truth, builds peace, if, in the choice of the means to the peaceful end, people act reasonably, freely and responsibly. In fact, "peace and progress could only be achieved by respecting the universal moral law written on the human heart" (John Paul II, *Message for Peace* 2003, nos. 3 and 4).

Peace is essentially connected with **justice**, too (cf. Is 32:17; Ps 85:11). It is the work of justice. As it was said, "*Opus iustitiae pax.*" Paul VI used to say, "If you want peace, work for justice." He also linked justice to integral development: "Development is the new name of peace" (Paul VI, PP. 87). For his part, John Paul II connected creatively justice with forgiveness: "No peace without justice. No justice without forgiveness" (*Message for Peace*, January 1, 2002).

Peace is principally connected with **love**, with charity - the form of all virtues and values. For St. Thomas Aquinas, peace is - with joy and mercy - an interior **fruit of charity**. Indeed, peace is the work of solidarity: "*Opus solidaritatis pax.*" This solidarity, or practical love of neighbor, is rooted in justice. Hence, justice and love are the main causes of peace. A common current definition: **peace is living together in justice and love**.

Moreover, John Paul II points out the continuing relevance of the teaching of John XXIII on **human dignity and rights**.

Indeed, a new awareness of human dignity and rights - expressions of justice - is leading also to peace. A basic tenet in the journey of peace is this: "Every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will" (*Message World Day of Peace 2003*, no. 4). Two basic principles of Pope John XXIII: "All human beings are equal in dignity," and "all States are by nature equal in dignity" (*Pacem in Terris*, nos. 86 and 89). An often-quoted saying from PT is this: "Human rights are universal, inviolable and inalienable" (PT, 9).

Peace is a dynamic concept, pointing to a continuing process towards peace. It is the *goal* of social life. The *means* to achieve peace ought to be peaceful, too: if you want peace, work for peace peacefully; a peaceful end does not justify violent means. **Terrorism** can never be justified as a means to justice or peace. **Racism** and **extreme nationalism** are obstacles to peace. **Violence** in all its forms is an obstacle to true peace - be it oppressive structural violence, subversive revolutionary violence or repressive authoritarian violence. "There is no way to peace, peace is the way" (Gandhi).

Nonviolence is the characteristic of peaceful means to peace - peaceful thoughts, words and deeds. Active nonviolence is the road to peace, the imperative most consonant with the life and teaching of Jesus. Theoretically, we can continue speaking of the ethical recourse to **revolutionary violence** against grave structural and repressive violence as a last resort, that is, when all the peaceful means have been exhausted. But, practically, here is the problem: *When can we truly say that all the peaceful means have been tried unsuccessfully? Why not try one more time?*

How about the war? May it be exceptionally a path to justice and peace? As Christians, we have to fight peacefully against war as a way to solve conflicts among nations. Can there be a just war today? After September 11, 2001?

Some Christians maintain that the so-called "**just-war theory**" can still be ethically applied to a *defensive war*; but, only if the required difficult conditions are met. The classical conditions are: the decision to go to war is made by legitimate authority; the intention is peaceful; the conduct of combat is licit (regarding weapons, bombardments, treatment of POW's, etc.), and the cause is truly just. *When is the intention peaceful and not veiled self- or nationalistic interest? When is the cause just? When is the war the last resort and a lesser evil?* The boy reads the poster with big letters: *Holy War!* He shakes his head and shouts: "These two words cannot be together." (See Fausto B. Gomez, O.P. 'The Just War Theory: A Path to Peace? *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 110, May-August 2002, pp. 197-223).

In the present context of terrorism and of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, it is almost impossible to speak of an ethically just war. *Was the 1991 Gulf War a just war? Was the 2001 Afghanistan War a just war? Was the 2003 War in Iraq a just war?* Were these wars defensive wars? Just remember the pictures of these wars and their terrible consequences on the people, including children! *Collateral damage?* Someone rightly said, "Every death is a tragedy" (Carel de Rooy, UNICEF Representative in Iraq, April 2003).

Paul VI said dramatically at the United Nations in New York (1965): "No more war! War never again! Peace, it is peace which must guide the destinies of peoples and mankind." Social conflicts ought to be resolved not through war, but through negotiation (John XXIII, *PT*, 291).

Peace is a gift of God and a task for his children. *What is our task for peace?*

2. PEACEMAKING IN OUR WORLD

The task of peace is **peacemaking!** God's gift of peace is like a seed that must produce progressively fruits of truth, justice, love and freedom.

Hereafter is my simple but demanding recipe for peacemaking, which I have prepared for myself and wish to share with you.

(1) Be at peace with yourself and with God

To be at peace with others, I have to be at peace with myself, that is, I have to possess personal peace: the body under the spirit and the passions under the will, at least substantially: "Peace begins within our hearts" (Paul VI).

To be at peace within myself, I need to be at peace with God. Sin is division, brokenness, and slavery. There can be no true peace without sanctifying grace (cf. II-II, 29, 3, ad 1).

To work for peace effectively, I have to possess true peace, that is, God's peace. As the lyrics of the well-known song put it: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

I recall the words of St. Seraphim: "Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find liberation."

(2) Be at peace with your immediate family or community

As love of neighbor is practiced in the first place with the most proximate neighbors, so also social peace must be lived, in the first place, by being at peace with members of my family, my parish, my professional association, my community.

From the very origins of the Dominican Order comes this story: The provincial visitators to the convents were charged with the duty of checking three things: First, *do the friars live in peace with one another?* Second, *are they constant in their studies?* Third, *are they fervent in their preaching?*

To be at peace with others, I have to be just to them, and to love them. I have to forgive them and ask forgiveness from them. Once I received a lovely card from a friend - a card with this message: "To forgive and be forgiven make the world new every day."

I keep repeating to myself: I talk big words on peace. They mean little if in my community life I am intolerant, or unjust, or pharisaic, or unloving, or unforgiving. To be a peacemaker as a member of the community, I have to be respectful, honest, caring, forgiving, patient, trusting, non-violent in thought, words and deeds, I have to be dialogical, not dogmatic; democratic, not authoritarian; open, not closed in within myself.

(3) With your communities, be a builder of peace

"Happy are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). The method of the peacemakers is this: peace from within to without; from small community to large community; from parish to diocese to region; from nation to world. St. Paul advises us: "Do all you can to live at peace with everyone" (Rom 12:18).

I have to promote peace with others. I have to work for justice and solidarity. With all men and women of good will, I have to promote peace nonviolently, peacefully. I have to talk with others the language of peace and spread around the symbols of peace. To promote peace socially, I have to be truthful and

responsibly free. I have to promote with others justice, human rights and integral development. I have to journey by the paths of justice and love - the paths of virtue:

A Buddhist Cambodian Monk says:

Tenderness puts peace in the heart.

A peaceful heart puts peace in the human being.

A peaceful human being puts peace in a family.

A peaceful family puts peace in a community.

A peaceful community puts peace in a nation.

A peaceful nation puts peace in the world.

(Quoted by Javier Melloni, 2000).

(4) Be at peace with the whole creation

The human person is a microcosm; that is, a unique individual, a rational and free being. He is also a member of the macrocosm; that is, a responsible person, a child of the universe. A creature of God, he is co-creator with him and under him: he was created by God to have dominion over the whole earth (Gen 1:28), to work for the integrity of creation. Interesting what evangelical theologian Jonathan Wilson says, commenting **Gen 1:28**: "Note that the command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it is given to humanity before the Fall. It is one thing to tell sinless humanity to subdue and have dominion; it is quite another to say this to sinful, fallen humanity. Accounts of this command have not usually given enough attention to this difference" (*Gospel Virtues*, 1998). Initially, the relationship of man and woman with God and his creation was one of love. With the Fall into sin, that relationship became a relationship of separation and of power.

As children of the universe, all human beings ought to respect and improve nature, and not destroy it and exploit it. Concerned humans and Christians must spread out ecological awareness, call for ecological responsibility, and fight in solidarity against environmental pollution and imbalance, and for a share by all persons and peoples of the common heritage that is the earth.

Interesting the following statement: "If man is not at peace with God, neither the earth is at peace" (John Paul II, *Message World Day of Peace* 1990).

(5) Share something with the poor

I cannot love God without loving the neighbor (I Jn 4:7-20). I cannot love the neighbor without loving, in particular, the poor neighbor (Mt 25: 31-36). St. Paul tells us: "Make real friends with the poor" (Rom 12:16). The love of preference or preferential option for the poor is a necessary option stemming from my faith, hope and love. If I do not show this option (not optional, but obligatory) in attitudes of concern for the oppressed and suffering of the earth, and if I do not manifest these attitudes in concrete actions for the poor, I am not a peacemaker. A challenging text from St. Basil:

He who takes the clothes from a man is a thief. He who does not clothe the indigent, when he can, does he deserve another name but thief? The bread that you keep belongs to the hungry; to the naked, the coat that you hide in your coffers; to the shoeless, the shoes that are dusty at your home; to the miserable, the silver that you hide. In brief, you offend all those who can be helped by you (*Horn. VII in famen*).

Another essential text comes from Saint Ambrose, commenting on Naboth, the poor Israelite, and King Ahab (cf. I K 21:1-29):

The tale of Naboth, ancient though it may be, is of perennial application... Ahab is not one person, someone born long ago; everyday, alas, the world sees Ahab born, never to die out - if one such die, a multitude rises up instead, and the spoilers still outnumber the spoiled. And Naboth is not one person either, a poor man who was once murdered; everyday some Naboth is done to death, everyday the poor are murdered.

You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich (*De Nabuthe Jezraelita*, 1, 53: PL 14, 747; cf. CCC, 2402 and 2408).

A significant note: the Community of St. Egidio understands peace as "the art of encountering the poor."

(6) Pray for Peace

All religious peoples pray for peace: peace is a **gift of God**. Christians in particular pray for peace and for the attainment of the essential elements of peace - justice, love (merciful forgiveness), freedom and truth:

To pray for peace is to pray for justice, for a right ordering of relations within and among nations and peoples. It is to pray for freedom, especially for the religious freedom that is a basic human and civil right of every individual. To pray for peace is to seek God's forgiveness, and to

implore the courage to forgive those who trespassed against us (John Paul II, *Message World Day of Peace* 2002, no. 14).

John Paul II is constantly asking Christians and all religious persons to pray for peace. Memorable indeed was his meeting with representatives from all religions in Assisi on January 24, 2002, where all prayed for a peace rooted in love and forgiveness.

Our prayer will be an offering pleasing to God, if it is preceded by a sincere effort to reconcile with our brothers and sisters, that is, to forgive them and ask for their forgiveness. (See John Paul II, *Message World Day of Peace* 1977, no. 6).

Realizing, however, that I am weak and poor and selfish, I have to pray always, as a Christian and as a member of the Church of Christ - a community of faith, hope, and love. St. Catherine of Siena tells us that prayer is the mother of all virtues, and therefore of peace too. I pray to God for peace. I ask Mary and all the saints to help me - and my brothers and sisters - be committed to peace. But I cannot be a peacemaker if I have no internal peace. And I cannot possess internal peace if I am not at peace with God. I pray, therefore, for my continuing conversion to God.

Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, is the Queen of Peace (*Regina pads*). In particular, we are asked to pray the Rosary of the Virgin Mary for peace: "The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace" (John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October, 2002, no. 40).

3. CONCLUSION

It is easy to speak or write on the Gospel of Peace. It is very easy to denounce injustice, violence and selfishness. It is

not hard to tell others - to tell you - to opt for justice, peace and the poor. My excellent professor of Christian Social Ethics, Fr. Ricardo Alberdi used to tell us, after strongly denouncing injustice and convincingly proclaiming justice: "We are all members of the Church of Christ. Somehow, she is still partly caught up in the web of capitalism; and so are many of her members. And so are we. And so am I! Therefore, I advise you to begin your teaching and preaching on justice - or on peace - thus: 'I am a sinner; still, I tell you, not in my name but in the name of Jesus: *Be just; be a peacemaker.*'"

On our journey of life together, as a human family and as God's family, let us preach convincingly the Gospel of Justice, Love and Peace. I remember the words of prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation and tells Zion: 'Your God is king.'" (Is 52:7).

Reflections and Prayers on *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*

RUPERTO C. SANTOS

Last October 16 at Saint Peter's Basilica, on the day which marked the beginning of the 25th year of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II signed and issued an apostolic letter on the Rosary entitled *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. In this particular document, the Holy Father describes the Rosary "as a prayer of great significance destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness" (RVM, 1). Affirming that "the Rosary is ... [his] favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer. Marvelous in its simplicity and its depth" (RVM, 2), he notes how his predecessors like Pope Leo XIII, the "Pope of the Rosary," and saints like Blessed Bartolo Longo, the "apostle of the Rosary" (RVM, 8) showed their love and devotion to the recitation of the Rosary. He also points out that the surest way of praying to Christ with Mary (RVM, 16) and proclaiming Christ with Mary (RVM, 17) is through the Rosary.

In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the Holy Father raises two important points. In the first place, he introduces some innovations in praying the rosary. Five mysteries *of light* have been added to the existing fifteen mysteries. These *luminous* mysteries are the following:

1. The baptism of Jesus by John (Matthew 3, 17ff).
2. The self-manifestation at the wedding in Cana (John 2, 2-12).
3. The proclamation of Jesus about the Kingdom of God with His call to conversion (Mark 1, 14-15; Mark 2, 3-11).
4. The transfiguration (Luke 9, 28-36).
5. The institution of the Eucharist as a sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery (Matthew 26, 26-29).

With these additional mysteries of light, Pope John Paul II proposes that the recitation of the Rosary within the days of the week should be the following:

1. Joyful Mysteries: Monday and Saturday
2. Sorrowful Mysteries: Tuesday and Friday
3. Glorious Mysteries: Wednesday and Sunday
4. Luminous Mysteries: Thursday

Second, the pope has marked the period from October 2002 to October 2003 as the "Year of the Rosary." Wanting to highlight the 120th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Supremi Apostolatus Officio* (September 1, 1883), which affirmed that the "rosary is an effective spiritual weapon against the evils affecting society," John Paul II declares that the recitation of Rosary should be specifically emphasized and promoted during the course of the year in the various Christian communities (RVM, 3).

Thus, heeding the call of the Holy Father, we in the Collegio Filippino have decided to observe this school year 2002-2003 as the "Year of the Rosary" For this reason, we have planned several activities throughout the year. The first of these activities was the inauguration of the 42nd foundation year of the Pontificio Collegio Filippino last 12 December 2002, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. On that occasion, a special prayer service was held at the Collegio chapel and it was attended by priests, religious

and Filipino migrant workers in Rome. This prayer service was really a reflection on and a recitation of the luminous mysteries. Basically, this was the process that was observed: the reading of a gospel passage related to a particular mystery of light, the explanation and reflection on that mystery, and finally, the recitation of that mystery. What follows here are the reflections that were read during the prayer service.

+ + + + + + +

INTRODUCTION

There is something awe-inspiring and deeply mystifying about the fervor and constancy of Filipino Catholics' devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. We carry Mother Mary in our names, in our homes, in our daily lives. We run to her in praise and in supplication; we ask her to intercede for us before the Father, so that we may be comforted in our suffering.

In Mary, we find a mother and a friend. In the simplicity of faith, which she showed by her obedience to the Father, we are shown the path to an authentic Christian life. Her own life humbles us, inspires us and gives us hope. We know that she listens, she comforts, she consoles, she accompanies us in our journey. Through her nearness to the Father, she intercedes for us, so that despite our sins and repeated failures, we are able to rise up and be renewed through the mercy and grace of God.

We pray to Mother Mary at all times. Our many shrines in her honor attest to our intense devotion and love for her. There is nothing in our hearts that we do not bring up to her. For instance, through novenas made in her shrines or even before the simplest altar in the most modest of homes, we express to her what our hearts truly desire.

Like all the other saints whose exemplary lives of virtue and faith on earth have earned them a rightful place in heaven, Mother Mary, the Saint of all saints, is our friend. That is why we know that she, along with all the saints, hears our prayers.

The recitation of the Rosary to the Blessed Virgin Mary is the best means by which we pray to her. The Holy Rosary is also our surest way to Jesus through Mother Mary. At Lourdes, Our Lady said to Bernadette, "Pray the Rosary in reparation for the sins of the world." At Fatima, she appealed to Lucia and her cousins, Francesco and Jacinta, "Pray the Rosary everyday to obtain world peace and end of the war." Pope Pius XI said, "I would conquer the world if I had an army which recites the Rosary." After the historic and great naval victory at Lepanto, the Venetian Senate declared that "it was not the generals or the battalions, nor the arms that produced the victory, but [it was] Our Lady of the Rosary."

The ROSARY

The rosary developed from a practice of reciting 150 times the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary*. This idea comes from the Liturgy of the Hours, where 150 psalms are prayed within a week. Later, these 150 *Our Fathers and Hail Marys* were reduced to one *Our Father* and ten *Hail Marys*. Moreover, the 150 events in the lives of Jesus and His Mother were summarized into 15 mysteries, which, on account of John Paul II's letter, now becomes 20. These are then grouped into episodes, each containing five mysteries, and these are the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious and Luminous mysteries.

Pope Pius V approved its standard in 1569. And in thanksgiving for the Christian victory against the Turks on 7 October 1573 in Lepanto, the Pope established the feast of the Holy Rosary on that same day. He remarked, "We have won. Mary's Rosary

gave us the victory!" Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Ingruentium Malarum* of 8 September 1951 made a similar point and declared, "We are well aware of the Rosary's powerful efficacy to obtain the material aid of the Blessed Virgin. Although there is more than one way of praying to obtain this aid, we nevertheless consider the Rosary the most suitable and most fruitful means."

How do we pray the Rosary? Let us be faithful in reciting the Holy Rosary. We should pray it with devotion - reflectively and meditatively, not mechanically; prayerful and not routinary. Let us not forget the inspiring maxim which says, "The family that prays together stays together."

The HAIL MARY:

We learn. The Hail Mary is composed of two parts. The *first part* of this prayer consists of two salutations - *one*, an angelic greeting (Luke 1, 18), and *second*, the exaltation of Mary's cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1, 42). The blending of these two greetings into one may have originated in the 4th or 5th century. This may be found in the liturgies of Saint James of Antioch and Saint Mark of Alexandria. Pope Urban IV (1261-1264) may have been responsible for adding the name of Jesus at the end of the salutation. The *second part* is drawn from the Litanies of the Saints. This was introduced in the 7th century, with the invocation to Mary as *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*. Saint Bernardine of Siena, in the 15th century, added the present endings.

We reflect. The angelic greeting to Mary was an introduction to a very important message from God. She had been chosen for a great task, and the archangel Gabriel had been sent to ask if she was willing to assume such a big responsibility - to be an instrument of the Lord's plan of salvation for men and women. The Blessed Virgin Mary, without any hesitation, gave her consent.

Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, may we be favorable to the Lord; may we be pleasing to Him. And may we learn to follow her example of service, making herself available to God for the fulfillment of His redemptive action. May we, inspired by the total trust and obedience of Mary, open ourselves to God's plan and mission for mankind.

The trip to her cousin Elizabeth's town was a long and tiring journey. But Mary did not see it as such, for she was so concerned about the well-being of her cousin. For her, the visit to Elizabeth was an errand of caring mercy.

The loving concern shown by Mary to Elizabeth is the same concern she shows to us, too. She reaches out to us, no matter how distant we are from her or from her Son Jesus. Let us not make it difficult for our Mother Mary to come to us. Let us not hide away from her or from God.

Let us also learn something from Elizabeth. May we always be ready to impart inspiring, beautiful and positive words to our Mother Mary and to others. May we be sincere in our dealings with others, and honest in our affirmation of them.

The SALVE REGINA:

We learn. This prayer is believed to have been written by a monk of Reichenau (1015-1054) named Hermann the Lame, or by the bishop Adhemar of Le Puy, France (1098). In 1135, the abbey of Cluny (in France) used this *Salve Regina* as a processional antiphon.

The additional phrase "O clement, o loving, o sweet" is attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. According to story, in the cathedral of Speyer, Saint Bernard exclaimed these words in ecstasy right after the people ended their singing.

We reflect. This prayer reveals man's longing for his final rest - and his hope of finally meeting his Divine Master. But

before he reaches his final destination, man must live "mourning and weeping in this land of exile." And to be able to endure this kind of existence, he turns to Mother Mary as a source of consolation, of sweet encouragement and inspiration in his stumbling journey to heaven. The *Salve Regina* is a prayer of a weary heart - our heart - crying to a Mother who listens, who understands and who is ready to enfold us in her loving and comforting arms.

When we are wounded, when we are crushed and shattered, burdened by trials and sorrows of this life, let us take refuge in her - our dear Mother Mary. She will show us the way to the greatest comfort and consolation - she will '*lead us home*' to her Son Jesus.

A tired and weary heart is a heart that longs for God. A life that seems so full of sorrows and pains is a life that needs the healing presence of God. Let us give God an opportunity to enter our troubled lives and soothe our aching hearts. Let us give Him a chance to take over and redirect our lives, to help us overcome the pains and hurts. Let us, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, allow God to do great things in us and through us. In the midst of our human suffering, we are called to "let go" and to surrender ourselves to Him, giving Him our unconditional "*Here I am Lord, send me as you will*" and inviting Him to travel with us in this passing world, saying "*Lord come into my life ... walk with me...till I reach heaven.*"

The LITANY of LORETO

We learn. These invocations date back to the 12th century. They were recorded at Loreto, Italy in 1558, and approved by Pope Sixtus V. These praises accorded to the Blessed Virgin Mary are quoted from the *Akathist Hymn* of the Greek Church. This was translated into Latin and then distributed first in Venice, Italy. The praises are patterned after the Litany of the Saints.

We reflect. Even though the Blessed Virgin Mary was chosen and highly favored, she declared, "I am the handmaid of the Lord." It is an expression of her humility and simplicity. Even with accolade of praises, the Blessed Mother showed her willingness to submit herself to the will of the Father. She unconditionally gave her obedience to the saving work of Father. How can we translate into our very own life the humility of the Blessed Virgin Mary? We must recognize the infinite goodness of God and realize our utter nothingness. We should announce what God has done in our life and not what we have done for Him. Let us possess God and free ourselves from other gods who rule our lives. Let us attach ourselves to Him and detach ourselves from material things. Let us accept that we need God and that we are helpless and hopeless without Him. To imitate the humility of our Mother Mary, we must not work for prestige or popularity nor aspire for fame or glory. But, like our dear Mother Mary, we must sincerely acknowledge that we are just unworthy servants of God.

God invites us to participate in His saving works. He offers us a share in His mission. But He never forces Himself nor coerces us. God does not issue threats. He listens to us, understands our objections and gives in to our demands. He patiently waits for us to turn to Him. Let us relive the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She said, "Let it be done." These are words of serene submission to God's will, without reservation or pre-set conditions. The Blessed Virgin Mary wanted her life to be in accordance with the divine plan of God. She wanted her life to be lived according to the will of God. This meant surrendering herself to God and agreeing to His saving plan for mankind.

Is our life a total service to God? Is our life lived for the glory of God? Have we used our positions, our titles, and our resources for the good of others and for their benefit, and not for selfish motives or for our own personal advantage?

The MYSTERIES of LIGHT.

Jesus mentions "light" in two different ways, and each has a different meaning. First, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5, 14). Light is to guide. With light along the way, we will not lose our direction. We are safe from stumbling or from impending harm. With light along the path, our journey will be easy, smooth and fast. Being the "light of the world," we must lead people to God. We must bring them to safety. We must bring about change in their lives and help them to move from sadness to happiness, from misery to glory, from death to new life. Being the "light of the world" (John 8, 12), Jesus is our only hope. He is our only joy. He is our true peace. Psalm 18, 29 says "Lord, you give light to my lamp. O my God you brighten my darkness."

Jesus is the light of the world. He tells us that we are also light of the world. As an individual light, each of us can be easily overcome by darkness, by rain or by wind. And our light will be extinguished. But gathering our light together, we are stronger. We are brighter. Together we can give more warmth. We can illumine more space. Uniting our light with Jesus, the eternal Light, we are strongest. We are brightest. No one can defeat us. Nothing can frustrate us. As the psalmist emphasizes, "For with you is the fountain of life. In your light we see light."

Second, Jesus makes this invitation: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest. For my yoke is good and my burden is light" (Matthew 11, 29-30). "Light" here means easy to carry. It is not heavy and not difficult. "Light" here suggests that the way of Jesus is very convenient for us. The will of Jesus fits us well. His words are very much suited to our life. This implies that to be a "light" to others is not to burden anyone. It is not

to give them troubles. It is not to make them miserable. Rather, it is to make their lives better, pleasant and dignified.

Light has a unique characteristic of sharing itself without diminishing its own light. Light does not lose anything when it gives and lights another. Something similar takes place in us. When we love, we do not become less lovable. When we give help, we do not end up helpless. When we forgive, we do not become less of a person. On the contrary, we become more human. Jesus gave up His life so that we can be saved, so that we can have eternal life. Yet Jesus did not lose His life. He rose from the dead and became the source of life for us. He is way to the Father. He brightens our way to the Father. He makes sure that we reach heaven. His ways and will are easy to follow since His "burden" is light. As the Holy Father points out (RVM, 26), "Truly it is during the years of his public ministry that the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light 'while I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (John 9, 5).

The First Mystery of Light: "The Baptism of the Jesus by John"

Gospel Reading

At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. But John tried to stop him, and said, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me!" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so for now. We must do justice to God's plan." John agreed. As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up from the water and he saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. At the same time a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Elected one" (Matthew 3, 13-17).

Reflection

Let us now reflect on the Baptism of the Lord. The first thing that we notice is that it is TRINITARIAN. Second, we see that it is now the TIME for Jesus to begin His public ministry. And third, this episode tells us to be TRUE to our calling and origin.

The baptism of the Lord is Trinitarian. How? First, it confirms the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Jesus is one with the Father. He is the perfect image of the Father (Hebrew 1, 3). Second, by "descending like a dove and coming upon him" (v16), the Holy Spirit describes the relationship between him and Jesus. He attests to the divine Sonship of Jesus, and confirms the mission of the Son of God as the savior of the world. Jesus neither works alone nor acts by Himself. But rather, Jesus fulfills the plan of the Father and acts in accordance with the Father's will. The Holy Spirit provides the help and the strength needed to save mankind. Jesus works under the guiding light of the Holy Spirit. The works of Jesus are thus the works of the Trinity. Third, the baptism of Jesus brings to the fore His relationship with His people. He identifies Himself with them. He makes Himself one with them except in sin (Hebrew 4, 15).

Our baptism makes us children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus and of one another, and temples of the Holy Spirit. We are now accountable for one another before God. Therefore, we should never be insensitive to the sufferings of the needy and of the powerless. We should never be indifferent to their plight. We are called to be one with them, both in trials and triumphs, in agony and in glory, in pain and in joy, in defeat and in success.

Second, the baptism of the Lord is the time for Him to fulfill the will of the Father. It is the start of the public life of Jesus. He now begins His messianic ministry and mission, openly

proclaiming the plan of God to redeem mankind. His baptism is His call to action. It is time to go out and make public the ways of God. Thus his baptism signals that his "hour" has come. Certain moments in our life call for decisive actions. Jesus faced such a moment at the river Jordan. He had to say "yes" to God and set into motion God's salvific plan.

Third, the baptism of the Lord tells us to be true to our calling and to our origin. We come from God. We must return to Him. Our baptism is our turning to God, becoming once again His adopted yet beloved children. God invites us to love, to forgive, and to be of service. God appeals to us to change, to do better, and to be with Him. To be of service is to work for the good of our family, for the welfare of our community, and for the well-being of our loved ones. When we do these things, we do the work of God. And when we do the work of God, we are with God. We are being true to our calling and origin.

The baptism of the Lord calls us to listen to God's invitation and to respond to it positively. We must now make a fundamental choice in our life: to turn to Him, to be true to Him and to work for Him. And so let us remember that our baptism is not just a ceremony. It celebrates our incorporation into the life of God. Baptism is not at all about acquiring "important connections" by asking people in power to act as the child's godparents. The truth is this. We too become God's beloved sons and daughters. We belong to God. We are given new life. Baptism is our entrance into Christ's mystical body. It cleanses our hearts, ridding it of the stains of original sin. Baptism enjoins us to live in grace throughout our lives. Baptized into Christ, we have put on Jesus Christ Himself. So return to God and be true to Him.

With this first mystery of light, we recall our own baptism and offer it especially to all of us here present. Fully aware of the dignity of our baptism, we implore our ever loving God to grant us the grace so that:

We may now fulfill our baptismal promises,
to reject Satan,
to avoid the occasions of sin,
to be strong against temptations, and
to get rid of selfishness in our lives and malice in our
minds.

We may be true to our baptismal commitments,
to know God deeply in our hearts,
to believe in Him, to do His will,
to carry His cross, and
to follow Him until end.

The Second Mystery of Light: "The Self-Manifestation at the
wedding at Cana"

Gospel Reading

Three days later there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples. When all the wine provided for the celebration had been served and they had run out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, your thoughts are not mine! My hour has not yet come."

However his mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby were six stone water jars meant for the ritual washing as practiced by the Jews; each jar could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. Then Jesus said, "Now draw some out and take it to the steward." So they did.

The steward tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing from where it had come; for only the servants who had drawn the water knew. So, he immediately called the bridegroom

to tell him, "Everyone serves the best wine first and when people have drunk enough, he serves that which is ordinary. You instead have kept the best wine until end" (John 2, 1-10).

Reflection

For our reflection, let us focus our thoughts on these three M's: Mothers, Mother Mary and Marriage.

MOTHERS always want the best for their children. They always desire the safety of their children. They always pray for their safety. Their time are always for their children - watching them to sleep, waking up early in the morning to prepare their meals, waiting for them to be home and worried for their safety. All their efforts are always for their children - taking care of them when they are sick, accompanying them to and from school, and working hard to earn and save for their clothing, food, allowances and schooling. MOTHERS will give anything for their children. Whether it is the last money or the only food, it will surely be given to their children. Mothers will always love their children, though they are ignored, shouted at, or even neglected. They will always understand their children, accept them back, and care for them.

Mothers are the most sought out persons in the whole world. When we are in pain or in trouble, we cry out "Mama." When we feel helpless in looking for our thing or lost in doing our school assignments, we ask the assistance of our mothers. When we need someone to listen to us or when we are in need, we run to our mothers. They will always stand by us and will always be available to help us. It is to our mother that we go for protection or for comfort. Mothers are overworked yet least complimented. When was the last time we told them that we love them, that we are very happy to have them as our mothers? When was the last time we affirmed them and said "Thank you mommy for

everything."? When was the last time we admitted our fault and confessed, "Sorry mommy, please forgive us." Mothers are always misunderstood. Their words are always for the well-being of their children. They are words of concern and care. They are words full of love and thoughtfulness. But their words are often questioned, criticized and disobeyed. Their ways are always for the good of the children. They act and do things to protect us, to keep us from bad company and lead us from being hurt. Their deeds are to safeguard us from committing mistakes or placing ourselves to troubles. But sometimes we laugh at them or take them for granted. Sometimes we don't speak to them; we even hurt them or make fun of them. How much love have we given and shown to them? How much gratitude have we expressed to them? How much kindness have we shown to them?

MOTHER MARY, in this gospel episode of the wedding at Cana, clearly showed her maternal instinct. She made visible the assurance of a mother's loving protection and care in times of trouble. The Blessed Virgin Mary was so concerned over the welfare of the wedding couple. She did not want them to be embarrassed or humiliated. So, without being asked, she went out of her way to help. Being sensitive to the predicament of the wedding couple, the Blessed Virgin Mary volunteered her Son Jesus to the servants. Trusting completely in her Son, Mother Mary called on Him. She who truly understood her Son Jesus had a total faith in Him when she told them, "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2, 5). And who would refuse a mother's request springing from great love?

The special relationship between Jesus and His Mother was made visibly clear in the wedding at Cana. The special bond between the Mother and the Son clearly is manifested. Now if we take the Blessed Virgin Mother as our Mother, surely her Son Jesus would not ignore us. If we place ourselves under the

guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, surely her Son Jesus will not forsake us in times of need. If we solicit her intercession, how could her Son Je\$us fail to listen to us? If we remain faithful to His Mother, Jesus will never separate Himself from us.

MARRIAGE is a Cana experience. A Cana event is a moment in our life when we attain what we have hoped for, when we achieve what we have dreamed of, and when we accomplish what we have set out to do. It is a moment in our life when we reach goals and fulfill our visions. Surely, during these Cana events, there is much laughter and an abundance of food. There are guests and praises. But something or someone could be overlooked or missing. Something could go wrong. Someone could be absent. And these could pose some problems. These could create an embarrassing moment. Now, in order to make marriage last a lifetime, in order for our Cana event to have a happy ending, we must always invite two persons.

One is our Mother Mary. As our Mother, she cares. She is concerned with us. She works for us. She will help so that our works may bear fruit. She will lead us toward the eternal peace with her Son Jesus. Mother Mary is always wishing us the best. She will intercede for us. She will take us to Jesus. With her maternal concern, the Blessed Virgin Mary will tell her Son that "[there is] no more wine" (John 2, 3). And thus, there will always be light and love in marriage. There will always be a happy and harmonious relationship in marriage. There will always be success and stability in the family.

The other one is Jesus Himself. He provides. He supplies what is lacking. Jesus does things for us. Jesus gives us what is best and what we need. With Jesus present in our marriage or in our Cana event, we will not be lacking in anything. We will not fail. We will not be lost. Our efforts will bear abundant

fruits. Our relationships will be strong. Our love will be faithful. Our life will be meaningful. With Jesus present in our life, our life will be transformed: as the water was turned into wine, so also will our defects be transformed into blessings; our weakness to graces; shortcomings to strength; shadow to light; hatred to love; anger to peace. With Jesus sanctifying our marriage, our Cana event, it may even be said to us, "You have kept the best until the end" (cfr. John 2, 10).

Having reflected on this second mystery of light, we pray that through the intercession of our dearest Mother Mary, our families will experience miracles. We beg the presence of Jesus and her Mother Mary in our family so that:

We can build up our family not in fear but with trust,
not in despair but in hope,
not in division but in unity,
not with revenge but in peace,
not with ill-feelings but with love,
not with bitterness but with affection.

We can maintain our family
with fidelity, and not to abandon them
with total responsibility, and not to neglect,
with respect, and with suspicion,
with unity, and not division.

We pray that we can lead and bring back to you our family,
as one, complete and pleasing to You.

The Third Mystery of Light: "The proclamation of Jesus about the Kingdom of God with His call to conversion"

Gospel Reading

After John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching the Good News of God. He said, "This is the time

of fulfillment; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Change your ways and believe the Good News."

Some people brought to him a paralyzed man. The four men who carried him couldn't get near Jesus, so they opened the roof above the room where Jesus was and, through the hole, lowered the man on his mat. When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the Law who were sitting there wondered among themselves. "How can he speak like this? He has no respect for God, because who can forgive sins except God?" At once Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking and asked, "Why do you wonder? Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man: 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Rise, take up your mat and walk?' But now you must know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins." And he said to the paralyzed man, "Rise, take up your mat and go home" (Mark 1, 14-15; 2, 3-11).

Reflection

Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom of God. He reveals the Kingdom of God through His words and through His works. His presence is a revelation of this Kingdom of God. Where is Jesus is, there is love. There is forgiveness. There is healing. When Jesus comes, He brings with Him both light and love, which dispel darkness and death. He gives hope that banishes fear. He proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God as He attends to the needs of people. When Jesus is with us, we feel joy rather than gloom. We feel peace rather than enmity. We are alive rather than indifferent.

With this third mystery of light, let us reflect on our entrance to the Kingdom of God. There are three things necessary. *First*

is REPENTANCE. It is to be sorry for the wrong we have done, the hurt we have inflicted, and the sins we have committed. To repent is to commit our whole self, our whole thinking, and our whole being to Jesus. It means turning away from material things in order to embrace our cross; it is letting go of our personal convenience in order to be ready for sacrifice and to serve; it is shunning away earthly satisfaction in order to live our spiritual commitments. To repent is not to compromise. We will not bargain or strike a deal. We will not be neutral or fence sitters. It is either we walk with Jesus or we walk out. It is either we go with Jesus or we give up on Him. Our repentance demands from us a 360-degree turn from our old self, that is, from our old self marked by sin and selfishness. Our repentance is a change of beliefs, a change of heart, and a change of life. It is not a change of words or styles, but a turning back to God. *Second* is RECONCILIATION. Our sins signify our refusal to love God and His command to love our fellow human beings. Because of our sins, we have alienated ourselves from God and from the community. When we sin, we rebel against God and we hurt His people. Now to reconcile with God and with our brothers and sisters is to ask forgiveness. We are sorry for the evil that we have done. We regret the evil we have committed. Then we resolve to remove the roots of sin in us. We reject the occasions of sin. We beg for pardon. We admit our faults. We go back to God. We approach our people and say that we are sorry and we ask their forgiveness. Reconciliation is to live truly for peace, that is, we work for harmony and we cultivate unity. We are ready to accept and trust others. *Third* is REPARATION. Being sorry for the wrong we have done demands that we repair what was broken. We restore what was lost. We repay what was lacking. Reparation is to give back what is due and to whom it rightly belongs. Reparation is to correct our mistakes and to mend our

lives. Reparation is a call to practice the demands of justice. It is to give back what is not for us. It is the call to respect who others are and what others have. A sign that we are ready to repent from our sins is when we have decided to reconcile with our brothers and sisters, when we have decided to right the wrongs we have done. When we forgive, and not punish, when we try to understand, and not to criticize, when we are always merciful, and not angry; when we are full of love, and not of hatred, then we can say the Kingdom of God reigns in us.

Reflecting on the story of the paralyzed man, we can see that entry to the Kingdom of God will make us COMPASSION-ATE. Jesus saw how much the paralyzed man suffered. He sympathized with him. Jesus understood his helplessness. At the same time, He also recognized the trust and confidence of the people who brought the sick man to him. And then the healing took place. We are called to be considerate and to be full of concern. Don't lose your temper. Don't be angry. Don't be critical. Don't condemn. The teachers of the Law questioned and even criticized the actions of Jesus. Instead of showing kindness and mercy towards the paralyzed man, they even branded him as a sinner. Instead of being grateful to Jesus, they even condemned Him. Our entry to the Kingdom of God will make us CHARITABLE. Jesus saw the concern and trust of the four men who carried the paralyzed man. He recognized their resourcefulness and their faith as "they opened the roof above the room where Jesus was and, through the hole, lowered the man on his mat" (Mark 2, 4). The four were concerned with the paralyzed man. And then Jesus cured the sick man. Let us be more understanding with people. We should be more patient with them. On the contrary the teachers of the Law were blinded by their arrogance and indifference to the plight of the paralyzed man. Don't embarrass people. Don't put them down. Don't underestimate

them. Instead, we should be charitable. We should be more caring to them. Our entry to God's Kingdom will CONFIGURE us to Jesus. We will be CHRIST to the people. Jesus did what the Father would have done. Jesus acted in the same manner that the Father would have. The words of Jesus are the Father's. The works of Jesus are the Father's actions. The call, for us, is to be Jesus to others. We can be His hands that care. We can be His heart that loves the lowly and the least of society. We can be His hands that help the needy and the oppressed. Like Jesus, we should promote faith rather than doubts, hope rather than pessimism, light rather than despair, concern rather than insensitivity. Why? So that people can see Jesus in us, so that people can tell that Jesus is alive in us. When Jesus is present in our lives, then His Kingdom reigns in us.

We offer this third mystery of light to all people who are in need and who are suffering. We pray to the Lord Jesus, our divine Healer that:

They will not lose hope.

They will not despair nor give up.

They will not doubt God's help and providence.

They will not question God's ways nor go against His will.

They will continue to trust God's healing and help.

They will continue to believe God's miracles.

We also pray to God in this mystery of light to touch the hearts of people so that:

They will help.

They will care and show concern.

They will be full of compassion.

They will do something to alleviate pain and hardships.

They will not inflict suffering.

They will be source of consolation and comfort.
They will be Christ to all.

The Fourth Mystery of Light: "The Transfiguration"

Gospel Reading

About eight days after he said this, he took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Peter and his companion had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here, let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen" (Luke 9, 28-36).

Reflection

For this fourth mystery of light, we reflect about mountains, the message and our mission.

MOUNTAINS seem to be difficult and tiring to climb. They appear so formidable that it seems impossible to conquer them. There may not be any footpaths to follow. The directions may be uphill or quite confusing to understand. The landscape may be either barren or dry. Or the terrain may be rough, rugged and

unpromising. To climb a mountain demands perseverance as well as the assistance of other people. A climber should show courage and care. There are dangers to guard against: falling, being lost, or attacks by wild animals. But when one reaches the mountaintop, one is rewarded with a breathtaking panoramic view of the surrounding.

Mountains have a significant place in the public ministry of Jesus. In the mountains and along the mountainside, we know more about Jesus and we get a clearer view of His life. Just like Moses on Mount Horeb (Exodus 19, 20) who, after receiving the Law, handed it over to his people, Jesus taught us the new concept of living the Law, through His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,1-7,29). Just as Jesus experienced the temptation of the devil (Matthew 4_v 1-11), we too will struggle against Satan. But if we imitate the ways of Jesus, who overcame the devil, we will emerge victorious. On the Mount of Ascension in Galilee, Jesus commanded His disciples to "go ... and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28, 16-20); now Jesus also gives us the authority to go out in His name. In the biblical mountains, we learn more about Jesus. From the mountainous terrain of life, we feel the presence of Jesus, who leads us to the true light with His caring assurance, "I am with you always until the end of this world" (Matthew 28, 21).

MESSAGES from Mount Tabor. *First is the message of suffering.* Jesus always predicted that to fulfill the will of the Father, "the Son of Man must suffer much" (cfr. Matthew 16, 21; Luke 9, 22 and Mark 8, 31). Jesus had to carry the cross and die on the cross for our sake. He had to undergo His passion for our redemption. What happened there in the mountain is a lesson for us: in order to achieve the crown of glory, we must first embrace the cross; in order to experience the glory of Easter Sunday, we must live our own Good Friday. *Second is a message*

of glory. The life of Jesus did not end with the cruel death on the cross. There was a glorious ending. On the third day, as He promised, Jesus rose from the dead. The transfiguration was really a glimpse of this glorification. Transfiguration was a preview of what was to come. Jesus was seen as a glorious Messiah. Transfiguration was a foretaste of the wonder of resurrection. In the mountain, Jesus revealed to Peter, James and John His true identity and His real destiny. They saw His divine splendor. Then, the Father made His filial affirmation of Jesus, saying, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him" (v35). The presence of Moses and Elijah confirmed that Jesus was the culmination of the Law and Prophets. Third is the message of hope. What happened in the mountain is an inspiration for us to climb and to conquer our mountain of sufferings and sacrifices. It is true that to follow Jesus means hardships. To follow Jesus is to embrace the cross. There would be constant trials, numerous persecutions, and even continuous dying to self. But if we hold on to Jesus, what a glorious moment awaits us.

MISSION for us. First is our mission to go down. Sometimes we do not want to "journey to Jerusalem." We desire to play it safe. We want to remain where we are so as to avoid the forthcoming passion. We want to stay where we are so as to escape the impending shadow of the cross and crucifixion. But Jesus submitted Himself to the salvific will of the Father. He prayed, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26, 42). Like Jesus, we must face and accept our cross. We must move on to carry our responsibilities. We must continue to fulfill our obligations. Thus, let us stop daydreaming. Let us not be contented floating. Let us not remain up there in the air. We must go down to do the "Father's business" (Luke 2, 49). Second, it is now our mission to share and to serve. In the mountain, the disciples learned who Jesus was. After knowing who Jesus really is, the next step is

to do what Jesus really demands. One must not simply look at and admire Jesus. One should not remain up and high on his pedestal. We must go down and start the journey of service and sacrifice. We must look down and continue the journey of carrying the cross. We must come down with Jesus and begin the pilgrimage of love and hope.

Let us go down to bring forgiveness to those who have betrayed us and turned away from us. Let us accept those whom we ignored and avoided. Let us love those whom we disliked and who displeased us, heal those who hurt, help those who are in need of our assistance.

There is now an urgent need for us to stop from our busy and hectic schedules and listen to Jesus. It is now time for contemplation. It is now the time for a moment of silent adoration. We must take time to feel the presence of God in our lives. We must take a break, and listen and hear the voice of God speaking to us. But after we listen to His voice, and after we discerned His will, it is now our turn to move and act. We have to go down to everyday life. We have to take the way of Jesus, the way of the cross. We must take the path of Jesus, the path of serving and saving. We have to go, to move forward and towards Jesus. And then we go down to meet our brothers and sisters in need.

Having meditated on this fourth mystery of light, the Transfiguration, we pray that:

We will not stay in the security of our rooms.

We will not give in to the comforts of daily living.

We will not be passive participant or just become unconcerned spectators.

We will not be contented with the little we do or the less we give.

But we are now ready to be sent out for the service of others.
We are now ready to accept the cross and carry it to completion.

We are now more than willing to obey, even to offer our life to God and to others.

We offer this luminous mystery so that:

When we go out, we can shine for God.

When we work, we can glorify Him.

When we speak, we can bear witness to Him.-

When we are with people, we can enlighten them and lead them to Jesus, our true Light
and our only Love.

The Fifth Mystery of Light: "The Institution of the Eucharist as sacramental expression of Paschal Mystery"

Gospel Reading

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup and gave thanks, and passed it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Yes, I say to you: I will not taste the fruit of the vine from now until the day I drink with you new wine in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26, 26-29).

Reflection

Our reflection for this fifth mystery is about two aspects of the Holy Eucharist. *First*, it is about the Holy Eucharist as a SACRIFICE. *Second*, it is the Holy Eucharist as our SALVATION.

God sustained His people with physical bread. It is what they called *manna*. But this food gave them temporary sustenance

and provisional nourishment. There was still hunger. So God provided them with living bread. God gave them lasting food. The effect was to lead them to eternal life. That food is no other than Jesus Himself. Indeed, Jesus is "the bread of life, whoever comes to [him] ... will never hunger, and whoever believes in [him] ... will never thirst" (John 6, 35).

Jesus continues to feed us. He constantly gives us that bread that leads to eternal life. Jesus Himself is the living bread. In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus continuously gives and offers Himself as the living bread for our salvation. Jesus declared, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6, 51). The invitation of Jesus to eat this "bread of life" is continually issued in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. During the consecration, the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Jesus. In Holy Communion, we receive Jesus in the form of the bread and wine. It is indeed Jesus whom we receive.

We draw spiritual nourishment from the Holy Eucharist. We get spiritual strength from it. *The Holy Eucharist sustains and gives us eternal life.* With the Holy Eucharist, we become one with Jesus. We are united with Him. We become like Him. We become for Him. Thus, in our celebration of the Holy Eucharist, let us pray that we can act and speak like Jesus to others. Let us pray that our celebration of the Holy Eucharist we will make us like Jesus to others. We should also be the source of light and life for others.

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrifice. When Jesus said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day"

(John 6, 53-55). Here, Jesus points out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. His life was a sacrificial offering on the altar of the cross; he was a sacrificial victim. Anyone who will partake in the communion of His body and blood is closely united with Him. We become recipients of His redemptive actions. We gain the forgiveness of our sins. We receive the fullness of life. And we merit His promised of eternal life. As the Holy Father points out in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, "Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies 'to the end' his love for humanity (John 13, 10, for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice" (21).

Now through our Holy Communion, we should be led to a more personal union with Jesus. We become closely united with Him. It should lead us to dwell in Him. Are we being transformed into His being with our celebration of the Holy Eucharist and with our Holy Communion? Should we not be like Him whom we receive in Holy Communion? And so our Holy Eucharist should make us *think like Jesus, speak like Jesus, and act like Jesus*.

The Holy Eucharist is our salvation. Jesus asked us to come to Him and believe in Him. It is only when we approach Him and trust Him that we can be sure of His promised eternal life. To us, who believed and accepted Him as the "living bread" sent by the Father, Jesus gives this assurance, "I shall not lose anything of what He gave me, but that I should raise up on the last day" (John 6, 34). Jesus will always seek us out. He will always gather us. He will always bring us back to the loving fold of the Father. So, Jesus will never let us perish. He will never permit us to be left behind. Jesus will show and lead us the bright and sure way to the Father. *He will surely bring us to the everlasting light and to eternal life.*

Now, as we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, with the priest saying, "The body of Christ," let our "Amen" be our strong affirmation of our faith and trust that Jesus wants us to have new life. Jesus wills that we be healed and saved from the darkness of sins. He desires us to rise and to remain with Him for the rest of our life. We now ask ourselves. Are we conscious of our spiritual needs? Do we seriously attend to our spiritual concerns? How faithful are we to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist? How do we participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist?

With this fifth mystery of light, we remember our migrant workers, who are like bread *taken, broken, blessed and shared*. They have been separated from their families and homeland, and they have experienced various sufferings. But all these have been means to "prune" their ways and will so that they will be in conformity with God's will and ways. As Jesus blesses them with safe trips and successful stays, He enables them to share His blessings and goodness to their loved ones. And so we pray and offer this fifth mystery that:

They may be like Jesus,
sources of strength and unity,
promoters of good works and inspiring words,
pillars of courage, and
models of honest and clean living.
That Jesus may continually walk and watch them,
He will sustain them in their struggle and protect them in
their journey.
He will relieve their pain.
He will heal their hurts.
He will comfort them in their sufferings and reward their
sacrifices.

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CONCLUSION.

"Confidently take up the Rosary once more" (RVM, 43). This is the urgent appeal of the Holy Father to all of us. Pope John Paul II affirms that the "Rosary is Mary's way. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening" (RVM, 24). "When [we pray] the Rosary," the Holy Father adds, "we plead with Mary, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 1, 35), she intercedes for us before the Father who filled her with grace before the Son born of her womb praying with and for us" (RVM, 16).

The Blessed Virgin Mary brought the Savior into the world. She introduced us to her Son Jesus. Her words and examples should be our inspiration and encouragement to be dedicated followers of Jesus. The life of purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as her service and humility are challenges for us to make our own life pleasing and worthy to God. *Let us give to the Blessed Virgin Mary what is due to her. Let us love her with the love of her Son Jesus. Let us accept her with the reverence of the archangel Gabriel. Let us honor her with the homage of her cousin Elizabeth.* As we love the Son, so we should also love the Mother. As we honor the Son Jesus, so we should also respect the Blessed Mother. As we seek the protection of Jesus, so we should also place ourselves under the care of Mother Mary. To be identified with her Son Jesus, we must be united with Mother Mary. Surely we cannot have Jesus Christ as our brother if we cannot accept the Blessed Virgin Mary as our Mother.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a powerful and important ally in our life. If we appeal to her as her children, she will never deny her protection. She is our greatest source of hope and strength. She is our certain way to her Son Jesus. Like a thoughtful and selfless mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary intercedes for us,

and gently yet constantly reminds us that we should never forget that God is behind our every success in life. God is the source of all our blessings and triumphs. God is the assurance that though we may struggle and stumble, with Mary's intercession and with His grace, we will never fail.

Now let us pray:

Dearest Our Lady, o caring Mother Mary!

Teach us to be humble.

Teach us to accept that there is someone special, someone more important than me.

Help me to know, understand and accept my limitations and shortcomings.

Intercede for me and give me strength to change, to improve and to be better person.

Dearest Our Lady, o caring Mother Mary!

Teach me to be an instrument of love and of peace.

that I may heal old wounds of division,

that I may mend broken lives,

that I may cure scarred hearts and

that I may build shattered dreams.

Help me to realize that I with whom you shared your Son,
am likewise called to share His love and peace to others.

Amen.

Jesus Christ the Bearer of Water and Life

PONTIFICAL COUNCILS FOR CULTURE &
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

FOREWORD

The present study is concerned with the complex phenomenon of "New Age" which is influencing many aspects of contemporary culture.

The study is a *provisional report*. It is the fruit of the common reflection of the Working Group on New Religious Movements, composed of staff members of different dicasteries of the Holy See: the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Interreligious Dialogue (which are the principal redactors for this project), the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

These reflections are offered primarily to those engaged in pastoral work so that they might be able to explain how the *New Age* movement differs from the Christian faith. This study invites readers to take account of the way that *New Age* religiosity addresses the spiritual hunger of contemporary men and women. **It should** be recognized that the attraction that *New Age* religiosity has for some Christians may be due in part to the lack of serious

attention in their own communities for themes which are actually part of the Catholic synthesis such as 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, the desire for personal and social transformation, and the rejection of a rationalistic and materialistic view of humanity.

The present publication calls attention to the need to know and understand *New Age* as a cultural current, as well as the need for Catholics to have an understanding of authentic Catholic doctrine and spirituality in order to properly assess *New Age* themes. The first two chapters present *New Age* as a multifaceted cultural tendency, proposing an analysis of the basic foundations of the thought conveyed in this context. From Chapter Three onwards some indications are offered for an investigation of *New Age* in comparison with the Christian message. Some suggestions of a pastoral nature are also made.

Those who wish to go deeper into the study of *New Age* will find useful references in the appendices. It is hoped that this work will in fact provide a stimulus for further studies adapted to different cultural contexts. Its purpose is also to encourage discernment by those who are looking for sound reference points for a life of greater fullness. It is indeed our conviction that through many of our contemporaries who are searching, we can discover a true thirst for God. 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 (cf. *Jn* 4:7-13)". Like him, we want to rely "on the perennial freshness of the Gospel message and its capacity to transform and renew those who accept it" (AAS 86/4, 330).

1. WHAT SORT OF REFLECTION?

The following reflections are meant as a guide for Catholics involved in preaching the Gospel and teaching the faith at any level within the Church. This document does not aim at providing a set of complete answers to the many questions raised by the *New Age* or other contemporary signs of the perennial human search for happiness, meaning and salvation. It is an invitation, to understand the *New Age* and to engage in a genuine dialogue with those who are influenced by *New Age* thought. The document guides those involved in pastoral work in their understanding and response to *New Age* spirituality, both illustrating the points where this spirituality contrasts with the Catholic faith and refuting the positions espoused by *New Age* thinkers in opposition to Christian faith. What is indeed required of Christians is, first and foremost, a solid grounding in their faith. On this sound base, they can build a life which responds positively to the invitation in the first letter of Saint Peter: "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" (/ P 3, 15 f.).

1.1. **Why** now?

The beginning of the Third Millennium comes not only two thousand years after the birth of Christ, but also at a time when astrologers believe that the Age of Pisces - known to them as the Christian age - is drawing to a close. These reflections are about the *New Age*, which takes its name from the imminent astrological Age of Aquarius. The *New Age* is one of many explanations of the significance of this moment in history which are bombarding contemporary (particularly western) culture, and it is hard to see clearly what is and what is not consistent with

the Christian message. So this seems to be the right moment to offer a Christian assessment of *New Age* thinking and the *New Age* movement as a whole.

It has been said, quite correctly, that many people hover between certainty and uncertainty these days, particularly in questions relating to their identity.¹ Some say that the Christian religion is patriarchal and authoritarian, that political institutions are unable to improve the world, and that formal (allopathic) medicine simply fails to heal people effectively. The fact that what were once central elements in society are now perceived as untrustworthy or lacking in genuine authority has created a climate where people look inwards, into themselves, for meaning and strength. There is also a search for alternative institutions, which people hope will respond to their deepest needs. The unstructured or chaotic life of alternative communities of the 1970s has given way to a search for discipline and structures, which are clearly key elements in the immensely popular "mystical" movements. *New Age* is attractive mainly because so much of what it offers meets hungers often left unsatisfied by the established institutions.

While much of *New Age* is a reaction to contemporary culture, there are many ways in which it is that culture's child. The Renaissance and the Reformation have shaped the modern western individual, who is not weighed down by external burdens like merely extrinsic authority and tradition; people feel the need to "belong" to institutions less and less (and yet loneliness is very much a scourge of modern life), and are not inclined to rank "official" judgments above their own. With this cult of humanity, religion is internalized in a way which prepares the ground for

¹ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement. The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, Oxford (Blackwell) 1996, p. 137.

a celebration of the sacredness of the self. This is why *New Age* shares many of the values espoused by enterprise culture and the "prosperity Gospel" (of which more will be said later: section 2.4), and also by the consumer culture, whose influence is clear from the rapidly-growing numbers of people who claim that it is possible to blend Christianity and *New Age*, by taking what strikes them as the best of both.² It is worth remembering that deviations within Christianity have also gone beyond traditional theism in accepting a unilateral turn to self, and this would encourage such a blending of approaches. The important thing to note is that God is reduced in certain *New Age* practices so as furthering the advancement of the individual.

New Age appeals to people imbued with the values of modern culture. Freedom, authenticity, self-reliance and the like are all held to be sacred. It appeals to those who have problems with patriarchy. It "does not demand any more faith or belief than going to the cinema",³ and yet it claims to satisfy people's spiritual appetites. But here is a central question: just what is meant by spirituality in a *New Age* context? The answer is the key to unlocking some of the differences between the Christian tradition and much of what can be called *New Age*. Some versions of *New Age* harness the powers of nature and seek to communicate with another world to discover the fate of individuals, to help individuals tune in to the right frequency to make the most of themselves and their circumstances. In most cases, it is completely fatalistic. Christianity, on the other hand, is an invitation to look outwards and beyond, to the "new Advent" of the God who calls us to live the dialogue of love.⁴

² Cf. P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. 164f.

³ Cf. P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem* (18 May 1986),

1.2. Communications

The technological revolution in communications over the last few years has brought about a completely new situation. The ease and speed with which people can now communicate is one of the reasons why *New Age* has come to the attention of people of all ages and backgrounds, and many who follow Christ are not sure what it is all about. The Internet, in particular, has become enormously influential, especially with younger people, who find it a congenial and fascinating way of acquiring information. But it is a volatile vehicle of misinformation on so many aspects of religion: not all that is labeled "Christian" or "Catholic" can be trusted to reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church and, at the same time, there is a remarkable expansion of *New Age* sources ranging from the serious to the ridiculous. People need, and have a right to, reliable information on the differences between Christianity and *New Age*.

1.3. Cultural background

When one examines many *New Age* traditions, it soon becomes clear that there is, in fact, little in the *New Age* that is new. The name seems to have gained currency through Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, at the time of the French and American Revolutions, but the reality it denotes is a contemporary variant of Western esotericism. This dates back to Gnostigroups which grew up in the early days of Christianity, and gained momentum at the time of the Reformation in Europe. It has grown in parallel with scientific world-views, and acquired a rational justification through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has involved a progressive rejection of a personal God and a focus on other entities which would often figure as intermediaries between God and humanity in traditional Christianity, with more

and more original adaptations of these or additional ones. A powerful trend in modern Western culture which has given space to *New Age* ideas is the general acceptance of Darwinist evolutionary theory; this, alongside a focus on hidden spiritual powers or forces in nature, has been the backbone of much of what is now recognized as *New Age* theory. Basically, *New Age* has found a remarkable level of acceptance because the world-view on which it was based was already widely accepted. The ground was well prepared by the growth and spread of relativism, along with an antipathy or indifference towards the Christian faith. Furthermore, there has been a lively discussion about whether and in what sense *New Age* can be described as a postmodern phenomenon. The existence and fervor of *New Age* thinking and practice bear witness to the unquenchable longing of the human spirit for transcendence and religious meaning, which is not only a contemporary cultural phenomenon, but was evident in the ancient world, both Christian and pagan.

1.4. The New Age and Catholic Faith

Even if it can be admitted that *New Age* religiosity in some way responds to the legitimate spiritual longing of human nature, it must be acknowledged that its attempts to do so run counter to Christian revelation. In Western culture in particular, the appeal of "alternative" approaches to spirituality is very strong. On the one hand, new forms of psychological affirmation of the individual have become very popular among Catholics, even in retreat-houses, seminaries and institutes of formation for religious. At the same time there is increasing nostalgia and curiosity for the wisdom and ritual of long ago, which is one of the reasons for the remarkable growth in the popularity of esotericism and gnosticism. Many people are particularly attracted to what is

known - correctly or otherwise - as "Celtic" spirituality,⁵ or to the religions of ancient peoples. Books and courses on spirituality and ancient or Eastern religions are a booming business, and they are frequently labeled "*New Age*" for commercial purposes. But the links with those religions are not always clear. In fact, they are often denied.

An adequate Christian discernment of *New Age* thought and practice cannot fail to recognize that, like second and third century gnosticism, it represents something of a compendium of positions that the Church has identified as heterodox. John Paul II warns with regard to the "return of ancient gnostic ideas under the guise of the so-called *New Age*: We cannot delude ourselves that this will lead toward a renewal of religion. It is only a new way of practicing gnosticism - that attitude of the spirit that, 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 a para-religion in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian".⁶ An example of this can be seen in the enneagram, the nine-type tool for character analysis, which when used as a means of spiritual growth introduces an ambiguity in the doctrine and the life of the Christian faith.

⁵ Cf. Gilbert Markus o.p., "Celtic Schmeltic", (1) in *Spirituality*, vol. 4, November-December 1998, No. 21, pp. 379-383 and (2) in *Spirituality*, vol. 5, January-February 1999, No. 22, pp. 57-61.

⁶ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (Knopf) 1994, 90.

1.5. A positive challenge

The appeal of *New Age* religiosity cannot be underestimated. When the understanding of the content of Christian faith is weak, some mistakenly hold that the Christian religion does not inspire a profound spirituality and so they seek elsewhere. As a matter of fact, some say the *New Age* is already passing us by, and refer to the "next" age.⁷ They speak of a crisis that began to manifest itself in the United States of America in the early 1990s, but admit that, especially beyond the English-speaking world, such a "crisis" may come later. But bookshops and radio stations, and the plethora of self-help groups in so many Western towns and cities, all seem to tell a different story. It seems that, at least for the moment, the *New Age* is still very much alive and part of the current cultural scene.

The success of *New Age* offers the Church a challenge. People feel the Christian religion no longer offers them - or perhaps never gave them - something they really need. The search which often leads people to the *New Age* is a genuine yearning: for a deeper spirituality, for something which will touch their hearts, and for a way of making sense of a confusing and often alienating world. There is a positive tone in *New Age* criticisms of "the materialism of daily life, of philosophy and even of medicine and psychiatry; reductionism, which refuses to take into consideration religious and supernatural experiences; the industrial culture of unrestrained individualism, which teaches egoism and pays no attention to other people, the future and the environment".⁸ Any problems there are with *New Age* are to be

⁷ Cf. particularly Massimo Introvigne, *New Age & Next Age*, Casale Monferrato (Piemme) 2000.

⁸ M. Introvigne, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

found in what it proposes as alternative answers to life's questions. If the Church is not to be accused of being deaf to people's longings, her members need to do two things: to root themselves ever more firmly in the fundamentals of their faith, and to understand the often-silent cry in people's hearts, which leads them elsewhere if they are not satisfied by the Church. There is also a call in all of this to come closer to Jesus Christ and to be ready to follow Him, since He is the real way to happiness, the truth about God and the fullness of life for every man and woman who is prepared to respond to his love.

2. NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

Christians in many Western societies, and increasingly also in other parts of the world, frequently come into contact with different aspects of the phenomenon known as *New Age*. Many of them feel the need to understand how they can best approach something which is at once so alluring, complex, elusive and, at times, disturbing. These reflections are an attempt to help Christians do two things:

- to identify elements of the developing *New Age* tradition;
- to indicate those elements which are inconsistent with the Christian revelation.

This is a pastoral response to a current challenge, which does not even attempt to provide an exhaustive list of *New Age* phenomena, since that would result in a very bulky tome, and such information is readily available elsewhere. It is essential to try to understand *New Age* correctly, in order to evaluate it fairly, and avoid creating a caricature. It would be unwise and untrue to say that everything connected with the *New Age* movement is good, or that everything about it is bad. Nevertheless, given

the underlying vision of *New Age* religiosity, it is on the whole difficult to reconcile it with Christian doctrine and spirituality.

New Age is not a movement in the sense normally intended in the term "New Religious Movement", and it is not what is normally meant by the terms "cult" and "sect". Because it is spread across cultures, in phenomena as varied as music, films, seminars, workshops, retreats, therapies, and many more activities and events, it is much more diffuse and informal, though some religious or para-religious groups consciously incorporate *New Age* elements, and it has been suggested that *New Age* has been a source of ideas for various religious and para-religious sects.⁹ *New Age* is not a single, uniform movement, but rather a loose network of practitioners whose approach is to think globally but act locally. People who are part of the network do not necessarily know each other and rarely, if ever, meet. In an attempt to avoid the confusion which can arise from using the term "movement", some refer to *New Age* as a "milieu",¹⁰ or an "audience cult". However, it has also been pointed out that "it is a very coherent current of thought",¹² a deliberate challenge to modern culture. It is a syncretistic structure incorporating many diverse elements, allowing people to share interests or connections to very different degrees and on varying levels of commitment. Many trends,

" Cf. Michel Lacroix, *L'Ideologia delta New Age*, Milano (il Saggiatore) 1998, p. 86. The word "sect" is used here not in any pejorative sense, but rather to denote a sociological phenomenon.

¹⁰ Cf. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden-New York-Koln (Brill) 1996, p. 377 and elsewhere.

" Cf. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion. Secularisation, Revival and Cult Formation*, Berkeley (University of California Press) 1985.

¹² Cf. M. Lacroix, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

practices and attitudes which are in some way part of *New Age* are, indeed, part of a broad and readily identifiable reaction to mainstream culture, so the word "movement" is not entirely out of place. It can be applied to *New Age* in the same sense as it is to other broad social movements, like the Civil Rights movement or the Peace Movement; like them, it includes a bewildering array of people linked to the movement's main aims, but very diverse in the way they are involved and in their understanding of particular issues.

The expression "*New Age* religion" is more controversial, so it seems best to avoid it, although *New Age* is often a response to people's religious questions and needs, and its appeal is to people who are trying to discover or rediscover a spiritual dimension in their life. Avoidance of the term "*New Age* religion" is not meant in any way to question the genuine character of people's search for meaning and sense in life; it respects the fact that many within the *New Age* Movement themselves distinguish carefully between "religion" and "spirituality". Many have rejected organized religion, because in their judgment it has failed to answer their needs, and for precisely this reason they have looked elsewhere to find "spirituality". Furthermore, at the heart of *New Age* is the belief that the time for particular religions is over, so to refer to it as a religion would run counter to its own self-understanding. However, it is quite accurate to place *New Age* in the broader context of esoteric religiousness, whose appeal continues to grow.¹³

There is a problem built into the current text. It is an attempt to understand and evaluate something which is basically an

¹³ The Swiss "Theologie für Laien" course entitled *Faszination Esoterik* puts this clearly. Cf. "Kursmappe 1 - *New Age* und Esoterik", text to accompany slides, p. 9.

exaltation of the richness of human experience. It is bound to draw the criticism that it can never do justice to a cultural movement whose essence is precisely to break out of what are seen as the constricting limits of rational discourse. But it is meant as an invitation to Christians to take the *New Age* seriously, and as such asks its readers to enter into a critical dialogue with people approaching the same world from very different perspectives.

The pastoral effectiveness of the Church in the Third Millennium depends to a great extent on the preparation of effective communicators of the Gospel message. What follows is a response to the difficulties expressed by many in dealing with the very complex and elusive phenomenon known as *New Age*. It is an attempt to understand what *New Age* is and to recognize the questions to which it claims to offer answers and solutions. There are some excellent books and other resources which survey the whole phenomenon or explain particular aspects in great detail, and reference will be made to some of these in the appendix. However they do not always undertake the necessary discernment in the light of Christian faith. The purpose of this contribution is to help Catholics find a key to understanding the basic principles behind *New Age* thinking, so that they can then make a Christian evaluation of the elements of *New Age* they encounter. It is worth saying that many people dislike the term *New Age*, and some suggest that "alternative spirituality" may be more correct and less limiting. It is also true that many of the phenomena mentioned in this document will probably not bear any particular label, but it is presumed, for the sake of brevity, that readers will recognize a phenomenon or set of phenomena that can justifiably at least be linked with the general cultural movement that is often known as *New Age*.

2.1. What is new about New Age?

For many people, the term *New Age* clearly refers to a momentous turning-point in history. According to astrologers, we live in the Age of Pisces, which has been dominated by Christianity. But the current age of Pisces is due to be replaced by the *New Age* of Aquarius early in the third Millennium.¹⁴ The Age of Aquarius has such a high profile in the *New Age* movement largely because of the influence of theosophy, spiritualism and anthroposophy, and their esoteric antecedents. People who stress the imminent change in the world are often expressing a *wish* for such a change, not so much in the world itself as in our culture, in the way we relate to the world; this is particularly clear in those who stress the idea of a New Paradigm for living. It is an attractive approach since, in some of its expressions, people do not watch passively, but have an active role in changing culture and bringing about a new spiritual awareness. In other expressions, more power is ascribed to the inevitable progression of natural cycles. In any case, the Age of Aquarius is a vision, not a theory. But *New Age* is a broad tradition, which incorporates many ideas which have no explicit link with the change from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius. There are moderate, but quite generalized, visions of a future where there will be a planetary spirituality alongside separate religions, similar planetary political institutions to complement more local ones, global economic entities which are more participatory and democratic,

¹⁴ The term was already in use in the title of *The New Age Magazine*, which was being published by the Ancient Accepted Scottish Masonic Rite in the southern jurisdiction of the United States of America as early as 1900 Cf. M. York, "The *New Age* Movement in Great Britain", in Syzygy. *Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture*, 1: 2-3 (1992), Stanford CA, p. 156, note 6. The exact timing and nature of the change to the New Age are interpreted variously by different authors; estimates of timing range from 1967 to 2376.

greater emphasis on communication and education, a mixed approach to health combining professional medicine and self-healing, a more androgynous self-understanding and ways of integrating science, mysticism, technology and ecology. Again, this is evidence of a deep desire for a fulfilling and healthy existence for the human race and for the planet. Some of the traditions which flow into *New Age* are: ancient Egyptian occult practices, Cabbalism, early Christian gnosticism, Sufism, the lore of the Druids, Celtic Christianity, mediaeval alchemy, Renaissance hermeticism, Zen Buddhism, Yoga and so on.¹⁵

Here is what is "new" about *New Age*. It is a "syncretism of esoteric and secular elements".¹⁶ They link into a widely-held perception that the time is ripe for a fundamental change in individuals, in society and in the world. There are various expressions of the need for a shift:

- from Newtonian mechanistic physics to quantum physics;

¹⁵ In late 1977, Marilyn Ferguson sent a questionnaire to 210 "persons engaged in social transformation", whom she also calls "Aquarian Conspirators". The following is interesting: "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, C.G. Jung, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Aldous Huxley, Robert Assagioli, and J. Krishnamurti. "Others frequently mentioned: Paul Tillich, Hermann Hesse, Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Buber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Tarthang Tulku, Alan Watts, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Muktananda, D.T 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 Chilton Pearce, Karl Pribram, Gardner Murphy, and Albert Einstein": *The Aquarian Conspiracy. Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*, Los Angeles (Tarcher) 1980, p. 50 (note 1) and p. 434.

¹⁶ W.J. Hanegraat'f, *op. cit.*, p. 520.

- from modernity's exaltation of reason to an appreciation of feeling, emotion and experience (often described as a switch from 'left brain' *rational* thinking to 'right brain' *intuitive* thinking);

- from a dominance of masculinity and patriarchy to a celebration of femininity, in individuals and in society.

In these contexts the term "paradigm shift" is often used. In some cases it is clearly supposed that this shift is not simply desirable, but inevitable. The rejection of modernity underlying this desire for change is not new, but can be described as "a modern revival of pagan religions with a mixture of influences from both eastern religions and also from modern psychology, philosophy, science, and the counterculture that developed in the 1950s and 1960s".¹⁷ *New Age* is a witness to nothing less than a cultural revolution, a complex reaction to the dominant ideas and values in western culture, and yet its idealistic criticism is itself ironically typical of the culture it criticizes.

A word needs to be said on the notion of *paradigm shift*. It was made popular by Thomas Kuhn, an American historian of science, who saw a paradigm as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community".¹⁸ When there is a shift from one paradigm to another, it is a question of wholesale transformation of perspective rather than one of gradual development. It really is a revolution, and Kuhn emphasized that competing paradigms are incommensurable and cannot co-exist. So the idea that a paradigm shift in the area of religion and spirituality is simply a new way

¹⁷ Irish Theological Commission, *A New Age of the Spirit? A Catholic Response to the New Age Phenomenon*, Dublin 1994, chapter 3.

¹⁸ Cf. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press), 1970, p. 175.

of stating traditional beliefs misses the point. What is actually going on is a radical change in world-view, which puts into question not only the content but also the fundamental interpretation of the former vision. Perhaps the clearest example of this, in terms of the relationship between *New Age* and Christianity, is the total recasting of the life and significance of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to reconcile these two visions.¹⁹

Science and technology have clearly failed to deliver all they once seemed to promise, so in their search for meaning and liberation people have turned to the spiritual realm. *New Age* as we now know it came from a search for something more humane and beautiful than the oppressive, alienating experience of life in Western society. Its early exponents were prepared to look far afield in their search, so it has become a very eclectic approach. It may well be one of the signs of a "return to religion", but it is most certainly not a return to orthodox Christian doctrines and creeds. The first symbols of this "movement" to penetrate Western culture were the remarkable festival at Woodstock in New York State in 1969 and the musical *Hair*, which set forth the main themes of *New Age* in the emblematic song "Aquarius".²⁰ But these were merely the tip of an iceberg whose dimensions have become clearer only relatively recently. The idealism of the 1960s and 1970s still survives in some quarters; but now, it is no longer

¹⁹ Cf. Alessandro Olivieri Pennesi, // *Cristo del New Age. Indagine critica*, Vatican City (Libreria Editrice Vaticana) 1999, *passim*, but especially pp. 11-34. See also section 4 below.

²⁰ It is worth recalling the lyrics of this song, which quickly imprinted themselves on to the minds of a whole generation in North America and Western Europe: "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. Aquarius..."

predominantly adolescents who are involved. Links with left-wing political ideology have faded, and psychedelic drugs are by no means as prominent as they once were. So much has happened since then that all this no longer seems revolutionary; "spiritual" and "mystical" tendencies formerly restricted to the counterculture are now an established part of mainstream culture, affecting such diverse facets of life as medicine, science, art and religion. Western culture is now imbued with a more general political and ecological awareness, and this whole cultural shift has had an enormous impact on people's life-styles. It is suggested by some that the *New Age* "movement" is precisely this major change to what is reckoned to be "a significantly better way of life".²¹

2.2. What does the New Age claim to offer?

2.2.1. *Enchantment: There Must be an Angel*

One of the most common elements in *New Age* "spirituality" is a fascination with extraordinary manifestations, and in particular with paranormal entities. People recognised as "mediums" claim that their personality is taken over by another entity during trances in a *New Age* phenomenon known as "channeling", during which the medium may lose control over his or her body and faculties. Some people who have witnessed these events would willingly acknowledge that the manifestations are indeed spiritual, but are not from God, despite the language of love and light which is

²¹ P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. If. 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". Quoted in Marilyn Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 370f.

almost always used.... It is probably more correct to refer to this as a contemporary form of spiritualism, rather than spirituality in a strict sense. Other friends and counselors from the spirit world are angels (which have become the center of a new industry of books and paintings). Those who refer to angels in the *New Age* do so in an unsystematic way; in fact, distinctions in this area are sometimes described as unhelpful if they are too precise, since "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/repulsion mechanisms".²² These spiritual entities are often invoked 'non-religiously' to help in relaxation aimed at better decision-making and control of one's life and career. Fusion with some spirits who teach through particular people is another *New Age* experience claimed by people who refer to themselves as 'mystics'. Some nature spirits are described as powerful energies existing in the natural world and also on the "inner planes": i.e. those which are accessible by the use of rituals, drugs and other techniques for reaching altered states of consciousness. It is clear that, in theory at least, the *New Age* often recognizes no spiritual authority higher than personal inner experience.

2.2.2. *Harmony and Understanding: Good Vibrations*

Phenomena as diverse as the Findhorn garden and Feng Shui²³ represent a variety of ways which illustrate the importance of being in tune with nature or the cosmos. In *New Age* there is no distinction between good and evil. Human actions are the fruit of either illumination or ignorance. Hence we cannot

²² Cf. Chris Griscom, *Ecstasy is a New Frequency: Teachings of the Light Institute*, New York (Simon & Schuster) 1987, p. 82.

²³ See the Glossary of *New Age* terms, §7.2 above.

condemn anyone, and nobody needs forgiveness. Believing in the existence of evil can create only negativity and fear. The answer to negativity is *love*. But it is not the sort which has to be translated into deeds; it is more a question of attitudes of mind. Love is energy, a high-frequency vibration, and the secret to happiness and health and success is being able to tune in, to find one's place in the great chain of being. *New Age* teachers and therapies claim to offer the key to finding the correspondences between all the elements of the universe, so that people may modulate the tone of their lives and be in absolute harmony with each other and with everything around them, although there are different theoretical backgrounds.²⁴

2.2.3. *Health: Golden living*

Formal (allopathic) medicine today tends to limit itself to curing particular, isolated ailments, and fails to look at the broader picture of a person's health: this has given rise to a fair amount of understandable dissatisfaction. Alternative therapies have gained enormously in popularity because they claim to look at the whole person and are about *healing* rather than *curing*. Holistic health, as it is known, concentrates on the important role that the mind plays in physical healing. The connection between the spiritual and the physical aspects of the person is said to be in the immune

²⁴Cf. W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, chapter 15 ("The Mirror of Secular Thought"). 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, for Swedenborg 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 relativized causality in favor of the esoteric world-view of correspondences.

system or the Indian chakra system. In a *New Age* perspective, illness and suffering come from working against nature; when one is in tune with nature, one can expect a much healthier life, and even material prosperity; for some *New Age* healers, there should actually be no need for us to die. Developing our human potential will put us in touch with our inner divinity, and with those parts of our selves which have been alienated and suppressed. This is revealed above all in Altered States of Consciousness (ASCs), which are induced either by drugs or by various mind-expanding techniques, particularly in the context of "transpersonal psychology". The shaman is often seen as the specialist of altered states of consciousness, one who is able to mediate between the transpersonal realms of spirits and gods and the world of humans.

There is a remarkable variety of approaches for promoting holistic health, some derived from ancient cultural traditions, whether religious or esoteric, others connected with the psychological theories developed in Esalen during the years 1960-1970. Advertising connected with *New Age* covers a wide range of practices as acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractic, kinesiology, homeopathy, iridology, massage and various kinds of "bodywork" (such as orgonomy, Feldenkrais, reflexology, Rolfing, polarity massage, therapeutic touch etc.), meditation and visualization, nutritional therapies, psychic healing, various kinds of herbal medicine, healing by crystals, metals, music or colors, reincarnation therapies and, finally, twelve-step programmes and self-help groups.²⁵ The source of healing is said to be within ourselves, something we reach when we are in touch with our inner energy or cosmic energy.

W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Inasmuch as health includes a prolongation of life, *New Age* offers an Eastern formula in Western terms. Originally, reincarnation was a part of Hindu cyclical thought, based on the *atman* or divine kernel of personality (later the concept of *jiva*), which moved from body to body in a cycle of suffering (*samsara*), determined by the law of *karma*, linked to behavior in past lives. Hope lies in the possibility of being born into a better state, or ultimately in liberation from the need to be reborn. What is different in most Buddhist traditions is that what wanders from body to body is not a soul, but a continuum of consciousness. Present life is embedded in a potentially endless cosmic process which includes even the gods. In the West, since the time of Lessing, reincarnation has been understood far more optimistically as a process of learning and progressive individual fulfillment. Spiritualism, theosophy, anthroposophy and *New Age* all see reincarnation as participation in cosmic evolution. This post-Christian approach to eschatology is said to answer the unresolved questions of theodicy and dispenses with the notion of hell. When the soul is separated from the body individuals can look back on their whole life up to that point, and when the soul is united to its new body there is a preview of its coming phase of life. People have access to their former lives through dreams and meditation techniques.²⁶

2.2.4. Wholeness: A Magical Mystery Tour

One of the central concerns of the *New Age* movement is the search for "wholeness". There is encouragement to overcome all forms of "dualism", as such divisions are an unhealthy product

²⁶ Cf. Reinhard Hummel, "Reinkarnation", in Hans Gasper, Joachim Miiller, Friederike Valentin (eds.), *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen. Fakten, Hintergründe, Kldrungen*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien (Herder) 2000, 886-893.

of a less enlightened past. Divisions which *New Age* proponents claim need to be overcome include the real difference between Creator and creation, the real distinction between man and nature, or spirit and matter, which are all considered wrongly as forms of dualism. These dualistic tendencies are often assumed to be ultimately based on the Judaeo-Christian roots of western civilization, while it would be more accurate to link them to gnosticism, in particular to Manichaeism. The scientific revolution and the spirit of modern rationalism are blamed particularly for the tendency to fragmentation, which treats organic wholes as mechanisms that can be reduced to their smallest components and then explained in terms of the latter, and the tendency to reduce spirit to matter, so that spiritual reality - including the soul - becomes merely a contingent "epiphenomenon" of essentially material processes. In all of these areas, the *New Age* alternatives are called "holistic". Holism pervades the *New Age* movement, from its concern with holistic health to its quest for unitive consciousness, and from ecological awareness to the idea of global "networking"

2.3. The fundamental principles of *New Age* thinking

2.3.1. A global response in a time of crisis

"Both the Christian tradition and the secular faith in an unlimited process of science had to face a severe break first manifested in the student revolutions around the year 1968".²⁷ The wisdom of older generations was suddenly robbed of significance and respect, while the omnipotence of science evaporated, so that the Church now "has to face a serious breakdown in the transmission of her faith to the younger generation".²⁸ A general

²⁷ Michael Fuss, "New Age and Europe - A Challenge for Theology", in *Mission Studies* Vol. VIII-2, 16, 1991, p. 192.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

loss of faith in these former pillars of consciousness and social cohesion has been accompanied by the unexpected return of cosmic religiosity, rituals and beliefs which many believed to have been supplanted by Christianity; but this perennial esoteric undercurrent never really went away. The surge in popularity of Asian religion at this point was something new in the Western context, established late in the nineteenth century in the theosophical movement, and it "reflects the growing awareness of a global spirituality, incorporating all existing religious traditions".²⁹

The perennial philosophical question of the one and the many has its modern and contemporary form in the temptation to overcome not only undue division, but even real difference and distinction, and the most common expression of this is holism, an essential ingredient in *New Age* and one of the principal signs of the times in the last quarter of the twentieth century. An extraordinary amount of energy has gone into the effort to overcome the division into compartments characteristic of mechanistic ideology, but this has led to the sense of obligation to submit to a global network which assumes quasi-transcendental authority. Its clearest implications are a process of conscious transformation and the development of ecology.³⁰ The new vision which is the goal of conscious transformation has taken time to formulate, and its enactment is resisted by older forms of thought judged to be entrenched in the status quo. What has been successful is the generalization of ecology as a fascination with nature and resacralisation of the earth, Mother Earth or *Gaia*, with the missionary zeal characteristic of Green politics. The Earth's executive agent is the human race as a whole, and the *harmony and understanding* required for responsible governance is increas-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

ingly understood to be a global government, with a global ethical framework. The warmth of Mother Earth, whose divinity pervades the whole of creation, is held to bridge the gap between creation and the transcendent Father-God of Judaism and Christianity, and removes the prospect of being judged by such a Being.

In such a vision of a closed universe that contains "God" and other spiritual beings along with ourselves, we recognize here an implicit pantheism. This is a fundamental point which pervades all *New Age* thought and practice, and conditions in advance any otherwise positive assessment where we might be in favor of one or another aspect of its spirituality. As Christians, we believe on the contrary that "man is essentially a creature and remains so for all eternity, so that an absorption of the human I in the divine I will never be possible".³¹

2.3.2. The essential matrix of New Age thinking

The essential matrix of *New Age* thinking is to be found in the esoteric-theosophical tradition which was fairly widely accepted in European intellectual circles in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was particularly strong in freemasonry, spiritualism, occultism and theosophy, which shared a kind of esoteric culture. In this world-view, the visible and invisible universes are linked by a series of correspondences, analogies and influences between microcosm and macrocosm, between metals and planets, between planets and the various parts of the human body, between the visible cosmos and the invisible realms of reality. Nature is a living being, shot through with networks of sympathy and

³¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation (Orationis Formas)*, 1989, 14. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 19; *Fides et Ratio*, 22.

antipathy, animated by a light and a secret fire which human beings seek to control. People can contact the upper or lower worlds by means of their imagination (an organ of the soul or spirit), or by using mediators (angels, spirits, devils) or rituals.

People can be initiated into the mysteries of the cosmos, God and the self by means of a spiritual itinerary of transformation. The eventual goal is *gnosis*, the highest form of knowledge, the equivalent of salvation. It involves a search for the oldest and highest tradition in philosophy (what is inappropriately called *philosophia perennis*) and religion (primordial theology), a secret (esoteric) doctrine which is the key to all the "exoteric" traditions which are accessible to everyone. Esoteric teachings are handed down from master to disciple in a gradual program of initiation.

19th century esotericism is seen by some as completely secularized. Alchemy, magic, astrology and other elements of traditional esotericism had been thoroughly integrated with aspects of modern culture, including the search for causal laws, evolutionism, psychology and the study of religions. It reached its clearest form in the ideas of Helena Blavatsky, a Russian medium who founded the *Theosophical Society* with Henry Olcott in New York in 1875. The Society aimed to fuse elements of Eastern and Western traditions in an evolutionary type of spiritualism. It had three main aims:

1. "To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, caste or color.
2. "To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. "To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

"The significance of these objectives... should be clear. The first objective implicitly rejects the 'irrational bigotry' and 'sectarianism' of traditional Christianity as perceived by spiritualists and theosophists... It is not immediately obvious from the objectives themselves that, for theosophists, 'science' meant the occult sciences and philosophy the *occulta philosophia*, that the laws of nature were of an occult or psychic nature, and that comparative religion was expected to unveil a 'primordial tradition' ultimately modeled on a Hermeticist *philosophiaperennis*?"²

A prominent component of Mrs. Blavatsky's writings was the emancipation of women, which involved an attack on the "male" God of Judaism, of Christianity and of Islam. She urged people to return to the mother-goddess of Hinduism and to the practice of feminine virtues. This continued under the guidance of Annie Besant, who was in the vanguard of the feminist movement. Wicca and "women's spirituality" carry on this struggle against "patriarchal" Christianity today.

Marilyn Ferguson devoted a chapter of *The Aquarian Conspiracy* to the precursors of the Age of Aquarius, those who had woven the threads of a transforming vision based on the expansion of consciousness and the experience of self-transcendence. Two of those she mentioned were the American psychologist William James and the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. James defined religion as experience, not dogma, and he taught that human beings can change their mental attitudes in such a way that they are able to become architects of their own destiny.

³² W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, p. 448f. The objectives are quoted from the final (1896) version, earlier versions of which 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).

Jung emphasized the transcendent character of consciousness and introduced the idea of the collective unconscious, a kind of store for symbols and memories shared with people from various different ages and cultures. According to Wouter Hanegraaff, both of these men contributed to a "sacralization of psychology", something that has become an important element of *New Age* thought and practice. Jung, indeed, "not only psychologized esotericism but he also sacralized psychology, by filling it with the contents of esoteric speculation. The result was a body of theories which enabled people to talk about God while really meaning their own psyche, and about their own psyche while really meaning the divine. If the psyche is 'mind', and God is 'mind' as well, then to discuss one must mean to discuss the other".³³ His response to the accusation that he had "psychologized" Christianity was that "psychology is the modern myth and only in terms of the current myth can we understand the faith".³⁴ It is certainly true that Jung's psychology sheds light on many aspects of the Christian faith, particularly on the need to face the reality of evil, but his religious convictions are so different at different stages of his life that one is left with a confused image of God. A central element in his thought is the cult of the sun, where God is the vital energy (libido) within a person.³⁵ As he himself said, "this comparison is no mere play of words".³⁶ This

³³ W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

³⁴ Thomas M. King s.j., "Jung and Catholic Spirituality", in *America*, 3 April 1999, p. 14. The author points out that New Age devotees "quote passages dealing with the I Ching, astrology and Zen, while Catholics quote passages dealing with Christian mystics, the liturgy and the psychological value of the sacrament of reconciliation" (p. 12). He also lists Catholic personalities and spiritual institutions clearly inspired and guided by Jung's psychology.

³⁵ Cf. W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, p. 501f.

³⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, quoted in Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

is "the god within" to which Jung refers, the essential divinity he believed to be in every human being. The path to the inner universe is through the unconscious. The inner world's correspondence to the outer one is in the *collective* unconscious.

The tendency to interchange psychology and spirituality was, firmly embedded in the Human Potential Movement as it developed towards the end of the 1960s at the Esalen Institute in California. Transpersonal psychology, strongly influenced by Eastern religions and by Jung, offers a contemplative journey where science meets mysticism. The stress laid on bodiliness, the search for ways of expanding consciousness and the cultivation of the myths of the collective unconscious were all encouragements to search for "the God within" oneself. To realize one's potential, one had to go beyond one's *ego* in order to become the god that one is, deep down. This could be done by choosing the appropriate therapy - meditation, parapsychological experiences, the use of hallucinogenic drugs. These were all ways of achieving "peak experiences", "mystical" experiences of fusion with God and with the cosmos.

The symbol of Aquarius was borrowed from astrological mythology, but later came to signify the desire for a radically new world. The two centers which were the initial power-houses of the *New Age*, and to a certain extent still are, were the Garden community at Findhorn in North-East Scotland, and the Center for the development of human potential at Esalen in Big Sur, California, in the United States of America. What feeds *New Age* consistently is a growing global consciousness and increasing awareness of a looming ecological crisis.

2.3.3. Central themes of the New Age

New Age is not, properly speaking, a religion, but it is interested in what is called "divine". The essence of *New Age* is the loose association of the various activities, ideas and people who might validly attract the term. So there is no single articulation of anything like the doctrines of mainstream religions. Despite this, and despite the immense variety within *New Age*, there are some common points:

- the cosmos is seen as an organic whole
- it is animated by an Energy, which is also identified as the divine Soul or Spirit
- much credence is given to the mediation of various spiritual entities
- humans are capable of ascending to invisible higher spheres, and of controlling their own lives beyond death
- there is held to be a "perennial knowledge" which pre-dates and is superior to all religions and cultures
- people follow enlightened masters...

2.3.4. What does New Age say about...

2.3.4.1. ...the human person?

New Age involves a fundamental belief in the perfectibility of the human person by means of a wide variety of techniques and therapies (as opposed to the Christian view of cooperation with divine grace). There is a general accord with Nietzsche's idea that Christianity has prevented the full manifestation of genuine humanity. Perfection, in this context, means achieving self-fulfillment, according to an order of values which we ourselves create and which we achieve by our own strength: hence one can speak of a self-creating self. On this view, there is more difference between humans as they now are and as they will be

when they have fully realized their potential, than there is between humans and anthropoids.

It is useful to distinguish between *esotericism*, a search for knowledge, and *magic*, or the occult: the latter is a means of obtaining power. Some groups are both esoteric and occult. At the center of occultism is a will to power based on the dream of becoming divine.

Mind-expanding techniques are meant to reveal to people their divine power; by using this power, people prepare the way for the Age of Enlightenment. This exaltation of humanity overturns the correct relationship between Creator and creature, and one of its extreme forms is Satanism. Satan becomes the symbol of a rebellion against conventions and rules, a symbol that often takes aggressive, selfish and violent forms. Some evangelical groups have expressed concern at the subliminal presence of what they claim is Satanic symbolism in some varieties of rock music, which have a powerful influence on young people. This is all far removed from the message of peace and harmony which is to be found in the New Testament; it is often one of the consequences of the exaltation of humanity when that involves the negation of a transcendent God.

But it is not only something which affects young people; the basic themes of esoteric culture are also present in the realms of politics, education and legislation.³⁷ *It is especially the case with ecology.* Deep ecology's emphasis on bio-centrism denies the anthropological vision of the Bible, in which human beings are at the center of the world, since they are considered to be qualitatively superior to other natural forms. It is very prominent

³⁷ On this point cf. Michel Schooyans, *L'Evangile face au desordre mondial*, with a preface by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Paris (Fayard) 1997.

in legislation and education today, despite the fact that it underrates humanity in this way. The same esoteric cultural matrix can be found in the ideological theory underlying population control policies and experiments in genetic engineering, which seem to express a dream human beings have of creating themselves afresh. How do people hope to do this? By deciphering the genetic code, altering the natural rules of sexuality, defying the limits of death.

In what might be termed a classical *New Age* account, people are born with a divine spark, in a sense which is reminiscent of ancient gnosticism; this links them into the unity of the Whole. So they are seen as essentially divine, although they participate in this cosmic divinity at different levels of consciousness. We are co-creators, and we create our own reality. Many *New Age* authors maintain that we choose the circumstances of our lives (even our own illness and health), in a vision where every individual is considered the creative source of the universe. But we need to make a journey in order fully to understand where we fit into the unity of the cosmos. The journey is psychotherapy, and the recognition of universal consciousness is salvation. There is no sin; there is only imperfect knowledge. The identity of every human being is diluted in the universal being and in the process of successive incarnations. People are subject to the determining influences of the stars, but can be opened to the divinity which lives within them, in their continual search (by means of appropriate techniques) for an ever greater harmony between the self and divine cosmic energy. There is no need for Revelation or Salvation which would come to people from outside themselves, but simply a need to experience the salvation hidden within themselves (self-salvation), by mastering psycho-physical techniques which lead to definitive enlightenment.

Some stages on the way to self-redemption are *preparatory* (meditation, body harmony, releasing self-healing energies). They are the starting-point for processes of spiritualization, perfection and enlightenment which help people to acquire further self-control and psychic concentration on "transformation" of the individual self into "cosmic consciousness". The destiny of the human person is a series of successive reincarnations of the soul in different bodies. This is understood not as the cycle of *samsara*, in the sense of purification as punishment, but as a gradual ascent towards the perfect development of one's potential.

Psychology is used to explain mind expansion as "mystical" experiences. Yoga, Zen, transcendental meditation and tantric exercises lead to an experience of self-fulfillment or enlightenment. Peak-experiences (reliving one's birth, traveling to the gates of death, biofeedback, dance and even drugs - anything which can provoke an altered state of consciousness) are believed to lead to unity and enlightenment. Since there is only one Mind, some people can be *channels* for higher beings. Every part of this single universal being has contact with every other part. The classic approach in *New Age* is transpersonal psychology, whose main concepts are the Universal Mind, the Higher Self, the collective and personal unconscious and the individual ego. The Higher Self is our real identity, a bridge between God as divine Mind and humanity. Spiritual development is contact with the Higher Self, which overcomes all forms of dualism between subject and object, life and death, psyche and soma, the self and the fragmentary aspects of the self. Our limited personality is like a shadow or a dream created by the real self. The Higher Self contains the memories of earlier (re-)incarnations.

2.3.4.2. ...God?

New Age has a marked preference for Eastern or pre-Christian religions, which are reckoned to be uncontaminated by Judaeo-Christian distortions. Hence great respect is given to ancient agricultural rites and to fertility cults. "Gaia", Mother Earth, is offered as an alternative to God the Father, whose image is seen to be linked to a patriarchal conception of male domination of women. There is talk of God, but it is not a personal God; the God of which *New Age* speaks is neither personal nor transcendent. Nor is it the Creator and sustainer of the universe, but an "impersonal energy" immanent in the world, with which it forms a "cosmic unity": "All is one". This unity is monistic, pantheistic or, more precisely, panentheistic. God is the "life-principle", the "spirit or soul of the world", the sum total of consciousness existing in the world. In a sense, everything is God. God's presence is clearest in the spiritual aspects of reality, so every mind/spirit is, in some sense, God.

When it is consciously received by men and women, "divine energy" is often described as "Christie energy". There is also talk of Christ, but this does not mean Jesus of Nazareth. "Christ" is a title applied to someone who has arrived at a state of consciousness where he or she perceives him-or herself to be divine and can thus claim to be a "universal Master". Jesus of Nazareth was not *the* Christ, but simply one among many historical figures in whom this "Christie" nature is revealed, as is the case with Buddha and others. Every historical realization of the *Christ* shows clearly that all human beings are heavenly and divine, and leads them towards this realization.

The innermost and most personal ("psychic") level on which this "divine cosmic energy" is "heard" by human beings is also called "Holy Spirit".

2.3.4.3. *...The world?*

The move from a mechanistic model of classical physics to the "holistic" one of modern atomic and sub-atomic physics, based on the concept of matter as waves or energy rather than particles, is central to much *New Age* thinking. The universe is an ocean of energy, which is a single whole or a network of links. The energy animating the single organism which is the universe is "spirit". There is no alterity between God and the world. The world itself is divine and it undergoes an evolutionary process which leads from inert matter to "higher and perfect consciousness". The world is uncreated, eternal and self-sufficient. The future of the world is based on an inner dynamism which is necessarily positive and leads to the reconciled (divine) unity of all that exists. God and the world, soul and body, intelligence and feeling, heaven and earth are one immense vibration of energy.

James Lovelock's book on the Gaia Hypothesis claims that "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".³⁸ To some, the Gaia hypothesis is "a strange synthesis of individualism and collectivism. It all happens as if *New Age*, having plucked people out of fragmentary politics, cannot wait to throw them into the great cauldron of the global mind". The global brain needs institutions with which to rule, in other words, a world government. "To deal with today's problems *New Age* dreams of a spiritual aristocracy

³⁸ Quoted in the Maranatha Community's *The True and the False New Age. Introductory Ecumenical Notes*, Manchester (Maranatha) 1993, 8.10 - the original page numbering is not specified.

in the style of Plato's *Republic*, run by secret societies...".³⁹ This may be an exaggerated way of stating the case, but there is much evidence that gnostic elitism and global governance coincide on many issues in international politics.

Everything in the universe is interrelated; in fact every part is in itself an image of the totality; the whole is in every thing and every thing is in the whole. In the "great chain of being", all beings are intimately linked and form one family with different grades of evolution. Every human person is a *hologram*, an image of the whole of creation, in which every thing vibrates on its own frequency. Every human being is a neuron in earth's central nervous system, and all individual entities are in a relationship of complementarity with others. In fact, there is an inner complementarity or androgyny in the whole of creation.⁴⁰

One of the recurring themes in *New Age* writings and thought is the "new paradigm" which contemporary science has opened up. "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".⁴¹ Thus far, the "paradigm shift" is a radical change of perspective, but nothing more. The question is whether thought and real change are commensurate, and how effective in the external world an inner transformation can be proved to be. One is forced to ask, even without expressing a

³⁹ Michel Lacroix, *L'Ideologia della New Age*, Milano (il Saggiatore) 1998, p. 84f.

⁴⁰ Cf. the section on David Spangler's ideas in *Actualite des religions* n° 8, septembre 1999, p. 43.

⁴¹ M. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

negative judgment, how scientific a thought-process can be when it involves affirmations like this: "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".⁴² It is illogical to conclude from the fact that something is unthinkable that it cannot happen. Such reasoning is really gnostic, in the sense of giving too much power to knowledge and consciousness. This is not to deny the fundamental and crucial role of developing consciousness in scientific discovery and creative development, but simply to caution against imposing upon external reality what is as yet still only in the mind.

2.4. "Inhabitants of myth rather than history"⁴³?: *New Age* and culture

"Basically, the appeal of the *New Age* has to do with the culturally stimulated interest in the self, its value, capacities and problems. Whereas traditionalized religiosity, with its hierarchical organization, is well-suited for the community, detraditionalized spirituality is well-suited for the individual. The *New Age* is 'of the self in that it facilitates celebration of what it is to be and to become; and 'for' the self in that by differing from much of the mainstream, it is positioned to handle identity problems generated by conventional forms of life".⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁴³ "To be an American... is precisely to *imagine* a destiny rather than inherit one. We have always been inhabitants of myth rather than history": Leslie Fiedler, quoted in M. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Cf. P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. 173f.

The rejection of tradition in the form of patriarchal, hierarchical social or ecclesial organization implies the search for an alternative form of society, one that is clearly inspired by the modern notion of the self. Many *New Age* writings argue that one can do nothing (directly) to change the world, but everything to change oneself; changing individual consciousness is understood to be the (indirect) way to change the world. The most important instrument for social change is personal example. Worldwide recognition of these personal examples will steadily lead to the transformation of the collective mind and such a transformation will be the major achievement of our time. This is clearly part of the holistic paradigm, and a re-statement of the classical philosophical question of the one and the many. It is also linked to Jung's espousal of the theory of correspondence and his rejection of causality. Individuals are fragmentary representations of the planetary hologram; by looking within one not only *knows* the universe, but also *changes* it. But the more one looks within, the smaller the political arena becomes. Does this really fit in with the rhetoric of democratic participation in a new planetary order, or is it an unconscious and subtle disempowerment of people, which could leave them open to manipulation? Does the current preoccupation with planetary problems (ecological issues, depletion of resources, over-population, the economic gap between north and south, the huge nuclear arsenal and political instability) enable or disable engagement in other, equally real, political and social questions? The old adage that "charity begins at home" can give a healthy balance to one's approach to these issues. Some observers of *New Age* detect a sinister authoritarianism behind apparent indifference to politics. David Spangler himself points out that one of the shadows of the *New Age* is "a subtle surrender to powerlessness and irresponsibility in the name of

waiting for the *New Age* to come rather than being an active creator of wholeness in one's own life".⁴⁵

Even though it would hardly be correct to suggest that quietism is universal in *New Age* attitudes, one of the chief criticisms of the *New Age* Movement is that its privatistic quest for self-fulfillment may actually work against the possibility of a sound religious culture. Three points bring this into focus:

- it is questionable whether *New Age* demonstrates the *intellectual cogency* to provide a complete picture of the cosmos in a worldview which claims to integrate nature and spiritual reality. The Western universe is seen as a divided one based on monotheism, transcendence, alterity and separateness. A fundamental dualism is detected in such divisions as those between real and ideal, relative and absolute, finite and infinite, human and divine, sacred and profane, past and present, all redolent of Hegel's "unhappy consciousness". This is portrayed as something tragic. The response from *New Age* is unity through fusion: it claims to reconcile soul and body, female and male, spirit and matter, human and divine, earth and cosmos, transcendent and immanent, religion and science, differences between religions, Yin and Yang. There is, thus, no more alterity; what is left in human terms is transpersonality. The *New Age* world is unproblematic: there is nothing left to achieve. But the metaphysical question of the one and the many remains unanswered, perhaps even unasked, in that there is a great deal of regret at the effects of disunity and division, but the response is a description of how things would appear in another vision.

- *New Age* imports Eastern religious practices piecemeal and *re-interprets them to suit Westerners*; this involves a rejection of

⁴⁵ David Spangler, *The New Age*, Issaquah (Mornington Press) 1988, p. 14.

the language of sin and salvation, replacing it with the morally neutral language of addiction and recovery. References to extra-European influences are sometimes merely a "pseudo-Orientalization" of Western culture. Furthermore, it is hardly a genuine dialogue; in a context where Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian influences are suspect, oriental influences are used precisely because they are alternatives to Western culture. Traditional science and medicine are felt to be inferior to holistic approaches, as are patriarchal and particular structures in politics and religion. All of these will be obstacles to the coming of the Age of Aquarius; once again, it is clear that what is implied when people opt for *New Age* alternatives is a complete break with the tradition that formed them. Is this as mature and liberated as it is often thought or presumed to be?

- Authentic religious traditions encourage discipline with the eventual goal of acquiring *wisdom, equanimity and compassion*. *New Age* echoes society's deep, "ineradicable yearning for an integral religious culture, and for something more generic and enlightened than what politicians generally offer, but it is not clear whether the benefits of a vision based on the ever-expanding self are for individuals or for societies. *New Age* training courses (what used to be known as "Erhard seminar trainings" [EST] etc.) marry counter-cultural values with the mainstream need to succeed, inner satisfaction with outer success; Findhorn's "Spirit of Business" retreat transforms the experience of work while increasing productivity; some *New Age* devotees are involved not only to become more authentic and spontaneous, but also in order to become more prosperous (through magic etc.). "What makes things even more appealing to the enterprise-minded businessperson is that *New Age* trainings also resonate with somewhat more humanistic ideas abroad in the world of business. The ideas have to do with the workplace as a 'learning environment', 'bringing

life back to work', 'humanizing work', 'fulfilling the manager', 'people come first' or 'unlocking potential'. Presented by *New Age* trainers, they are likely to appeal to those businesspeople who have already been involved with more (secular) humanistic trainings and who want to take things further: at one and the same time for the sake of personal growth, happiness and enthusiasm, as well as for commercial productivity".⁴⁶ So it is clear that people involved do seek wisdom and equanimity for their own benefit, but how much do the activities in which they are involved enable them to work for the common good? Apart from the question of motivation, all of these phenomena need to be judged by their fruits, and the question to ask is whether they promote *self* or *solidarity*, not only with whales, trees or like-minded people, but with the whole of creation - including the whole of humanity. The most pernicious consequences of any philosophy of egoism which is embraced * by institutions or by large numbers of people are identified by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as a set of "strategies to reduce the number of those who will eat at humanity's table".⁴⁷ This is a key standard by which to evaluate the impact of any philosophy or theory. Christianity always seeks to measure human endeavors by their openness to the Creator and to all other creatures, a respect based firmly on love.

⁴⁶ P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ See the Preface to Michel Schooyans, *L'Evangile face au desordre mondial*, *op. cit.* This quotation is translated from the Italian, // *nuovo disordine mondiale*, Cinisello Balsamo (San Paolo) 2000. p. 6.

2.5. Why has New Age grown so rapidly and spread so effectively?

Whatever questions and criticisms it may attract, *New Age* is an attempt by people who experience the world as harsh and heartless to bring warmth to that world. As a reaction to modernity, it operates more often than not on the level of feelings, instincts and emotions. Anxiety about an apocalyptic future of economic instability, political uncertainty and climatic change plays a large part in causing people to look for an alternative, resolutely optimistic relationship to the cosmos. There is a search for wholeness and happiness, often on an explicitly spiritual level. But it is significant that *New Age* has enjoyed enormous success in an era which can be characterized by the almost universal exaltation of *diversity*. Western culture has taken a step beyond tolerance - in the sense of grudging acceptance or putting up with the idiosyncrasies of a person or a minority group - to a conscious erosion of respect for normality. Normality is presented as a morally loaded concept, linked necessarily with absolute norms. For a growing number of people, absolute beliefs or norms indicate nothing but an inability to tolerate other people's views and convictions. In this atmosphere alternative life-styles and theories have really taken off: it is not only acceptable but positively good to be diverse.⁴⁸

It is essential to bear in mind that people are involved with *New Age* in very different ways and on many levels. In most cases it is not really a question of "belonging" to a group or movement; nor is there much conscious awareness of the principles on which *New Age* is built. It seems that, for the most

⁴⁸ Cf. *Our Creative Diversity. Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*, Paris (UNESCO) 1995, which illustrates the importance given to celebrating and promoting diversity.

part, people are attracted to particular therapies or practices, without going into their background, and others are simply occasional consumers of products which are labeled "New Age ". People who use aromatherapy or listen to "New Age" music, for example, are usually interested in the effect they have on their health or well-being; it is only a minority who go further into the subject, and try to understand its theoretical (or "mystical") significance. This fits perfectly into the patterns of consumption in societies where amusement and leisure play such an important part. The "movement" has adapted well to the laws of the market, and it is partly because it is such an attractive economic proposition that *New Age* has become so widespread. *New Age* has been seen, in some cultures at least, as the label for a product created by the application of marketing principles to a religious phenomenon.⁴⁹ There is always going to be a way of profiting from people's perceived spiritual needs. Like many other things in contemporary economics, *New Age* is a global phenomenon held together and fed with information by the mass media. It is arguable that this global community was created by means of the mass media, and it is quite clear that popular literature and mass communications ensure that the common notions held by "believers" and sympathizers spread almost everywhere very rapidly. However, there is no way of proving that such a rapid spread of ideas is either by chance or by design, since this is a very loose form of "community". Like the cybercommunities created by the Internet, it is a domain where relationships between people can be either very impersonal or interpersonal in only a very selective sense.

⁴⁹ Cf. Christoph Boehinger, "New Age" *unci* moderne Religion: Religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchungen, Gütersloh (KaiSicr) 1994, especially chapter 3.

New Age has become immensely popular as a loose set of beliefs, therapies and practices, which are often selected and combined at will, irrespective of the incompatibilities and inconsistencies this may imply. But this is obviously to be expected in a world-view self-consciously based on "right-brain" intuitive thinking. And that is precisely why it is important to discover and recognize the fundamental characteristics of *New Age* ideas. What is offered is often described as simply "spiritual", rather than belonging to any religion, but there are much closer links to particular Eastern religions than many "consumers" realize. This is obviously important in "prayer"-groups to which people choose to belong, but it is also a real question for management in a growing number of companies, whose employees are required to practice meditation and adopt mind-expanding techniques as part of their life at work.⁵⁰

It is worth saying a brief word about concerted promotion of *New Age* as an ideology, but this is a very complex issue. Some groups have reacted to *New Age* with sweeping accusations about conspiracies, but the answer would generally be that we are witnessing a spontaneous cultural change whose course is fairly determined by influences beyond human control. However, it is enough to point out that *New Age* shares with a number of internationally influential groups the goal of superseding or transcending particular religions in order to create space for a universal religion which could unite humanity. Closely related to this is a very concerted effort on the part of many institutions to invent a *Global Ethic*, an ethical framework which would reflect the global nature of contemporary culture, economics and politics. Further, the politicization of ecological questions cer-

⁵⁰ The shortcomings of techniques which are not yet prayer are discussed below in § 3.4, "Christian mysticism and *New Age* mysticism".

tainly colors the whole question of the Gaia hypothesis or worship of mother earth.

3 NEW AGE AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

3.1. New Age as spirituality

New Age is often referred to by those who promote it as a "new spirituality". It seems ironic to call it "new" when so many of its ideas have been taken from ancient religions and cultures. But what really is new is that *New Age* is a conscious search for an alternative to Western culture and its Judaeo-Christian religious roots. "Spirituality" in this way refers to the inner experience of harmony and unity with the whole of reality, which heals each human person's feelings of imperfection and finiteness. People discover their profound connectedness with the sacred universal force or energy which is the nucleus of all life. When they have made this discovery, men and women can set out on a path to perfection, which will enable them to sort out their personal lives and their relationship to the world, and to take their place in the universal process of becoming and in the New Genesis of a world in constant evolution. The result is a *cosmic mysticism*⁵¹ based on people's awareness of a universe burgeoning with dynamic energies. Thus cosmic energy, vibration, light, God, love - even the supreme Self - all refer to one and the same reality, the primal source present in every being.

This spirituality consists of two distinct elements, one metaphysical, the other psychological. The *metaphysical* component comes from *New Age's* esoteric and theosophical roots, and is basically a new form of gnosis. Access to the divine is by

⁵¹ Cf. Carlo Maccari. "La 'mistica cosmica' del *New Age*", in *Religioni e Sette nel Mondo* 1996/2.

knowledge of hidden mysteries, in each individual's search for "the real behind what is only apparent, the origin beyond time, the transcendent beyond what is merely fleeting, the primordial tradition behind merely ephemeral tradition, the other behind the self, the cosmic divinity beyond the incarnate individual". Esoteric spirituality "is an investigation of Being beyond the separateness of beings, a sort of nostalgia for lost unity".⁵²

"Here one can see the gnostic matrix of esoteric spirituality. It is evident when the children of Aquarius search for the Transcendent Unity of religions. They tend to pick out of the historical religions 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".⁵³

The *psychological* component of this kind of spirituality comes from the encounter between esoteric culture and psychology (cf. 2.32). *New Age* thus becomes an experience of personal psycho-spiritual transformation, seen as analogous to religious experience. For some people this transformation takes the form of a deep mystical experience, after a personal crisis or a lengthy spiritual search. For others it comes from the use of meditation or some sort of therapy, or from paranormal experiences which alter states of consciousness and provide insight into the unity of reality.⁵⁴

⁵² Jean Vernet, "L'avventura spirituale dei figli dell'Acquario", in *Religioni e Sette nel Mondo* 1996/2, p. 42f.

⁵³ J. Vernet, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ Cf. J. Gordon Melton, *New Age Encyclopedia*, Detroit (Gale Research) _ 1990, pp. xiii-xiv.

3.2. Spiritual narcissism?

Several authors see *New Age* spirituality as a kind of spiritual narcissism or pseudo-mysticism. It is interesting to note that this criticism was put forward even by an important exponent of *New Age*, David Spangler, who, in his later works, distanced himself from the more esoteric aspects of this current of thought.

He wrote that, in the more popular forms of *New Age*, "individuals and groups are living out their own fantasies of adventure and power, usually of an occult or millenarian form.... The principal characteristic of this level is attachment to a private world of ego-fulfillment and a consequent (though not always apparent) withdrawal from the world. On this level, 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".⁵⁵

In a later work, David Spangler lists what he sees as the negative elements or "shadows" of the *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... confusion of psychic phenomena with wisdom, of channeling with spirituality, of the *New Age* perspective with ultimate truth".⁵⁶ But, in the end, Spangler is convinced that selfish, irrational narcissism is limited to just a few new-agers. The positive aspects he stresses are the function of *New Age* as an image of change and as an incarnation of the sacred, a movement in which most people are "very serious

⁵⁵ David Spangler, *The Rebirth of the Sacred*, London (Gateway Books) 1984, p. 78f.

⁵⁶ David Spangler, *The New Age*, *op. cit.*, p. 13f.

seekers after truth", working in the interest of life and inner growth.

The commercial aspect of many products and therapies which bear the *New Age* label is brought out by David Toolan, an American Jesuit who spent several years in the *New Age* milieu. He observes that new-agers have discovered the inner life and are fascinated by the prospect of being responsible for the world, but that they are also easily overcome by a tendency to individualism and to viewing everything as an object of consumption. In this sense, while it is not Christian, *New Age* spirituality is not Buddhist either, inasmuch as it does not involve self-denial. The dream of mystical union seems to lead, in practice, to a merely virtual union, which, in the end, leaves people more alone and unsatisfied.

3.3. The Cosmic Christ

In the early days of Christianity, believers in Jesus Christ were forced to face up to the gnostic religions. They did not ignore them, but took the challenge positively and applied the terms used of cosmic deities to Christ himself. The clearest example of this is in the famous hymn to Christ in Saint Paul's letter to the Christians at Colossae:

"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, Sovereignities, 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.
 As **he is the Beginning**, he was 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).

For these early Christians, there was no new cosmic age to come; what they were celebrating with this hymn was the Fulfillment of all things which had 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 'fulfillment' could be greater than this? What other 'fulfillment' would be possible?"⁵⁷ Gnostic belief in cosmic powers and some obscure kind of destiny withdraws the possibility of a relationship to a personal God revealed in Christ. For Christians, the real cosmic Christ is the one who is present actively in the various members of his body, which is the Church. They do not look to impersonal cosmic powers, but to the loving care of a *personal* God; for them cosmic bio-centrism has to be transposed into a set of *social* relationships (in the Church); and they are not locked into a cyclical pattern of cosmic events, but focus on the *historical Jesus*, in particular on his crucifixion and resurrection. We find in the Letter to the Colossians and in the New Testament a doctrine of God different from that implicit in *New Age* thought: the Christian conception of God is one of a Trinity of Persons

⁵⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 9.

who has created the human race out of a desire to share the communion of Trinitarian life with creaturely persons. Properly understood, this means that authentic spirituality is not so much *our* search for God but *God's* search for us.

Another, completely different, view of the cosmic significance of Christ has become current in *New Age* circles. "The Cosmic Christ is the *divine* pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ (but by no means is limited to that person). The divine pattern of connectivity *was made flesh and set up its tent among us* (John 1:14)... The Cosmic Christ... leads a new exodus from the bondage and pessimistic views of a Newtonian, mechanistic universe so ripe with competition, winners and losers, dualisms, anthropocentrism, and the boredom that comes when our exciting universe is pictured 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."⁵⁸ Although this statement may not satisfy everyone involved in *New Age*, it does catch the tone very well, and it shows with absolute clarity where the differences between these two views of Christ lie. For *New Age* the Cosmic Christ is seen as a pattern which can be repeated in many people, places and times; it is the bearer of an enormous paradigm shift; it is ultimately a potential within us.

According to Christian belief, Jesus Christ is not a pattern, but a divine person whose human-divine figure reveals the mystery of the Father's love for every person throughout history

⁵⁸ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ. The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, San Francisco (Harper & Row) 1988, p. 135.

(Jn 3:16); he lives in us because he shares his life with us, but it is neither imposed nor automatic. All men and women are invited to share his life, to live "in Christ".

3.4. Christian mysticism and *New Age* mysticism

For Christians, the spiritual life is a relationship with God which gradually through his grace becomes deeper, and in the process also sheds light on our relationship with our fellow men and women, and with the universe. Spirituality in *New Age* terms means experiencing states of consciousness dominated by a sense of harmony and fusion with the Whole. So "mysticism" refers not to meeting the transcendent God in the fullness of love, but to the experience engendered by turning in on oneself, an exhilarating sense of being at one with the universe, a sense of letting one's individuality sink into the great ocean of Being.⁵⁹

This fundamental distinction is evident at all levels of comparison between Christian mysticism and *New Age* mysticism. The *New Age* way of purification is based on awareness of unease or alienation, which is to be overcome by immersion into the Whole. In order to be converted, a person needs to make use of techniques which lead to the experience of illumination. This transforms a person's consciousness and opens him or her to contact with the divinity, which is understood as the deepest essence of reality.

The techniques and methods offered in this immanentist religious system, which has no concept of God as person, proceed 'from below'. Although they involve a descent into the depths

⁵⁹ Cf. the document issued by the Argentine Bishops' Conference Committee for Culture: *Frente a una Nueva Era. Desafío a la pastoral en el horizonte de la Nueva Evangelization*, 1993.

of one's own heart or soul, they constitute an essentially human enterprise on the part of a person who seeks to rise towards divinity by his or her own efforts. It is often an "ascent" on the level of consciousness to what is understood to be a liberating awareness of "the god within". Not everyone has access to these techniques, whose benefits are restricted to a privileged spiritual 'aristocracy'.

The essential element in Christian faith, however, is God's descent towards his creatures, particularly towards the humblest, those who are weakest and least gifted according to the values of the "world". There are spiritual techniques which it is useful to learn, but God is able to by-pass them or do without them. A Christian's "method 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 Christian mysticism is not technique: it is always a gift of God; and the one who benefits from it knows himself to be unworthy".⁶⁰

For Christians, conversion is turning back to the Father, through the Son, in docility to the power of the Holy Spirit. The more people progress in their relationship with God - which is always and in every way a free gift - the more acute is the need to be converted from sin, spiritual myopia and self-infatuation, all of which obstruct a trusting self-abandonment to God and openness to other men and women.

All meditation techniques need to be purged of presumption and pretentiousness. Christian prayer is not an exercise in self-contemplation, stillness and self-emptying, but a dialogue of love, one which "implies an attitude of conversion, a flight from 'self

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Orationis Fortnas*, 23.

to the 'You' of God".⁶¹ It leads to an increasingly complete surrender to God's will, whereby we are invited to a deep, genuine solidarity with our brothers and sisters.⁶²

3.5. The "god within" and "theosis"

Here is a key point of contrast between *New Age* and Christianity. So much *New Age* literature is shot through with the conviction that there is no divine being "out there", or in any real way distinct from the rest of reality. From Jung's time onwards there has been a stream of people professing belief in "the god within". Our problem, in a *New Age* perspective, is our inability to recognize our own divinity, an inability which can be overcome with the help of guidance and the use of a whole variety of techniques for unlocking our hidden (divine) potential. The fundamental idea is that 'God' is deep within ourselves. We are gods, and we discover the unlimited power within us by peeling off layers of inauthenticity.⁶³ The more this potential is recognized, the more it is realized, and in this sense the *New Age* has its own idea of theosis, becoming divine or, more precisely, recognizing and accepting that we are divine. We are said by some to be living in "an age in which our understanding of God has to be interiorized: from the Almighty God out there to God the dynamic, creative power within the very center of all being: God as Spirit".⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3. See the sections on meditation and contemplative prayer in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§. 2705-2719.

⁶² Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Orationis Formas*, 13.

⁶³ Cf. Brendan Pelphrey, "I said, You are Gods. Orthodox Christian *Theosis* and Deification in the New Religious Movements" in *Spirituality East and West*, Easter 2000 (No. 13).

⁶⁴ Adrian Smith, *God and the Aquarian Age. The new era of the Kingdom*, Great Waking (McCrimmons) 1990, p. 49.

In the Preface to Book V of *Adversus Haereses*, Saint Irenaeus refers to "Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself. Here theosis, the Christian understanding of divinization, comes about not through our own efforts alone, but with the assistance of God's grace working in and through us. It inevitably involves an initial awareness of incompleteness and even sinfulness, in no way an exaltation of the self. Furthermore, it unfolds as an introduction into the life of the Trinity, a perfect case of distinction at the heart of unity; it is synergy rather than fusion. This all comes about as the result of a personal encounter, an offer of a new kind of life. 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 being transformed in our soul and in our body by participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

4. NEW AGE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH IN CONTRAST

It is difficult to separate the individual elements of *New Age* religiosity - innocent though they may appear - from the overarching framework which permeates the whole thought-world on the *New Age* movement. The gnostic nature of this movement calls us to judge it in its entirety. From the point of view of Christian faith, it is not possible to isolate some elements of *New Age* religiosity as acceptable to Christians, while rejecting others. Since the *New Age* movement makes much of a communication with nature, of cosmic knowledge of a universal good - thereby negating the revealed contents of Christian faith - it cannot be viewed as positive or innocuous. In a cultural environment, marked by religious relativism, it is necessary to signal a warning against the attempt to place *New Age* religiosity on the same level as Christian faith, making the difference between faith and belief

seem relative, thus creating greater confusion for the unwary. In this regard, it is useful to remember the exhortation of St. Paul "to instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine or to concern themselves with myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the plan of God that is to be received by faith" (/ *Tim* 1:3-4). Some practices are incorrectly labeled as *New Age* simply as a marketing strategy to make them sell better, but are not truly associated with its worldview. This only adds to the confusion. It is therefore necessary to accurately identify those elements which belong to the *New Age* movement, and which cannot be accepted by those who are faithful to Christ and his Church.

The following questions may be the easiest key to evaluating some of the central elements of *New Age* thought and practice from a Christian standpoint. "*New Age*" refers to the ideas which circulate about God, the human being and the world, the people with whom Christians may have conversations on religious matters, the publicity material for meditation groups, therapies and the like, explicit statements on religion and so on. Some of these questions applied to people and ideas not explicitly labeled *New Age* would reveal further unnamed or unacknowledged links with the whole *New Age* atmosphere.

* Is God a being with whom we have a relationship or something to be used or a force to be harnessed?

The *New Age* concept of God is rather diffuse, whereas the Christian concept is a very clear one. The *New Age* god is an impersonal energy, really a particular extension or component of the cosmos; god in this sense is the life-force or soul of the world. Divinity is to be found in every being, in a gradation "from the lowest crystal of the mineral world up to and beyond the Galactic

God himself, about Whom we can say nothing at all. This is not a man but a Great Consciousness".⁶⁵ In some "classic" *New Age* writings, it is clear that human beings are meant to think of themselves as gods: this is more fully developed in some people than in others. God is no longer to be sought beyond the world, but deep within myself.⁶⁶ Even when "God" is something outside myself, it is there to be manipulated.

This is very different from the Christian understanding of God as the maker of heaven and earth and the source of all personal life. God is in himself personal, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who created the universe in order to share the communion of his life with creaturely persons. "God, who 'dwells in unapproachable light', wants to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son. By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity".⁶⁷ God is not identified with the Life-principle understood as the "Spirit" or "basic energy" of the cosmos, but is that love which is absolutely different from the world, and yet creatively present in everything, and leading human beings to salvation.

* Is there just one Jesus Christ, or are there thousands of Christs?

Jesus Christ is often presented in *New Age* literature as one among many wise men, or initiates, or avatars, whereas in

⁶⁵ Cf. Benjamin Creme. *The Reappearance of Christ and the Masters of Wisdom*, London (Tara Press) 1979, p. 116.

* Cf. Jean Vermette, *Le New Age*. Paris (P.U.F.) 1992 (Collection Encyclopédique *Que sais-je?*), p. 14.

⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 52.

Christian tradition He is the Son of God. Here are some common points in *New Age* approaches:

- the personal and individual historical Jesus is distinct from the eternal, impersonal universal Christ;
- Jesus is not considered to be the only Christ;
- the death of Jesus on the cross is either denied or re-interpreted to exclude the idea that He, as Christ, could have suffered;
- extra-biblical documents (like the neo-gnostic gospels) are considered authentic sources for the knowledge of aspects of the life of Jesus which are not to be found in the canon of Scripture. Other revelations about Jesus, made available by entities, spirit guides and ascended masters, or even through the *Akasha Chronicles*, are basic for *New Age* christology;
- a kind of esoteric exegesis is applied to biblical texts to purify Christianity of the formal religion which inhibits access to its esoteric essence.⁶⁸

*In the Christian Tradition Jesus Christ is the Jesus of Nazareth about which the gospels speak, the son of Mary and the only Son of God, true man and true God, the full revelation of divine truth, unique Savior 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 fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father".*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Cf. Alessandro Olivieri Pennesi, // *Cristo del New Age. Indagine Critica*, Vatican City (Libreria Editrice Vaticana) 1999, especially pages 13-34. The list of common points is on p. 33.

⁶⁹ The Nicene Creed.

* The human being: is there one universal being or are there many individuals?

"The point of *New Age* technique is to reproduce mystical states at will, as if it were a matter of laboratory material. Rebirth, biofeedback, sensory isolation, holotropic breathing, hypnosis, mantras, fasting, sleep deprivation and transcendental meditation are attempts to control these states and to experience them continuously".⁷⁰ These practices all create an atmosphere of psychic weakness (and vulnerability*): When the object of the exercise is that we should re-invent our selves, there is a real question of who "I" am. "God within us" and holistic union'with the whole cosmos' underline this question. Isolated individual personalities would be pathological in terms of *New Age* (in particular transpersonal psychology). But "the real danger is the holistic paradigm. *New Age* is thinking based on totalitarian unity and that is why it is a danger...".⁷¹ More moderately: "We are authentic when we 'take charge of ourselves, when our choice and reactions flow spontaneously from our deepest needs, when our behavior and expressed feelings reflect our personal wholeness".⁷² The Human Potential Movement is the clearest example of the conviction that humans are divine, or contain a divine spark within themselves.

The Christian approach grows out of the Scriptural teachings about human nature; men and women are created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1.27) and God takes great consideration of them, much to the relieved surprise of the Psalmist (cf. Ps 8).

⁷⁰ Michel Lacroix, *L'ideologia delta New Age*, Milano (II Saggiatore) 1998, p. 74.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷² Edwin Schur, *The Awareness Trap. Self-Absorption instead of Social Change*, New York (McGraw Hill) 1977, p. 68.

The human person is a mystery fully revealed only in Jesus Christ (cf. GS 22), and in fact becomes authentically human properly in his relationship with Christ through the gift of the Spirit.¹³ This is far from the caricature of anthropocentrism ascribed to Christianity and rejected by many New Age authors and practitioners.

* Do we save ourselves or is salvation a free gift from God?

The key is to discover by what or by whom we believe we are saved. Do we save ourselves by our own actions, as is often the case in *New Age* explanations, or are we saved by God's love? Key words are *self-fulfillment* and *self-realization*, *self-redemption*. *New Age* is essentially Pelagian in its understanding of about human nature.⁷⁴

For Christians, salvation depends on a participation in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, and on a direct personal relationship with God rather than on any technique. The human situation, affected as it is by original sin and by personal sin, can only be rectified by God's action: sin is an offense against God, and only God can reconcile us to himself. In the divine plan of salvation, human beings have been saved by Jesus Christ who, as God and man, is the one mediator of redemption. In Christianity salvation is not an experience of self, a meditative and intuitive dwelling within oneself, but much more the forgiveness of sin, being lifted out of profound ambivalences in oneself and the calming of nature by the gift of communion with a loving God. The way to salvation is not found simply in a self-induced transformation of consciousness, but in a liberation from sin and

⁷⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§ 355-383.

⁷⁴ Cf. Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement. The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, Oxford (Blackwell) 1996, p. 161.

its consequences which then leads us to struggle against sin in ourselves and in the society around us. It necessarily moves us toward loving solidarity with our neighbour in need.

* Do we invent truth or do we embrace it?

New Age truth is about good vibrations, cosmic correspondences, harmony and ecstasy, in general pleasant experiences. It is a matter of finding one's own truth in accordance with the feel- good factor. Evaluating religion and ethical questions is obviously relative to one's own feelings and experiences.

Jesus Christ is presented in Christian teaching as "The Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14.6). His followers are asked to open their whole lives to him and to his values, in other words to an objective set of requirements which are part of an objective reality ultimately knowable by all.

* Prayer and meditation: are we talking to ourselves or to God?

The tendency to confuse psychology and spirituality makes it hard not to insist that many of the meditation techniques now used are not prayer. They are often a good preparation for prayer, but no more, even if they lead to a more pleasant state of mind or bodily comfort. The experiences involved are genuinely intense, but to remain at this level is to remain alone, not yet in the presence of the other. The achievement of silence can confront us with emptiness, rather than the silence of contemplating the beloved. It is also true that techniques for going deeper into one's own soul are ultimately an appeal to one's own ability to reach the divine, or even to become divine: if they forget God's search for the human heart they are still not Christian prayer. Even when it is seen as a link with the Universal Energy, "such an easy 'relationship' with God, where God's function is seen as supplying

all our needs, shows the selfishness at the heart of this *New Age*".¹⁵

New Age practices are not really prayer, in that they are generally a question of introspection or fusion with cosmic energy, as opposed to the double orientation of Christian prayer, which involves introspection but is essentially also a meeting with God. Far from being a merely human effort, Christian mysticism is essentially a dialogue which "implies an attitude of conversion, a flight from 'self' to the 'you' of God".⁷⁶ "The Christian, even when he is alone and prays in secret, he is conscious that he always prays for the good of the Church in union with Christ, in the Holy Spirit and together with all the saints".¹¹

* Are we tempted to deny sin or do we accept that there is such a thing?

In *New Age* there is no real concept of sin, but rather one of imperfect knowledge; what is needed is enlightenment, which can be reached through particular psycho-physical techniques. Those who take part in *New Age* activities will not be told what to believe, what to do or what not to do, but: "There are a thousand ways of exploring inner reality. Go where your intelligence and intuition lead you. Trust yourself".⁷⁸ Authority has shifted from a theistic location to within the self. The most serious problem perceived in *New Age* thinking is alienation from the whole cosmos, rather than personal failure or sin. The remedy is to become more and more immersed in the whole of being.

⁷⁵ *A Catholic Response to the New Age Phenomenon*, Irish Theological Commission 1994, chapter 3.

⁷⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Orationis Formas*, 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁸ William Bloom, *The New Age. An Anthology of Essential Writings*, London (Rider) 1991, p. xvi.

In some *New Age* writings and practices, it is clear that one life is not enough, so there have to be reincarnations to allow people to realize their full potential.

In the Christian perspective "only the light of divine Revelation clarifies the reality of sin and particularly of the sin committed at mankind's origins. Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a development flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure, etc. Only in the knowledge of God's plan for man can we grasp that sin is an abuse of freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another".⁷⁹ Sin is an offense against reason, truth and right conscience; it is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity...⁸⁰ Sin is an offense against God... sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it... Sin is thus 'love of oneself even to contempt of God'".^{Si}

* Are we encouraged to reject or accept suffering and death?

Some *New Age* writers view suffering as self-imposed, or as bad karma, or at least as a failure to harness one's own resources. Others concentrate on methods of achieving success and wealth (e.g. Deepak Chopra, Jose Silva et al.). In *New Age*, reincarnation is often seen as a necessary element in spiritual growth, a stage in progressive spiritual evolution which began before we were born and will continue after we die. In our present

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 387.

Ibid, § 1849.

Ibid, § 1850.

lives the experience of the death of other people provokes a healthy crisis.

Both cosmic unity and reincarnation are irreconcilable with the Christian belief that a human person is a distinct being, who lives one life, for which he or she is fully responsible: this understanding of the person puts into question both responsibility and freedom. Christians know that "in the cross of Christ not only is the redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed. Christ - without any fault of his own - took on himself 'the total evil of sin'. The experience of this evil determined the incomparable extent of Christ's suffering, which became the price of the redemption... 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. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the redemption. Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ"}²

* Is social commitment something shirked or positively sought after?

Much in *New Age* is unashamedly self-promotion, but some leading figures in the movement claim that it is unfair to judge the whole movement by a minority of selfish, irrational and narcissistic people, or to allow oneself to be dazzled by some of their more bizarre practices, which are a block to seeing in

⁸² John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter on human suffering "Salvifici doloris"* (11 February 1984), 19.

New Age a genuine spiritual search and spirituality.⁸³ The fusion of individuals into the cosmic self, the relativization or abolition of difference and opposition in a cosmic harmony, is unacceptable to Christianity.

Where there is true love, there has to be a different other (person). A genuine Christian searches for unity in the capacity and freedom of the other to say "yes" or "no" to the gift of love. Union is seen in Christianity as communion, unity as community.

* Is our future in the stars or do we help to construct it?

The *New Age* which is dawning will be peopled by perfect, androgynous beings who are totally in command of the cosmic laws of nature. In this scenario, Christianity has to be eliminated and give way to a global religion and a new world order.

Christians are in a constant state of vigilance, ready for the last days when Christ will come again; their New Age began 2000 years ago, with Christ, who is none other than "Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all". His Holy Spirit is present and active in the hearts of individuals, in "society and history, peoples, cultures and religions". In fact, "the Spirit of the Father, bestowed abundantly by the Son, is the animator of all".⁸⁴ We live in the last times.

On the one hand, it is clear that many *New Age* practices seem to those involved in them not to raise doctrinal questions; but, at the same time, it is undeniable that these practices themselves communicate, even if only indirectly, a mentality

⁸³ Cf. David Spangler, *The New Age*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁸⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 6, 28, and the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 12.

which can influence thinking and inspire a very particular vision of reality. Certainly *New Age* creates its own atmosphere, and it can be hard to distinguish between things which are innocuous and those which really need to be questioned. However, it is well to be aware that the doctrine of the Christ spread in *New Age* circles is inspired by the theosophical teachings of Helena Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy and Alice Bailey's "Arcane School". Their contemporary followers are not only promoting their ideas now, but also working with *New Agers* to develop a completely new understanding of reality, a doctrine known by some observers as "*New Age truth*".⁸⁵

5. JESUS CHRIST OFFERS US THE WATER OF LIFE

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord. He is at the heart of every Christian action, and every Christian message. So the Church constantly returns to meet her Lord. The Gospels tell of many meetings with Jesus, from the shepherds in Bethlehem to the two thieves crucified with him, from the wise elders who listened to him in the Temple to the disciples walking miserably towards Emmaus. But one episode that speaks really clearly about what he offers us is the story of his encounter with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel; it has even been described as "a paradigm for our engagement with truth".⁸⁶ The experience of meeting the stranger who offers us the water of life is a key to the way Christians can and should engage in dialogue with anyone who does not know Jesus.

⁸⁵ Cf. R. Rhodes, *The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement*, Grand Rapids (Baker) 1990, p. 129.

⁸⁶ Helen Bergin o.p., "Living One's Truth", in *The Furrow*, January 2000, p. 12.

One of the attractive elements of John's account of this meeting is that it takes the woman a while even to glimpse what Jesus means by the water 'of life', or 'living' water (verse 11). Even so, she is fascinated - not only by the stranger himself, but also by his message - and this makes her listen. After her initial shock at realizing what Jesus knew about her ("You are right in saying 'I have no husband': for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly", verses 17- 18), she was quite open to his word: "I see you are a prophet, Sir" (verse 19). The dialogue about the adoration of God begins: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (verse 22). Jesus touched her heart and so prepared her to listen to what He had to say about Himself as the Messiah: "I who am speaking to you - I am he" (verse 26), prepared her to open her heart to the true adoration in Spirit and the self-revelation of Jesus as God's Anointed.

¹ Helen Bergin o.p., "Living One's Truth", in *The Furrow*, January 2000, p. 12.

The woman "put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people" all about the man (verse 28). The remarkable effect on the woman of her encounter with the stranger made them so curious that they, too, "started walking towards him" (verse 30). They soon accepted the truth of 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 savior of the world" (verse 42). They move from hearing about Jesus to knowing him personally, then understanding the universal significance of his identity. This all happens because their minds, their hearts and more are engaged.

The fact that the story takes place by a well is significant. Jesus offers the woman "a spring... welling up to eternal life"

(verse 14). The gracious way in which Jesus deals with the woman is a model for pastoral effectiveness, helping others to be truthful without suffering in the challenging process of self-recognition ("he told me every thing I have done", verse 39). This approach could yield a rich harvest in terms of people who may have been attracted to the water-carrier (Aquarius) but who are genuinely still seeking the truth. They should be invited to listen to Jesus, who offers us not simply something that will quench our thirst today, but the hidden spiritual depths of "living water". It is important to acknowledge the sincerity of people searching for the truth; there is no question of deceit or of self-deception. It is also important to be patient, as any good educator knows. A person embraced by the truth is suddenly energized by a completely new sense of freedom, especially from past failures and fears, and "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".⁸⁷

An invitation to meet Jesus Christ, the bearer of the water of life, will carry more weight if it is made by someone who has clearly been profoundly affected by his or her own encounter with Jesus, because it is made not by someone who has simply heard about him, but by someone who can be sure "that he really is the savior of the world" (verse 42). It is a matter of letting people react in their own way, at their own pace, and letting God do the rest.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

6. POINTS TO NOTE

6.1. Guidance and sound formation *are* needed

Christ or *Aquarius*? *New Age* is almost always linked with "alternatives", either an alternative vision of reality or an alternative way of improving one's current situation (magic).⁸⁸ Alternatives offer people not two possibilities, but only the possibility of choosing one thing in preference to another: in terms of religion, *New Age* offers an alternative to the Judaeo-Christian heritage. The Age of Aquarius is conceived as one which will replace the predominantly Christian Age of Pisces. *New Age* thinkers are acutely aware of this; some of them are convinced that the coming change is inevitable, while others are actively committed to assisting its arrival. People who wonder if it is possible to believe in both Christ and Aquarius can only benefit from knowing that this is very much an "either-or" situation. "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). Christians have only to think of the difference between the wise men from the East and King Herod to recognize the powerful effects of choice for or against Christ. It must never be forgotten that many of the movements which have fed the *New Age* are explicitly anti-Christian. Their stance towards Christianity is not neutral, but neutralizing: despite what is often said about openness to all religious standpoints, traditional Christianity is not sincerely regarded as an acceptable alternative. In fact, it is occasionally made abundantly clear that "there is no tolerable place for true Christianity", and there are

Cf. P. Heelas, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

even arguments justifying anti-Christian behaviour.⁸⁹ This opposition initially was confined to the rarefied realms of those who go beyond a superficial attachment to *New Age*, but has begun more recently to permeate all levels of the "alternative" culture which has an extraordinarily powerful appeal, above all in sophisticated Western societies.

Fusion or confusion? *New Age* traditions consciously and deliberately blur real differences: between creator and creation, between humanity and nature, between religion and psychology, between subjective and objective reality. The idealistic intention is always to overcome the scandal of division, but in *New Age* theory it is a question of the systematic fusion of elements which have generally been clearly distinguished in Western culture. Is it, perhaps, fair to call it "confusion"? It is not playing with words to say that *New Age* thrives on confusion. The Christian tradition has always valued the role of reason in justifying faith and in understanding God, the world and the human person.⁹⁰ *New Age* has caught the mood of many in rejecting cold, calculating, inhuman reason. While this is a positive insight, recalling the need for a balance involving all our faculties, it does not justify sidelining a faculty which is essential for a fully human life. Rationality has the advantage of universality: it is freely available to everyone, quite unlike the mysterious and fascinating character

⁸⁹ Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course in the New Age*, Eastbourne (Monarch) 1989, p. 122. For documentation on the vehemently anti-Christian stance of spiritualism, cf. R. Laurence Moore. "Spiritualism", in Edwin S. Gaustad (ed.), *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, New York 1974, pp. 79-103. and also R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, New York (Oxford University Press) 1977.

^m Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 36-48.

of esoteric or gnostic "mystical" religion. Anything which promotes conceptual confusion or secrecy needs to be very carefully scrutinized. It hides rather than reveals the ultimate nature of reality. It corresponds to the post-modern loss of confidence in the bold certainties of former times, which often involves taking refuge in irrationality. The challenge is to show how a healthy partnership between faith and reason enhances human life and encourages respect for creation.

Create your own reality. The widespread *New Age* conviction that one creates one's own reality is appealing, but illusory. It is crystallized in Jung's theory that the human being is a gateway from the outer world into an inner world of infinite dimensions, where each person is Abraxas, who gives birth to his own world or devours it. The star that shines in this infinite inner world is man's God and goal. The most poignant and problematic consequence of the acceptance of the idea that people create their own reality is the question of suffering and death: people with severe handicaps or incurable diseases feel cheated and demeaned when confronted by the suggestion that they have brought their misfortune upon themselves, or that their inability to change things points to a weakness in their approach to life. This is far from being a purely academic issue: it has profound implications in the Church's pastoral approach to the difficult existential questions everyone faces. Our limitations are a fact of life, and part of being a creature. Death and bereavement present a challenge and an opportunity, because the temptation to take refuge in a westernized reworking of the notion of reincarnation is clear proof of people's fear of death and their desire to live forever. Do we make the most of our opportunities to recall what is promised by God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How real is the faith in the resurrection of the body, which Christians proclaim every Sunday in the creed? The *New Age* idea that we

are in some sense also gods is one which is very much in question here. The whole question depends, of course, on one's definition of reality. A sound approach to epistemology and psychology needs to be reinforced - in the appropriate way - at every level of Catholic education, formation and preaching. It is important constantly to focus on effective ways of speaking of transcendence. The fundamental difficulty of all *New Age* thought is that this transcendence is strictly a self-transcendence to be achieved within a closed universe.

Pastoral resources. In Chapter 8 an indication is given regarding the principal documents of the Catholic Church in which can be found an evaluation of the ideas of *New Age*. In the first place comes the address of Pope John Paul II which was quoted in the Foreword. The Pope recognizes in this cultural trend some positive aspects, such as "the search for new meaning in life, a new ecological sensitivity and the desire to go beyond a cold, rationalistic religiosity". But he also calls the attention of the faithful to certain ambiguous elements which are incompatible with the Christian faith: these movements "pay little heed to Revelation", "they tend to relativize religious doctrine in favor of a vague worldview", "they often propose a pantheistic concept of God", "they replace personal responsibility to God for our actions with a sense of duty to the cosmos, thus overturning the true concept of sin and the need for redemption through Christ".⁹¹

6.2. Practical steps

First of all, it is worth saying once again that not everyone or everything in the broad sweep of *New Age* is linked to the

⁹¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the United States Bishops of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska on their "Ad Limina" visit*, 28 May 1993.

theories of the movement in the same ways. Likewise, the label itself is often misapplied or extended to phenomena which can be categorized in other ways. The term *New Age* has even been abused to demonize people and practices. It is essential to see whether phenomena linked to this movement, however loosely, reflect or conflict with a Christian vision of God, the human person and the world. The mere use of the term *New Age* in itself means little, if anything. The relationship of the person, group, practice or commodity to the central tenets of Christianity is what counts.

* The Catholic Church has its own very effective networks, which could be better used. For example, there is a large number of pastoral centers, cultural centers and centers of spirituality. Ideally, these could also be used to address the confusion about *New Age* religiosity in a variety of creative ways, such as providing a forum for discussion and study. It must unfortunately be admitted that there are too many cases where Catholic centers of spirituality are actively involved in diffusing *New Age* religiosity in the Church. This would of course have to be corrected, not only to stop the spread of confusion and error, but also so that they might be effective in promoting true Christian spirituality. Catholic cultural centers, in particular, are not only teaching institutions but spaces for honest dialogue.⁹² Some excellent specialist institutions deal with all these questions. These are precious resources, which ought to be shared generously in areas that are less well provided for.

⁹² Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 103. The Pontifical Council for Culture has published a handbook listing these centers throughout the world: *Catholic Cultural Centres* (3rd edition, Vatican City, 2001).

* Quite a few *New Age* groups welcome every opportunity to explain their philosophy and activities to others. Encounters with these groups should be approached with care, and should always involve persons who are capable of both explaining Catholic faith and spirituality, and of reflecting critically on *New Age* thought and practice. It is extremely important to *check the credentials* of people, groups and institutions claiming to offer guidance and information on *New Age*. In some cases what has started out as impartial investigation has later become active promotion of, or advocacy on behalf of, "alternative religions". Some international institutions are actively pursuing campaigns which promote respect for "religious diversity", and claim religious status for some questionable organizations. This fits in with the *New Age* vision of moving into an age where the limited character of particular religions gives way to the universality of a new religion or spirituality. Genuine dialogue, on the other hand, will always respect diversity from the outset, and will never seek to blur distinctions in a fusion of all religious traditions.

* Some local *New Age* groups refer to their meetings as "prayer groups". Those people who are invited to such groups need to *look for the marks of genuine Christian spirituality*, and to be wary if there is any sort of initiation ceremony. Such groups take advantage of a person's lack of theological or spiritual formation to lure them gradually into what may in fact be a form of false worship. Christians must be taught about the true object and content of prayer - in the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, to the Father - in order to judge rightly the intention of a "prayer group". Christian prayer and the God of Jesus Christ will easily be recognised.⁹³ Many people are convinced that there is no harm

⁹³ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Orationis Formas*, and § 3 above.

in 'borrowing' from the wisdom of the East, but the example of Transcendental Meditation (TM) should make Christians cautious about the prospect of committing themselves unknowingly to another religion (in this case, Hinduism), despite what TM's promoters claim about its religious neutrality. There is no problem with learning how to meditate, but the object or content of the exercise clearly determines whether it relates to the God revealed by Jesus Christ, to some other revelation, or simply to the hidden depths of the self.

* Christian groups which promote *care for the earth as God's creation* also need to be given due recognition. The question of respect for creation is one which could also be approached creatively in Catholic schools. A great deal of what is proposed by the more radical elements of the ecological movement is difficult to reconcile with Catholic faith. Care for the environment in general terms is a timely sign of a fresh concern for what God has given us, perhaps a necessary mark of Christian stewardship of creation, but "deep ecology" is often based on pantheistic and occasionally gnostic principles.⁹⁴

* The beginning of the Third Millennium offers a real *kairos* for evangelization. People's minds and hearts are already unusually open to reliable information on the Christian understanding of time and salvation history. Emphasizing what is lacking in other approaches should not be the main priority. It is more a question of constantly revisiting the sources of our own faith, so that we can *offer a good, sound presentation of the Christian message*.

⁹⁴ This is one area where lack of information can allow those responsible for education to be misled by groups whose real agenda is inimical to the Gospel message. It is particularly the case in schools, where a captive curious young audience is an ideal target for ideological merchandising. Cf. the *caveat* in Massimo Introvigne, *New Age & Next Age*, Casale Monferrato (Piemme) 2000, p. 277f.

We can be proud of what we have been given on trust, so we need to resist the pressures of the dominant culture to bury these gifts (cf. *Mt* 25.24-30). One of the most useful tools available is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. There is also an immense heritage of ways to holiness in the lives of Christian men and women past and present. Where Christianity's rich symbolism, and its artistic, aesthetical and musical traditions are unknown or have been forgotten, there is much work to be done for Christians themselves, and ultimately also for anyone searching for an experience or a greater awareness of God's presence. Dialogue between Christians and people attracted to the *New Age* will be more successful if it takes into account the appeal of what touches the emotions and symbolic language. If our task is to know, love and serve Jesus Christ, it is of paramount importance to start with a good knowledge of the Scriptures. But, most of all, coming to meet the Lord Jesus in prayer and in the sacraments, which are precisely the moments when our ordinary life is hallowed, is the surest way of making sense of the whole Christian message.

* Perhaps the simplest, the most obvious and the most urgent measure to be taken, which might also be the most effective, would be *to make the most of the riches of the Christian spiritual heritage*. The great religious orders have strong traditions of meditation and spirituality, which could be made more available through courses or periods in which their houses might welcome genuine seekers. This is already being done, but more is needed. Helping people in their spiritual search by offering them proven techniques and experiences of real prayer could open a dialogue with them which would reveal the riches of Christian tradition, and perhaps clarify a great deal about *New Age* in the process.

In a vivid and useful image, one of the *New Age* movement's own exponents has compared traditional religions to cathedrals, and *New Age* to a worldwide fair. The *New Age* Movement is seen as an invitation to Christians to bring the message of the cathedrals to the fair which now covers the whole world. This image offers Christians a positive challenge, since it is always time to take the message of the cathedrals to the people in the fair. Christians need not, indeed, must not wait for an invitation to bring the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who are looking for the answers to their questions, for spiritual food that satisfies, for living water. Following the image proposed, Christians must issue forth from the cathedral, nourished by word and sacrament, to bring the Gospel into every aspect of everyday life - "Go! The Mass is ended!" In Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* the Holy Father remarks on the great interest in spirituality found in the secular world of today, and how other religions are responding to this demand in appealing ways. He goes on to issue a challenge to Christians in this regard: "But 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 to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead" (n. 33). To those shopping around in the world's fair of religious proposals, the appeal of Christianity will be felt first of all in the witness of the members of the Church, in their trust, calm, patience and cheerfulness, and in their concrete love of neighbour, all the fruit of their faith nourished in authentic personal prayer.

7. APPENDIX

7.1. Some brief formulations of *New Age* ideas

William Bloom's *1992 formulation of New Age quoted in Heelas*, p. 225f.:

* All life - all existence - is the manifestation of Spirit, of the Unknowable, of that supreme consciousness known by many different names in many different cultures.

* The purpose and dynamic of all existence is to bring Love, Wisdom, Enlightenment... into full manifestation.

* All religions are the expression of this same inner reality.

* All life, as we perceive it with the five human senses or with scientific instruments, is only the outer veil of an invisible, inner and causal reality.

* Similarly, human beings are twofold creatures - with: (i) an outer temporary personality; and (ii) a multi-dimensional inner being (soul or higher self).

* The outer personality is limited and tends towards love.

* The purpose of the incarnation of the inner being is to bring the vibrations of the outer personality into a resonance of love.

* All souls in incarnation are free to choose their own spiritual path.

* Our spiritual teachers are those whose souls are liberated from the need to incarnate and who express unconditional love, wisdom and enlightenment. Some of these great beings are well-known and have inspired the world religions. Some are unknown and work invisibly.

* All life, in its different forms and states, is interconnected energy - and this includes our deeds, feelings and thoughts. We, therefore, work with Spirit and these energies in co-creating our reality.

* Although held in the dynamic of cosmic love, we are jointly responsible for the state of our selves, of our environment and of all life.

* During this period of time, the evolution of the planet and of humanity has reached a point when we are undergoing a fundamental spiritual change in our individual and mass consciousness. This is why we talk of a *New Age*. This new consciousness is the result of the increasingly successful incarnation of what Some people call the energies of cosmic love. This new consciousness demonstrates itself in an instinctive understanding of the sacredness and, in particular, the interconnectedness of all existence.

* This new consciousness and this new understanding of the dynamic interdependence of all life mean that we are currently in the process of evolving a completely new planetary culture.

Heelas (p. 226) Jeremy Tarcher's "*complementary formulation*".

1. The world, including the human race, constitutes an expression of a higher, more comprehensive divine nature.

2. Hidden within each human being is a higher divine self, which is a manifestation of the higher, more comprehensive divine nature.

3. This higher nature can be awakened and can become the center of the individual's everyday life.

4. This awakening is the reason for the existence of each individual life.

David Spangler is quoted in *Actualite des religions n° 8, septembre J 999, p. 43, on the principal characteristics of the New Age vision, which is:*

* holistic (globalizing, because there is one single reality-energy);

* ecological (earth-Gaia is our mother; each of us is a neuron of earth's central nervous system);

* androgynous (rainbow and Yin/Yang are both NA symbols, to do with the complementarity of contraries, esp. masculine and feminine);

* mystical (finding the sacred in every thing, the most ordinary things);

* planetary (people must be at one and the same time anchored in their own culture and open to a universal dimension, capable of promoting love, compassion, peace and even the establishment of world government).

7.2. A Select 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. In this aspect, *New Age* accepts historical inevitability. Some reckon the age of Aries was the time of the Jewish religion, the age of Pisces that of Christianity, Aquarius the age of a universal religion.

Androgyny: is not hermaphroditism, i.e. 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 the Croat Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who left the Theosophical Society after being leader of its German branch from 1902 to 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.⁹⁵

Channeling: psychic mediums claim to act as channels for information from other selves, usually disembodied entities living on a higher plane. It links beings as diverse as 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 or an 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 people, Jesus is nothing more than a spiritual master who, like Buddha, Moses and Mohammed, amongst others, has been penetrated by the cosmic Christ. The cosmic Christ is also known as christic energy at the basis of each being and the whole of being. Individuals need to be initiated gradually into awareness of this christic characteristic they are

⁹⁵ Cf. J. Badewien, *Antroposofia*, in H. Waldenfels (ed.) *Nuovo Dizionario delle Religioni*, Cinisello Balsamo (San Paolo) 1993, 41.

all said to have. Christ - in *New Age* terms - represents the highest state of perfection of the self.⁹⁶

Crystals: are reckoned to vibrate at significant frequencies. Hence they are useful in self-transformation. They are used in various therapies and in meditation, visualization, 'astral travel' or as lucky charms. From the outside looking in, they have no intrinsic power, but are simply beautiful.

Depth Psychology: the school of psychology founded by C.G. 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.

Enneagram: (from the Greek *ennea* = nine + *gramma* = sign) the name refers to a diagram composed of a circle with nine points on its circumference, connected within the circle by a triangle and a hexangle. 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*,⁹⁷ but she recognizes her indebtedness to the Russian esoteric thinker and practitioner G.I. Gurdjieff, the Chilean psychologist Claudio Naranjo and author Oscar Ichazo, founder¹ of *Arica*. The origin of the enneagram remains shrouded in mystery, but some maintain that it comes from Sufi mysticism.

⁹⁶ Cf. Raul Berzosa Martinez, *Nueva Era y Cristianismo*, Madrid (BAC) 1995, 214.

⁹⁷ **Helen** Palmer, *The Enneagram*, New York (Harper-Row) 1989.

Esotericism: (from the Greek *esoterós* = that which is within) it generally refers to an ancient and hidden body of knowledge available only to initiated groups, who portray themselves as guardians of the 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. Salvation, in this context, coincides with a discovery of the Self.

Evolution: in *New Age* it is much more than a question of living beings evolving towards superior life forms; the physical model is projected on to the spiritual realm, so that an immanent power within human beings would propel them towards superior spiritual life forms. 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 to be moving inexorably towards a fusion with the divine. Reincarnation clearly has an important place in this view of a progressive spiritual evolution which is said to begin before birth and continue after death.⁹⁸

Expansion of consciousness: if the cosmos is seen as one continuous chain of being, all levels of existence - mineral, vegetable, animal, human, cosmic and divine beings - are interdependent. Human beings are said to become aware of their place in this *holistic* vision of *global* reality by expanding their consciousness well beyond its normal limits. The *New Age* offers a huge variety of techniques to help people reach a higher level

Cf. document of the Argentine Episcopal Committee for Culture, *op. cit.*

of perceiving reality, a way of overcoming the separation between subjects and between subjects and objects in the knowing process, concluding in total fusion of what normal, inferior, awareness sees as separate or distinct realities.

Feng-shui: a form of geomancy, in this case an occult Chinese method of deciphering the hidden presence of positive and negative currents in buildings and other places, on the basis of a 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".⁹⁹

Gnosis: in a generic sense, it is a form of knowledge that is not intellectual, but visionary or mystical, thought to be revealed and capable of joining the human being to the divine mystery. 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, the greater emphasis in *New Age* on monism and even pantheism or panentheism encourages some to use the term *neo-gnosticism* to distinguish New Age gnosis from ancient gnosticism.

. Great White Brotherhood: Mrs. Blavatsky claimed to have contact with the *mahatmas*, or *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*, and the

⁹⁹ J. Gernet, in J.-P. Vernant *et al.*, *Divination et Rationalité*, Paris (Seuil) 1974, p. 55.

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.¹⁰⁰ 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, the idea of the fall and later restoration of mankind. Hermetic speculation has strengthened belief in an ancient fundamental tradition or a so-called *philosophia perennis* falsely considered as common to all religious traditions. The high and ceremonial forms of magic developed from Renaissance Hermeticism.

Holism: a key concept in the "new paradigm", claiming to provide a theoretical frame integrating the entire worldview of modern man. In contrast with an experience of increasing fragmentation in science and everyday life, "wholeness" is put forward as 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 Descartes and Newton are typically blamed, is challenged by various scientists who offer a bridge 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 authority. When one understands one's place in nature, in the cosmos which is also divine, one also understands that "wholeness" and "holiness" are one and the same thing. The

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Susan Greenwood, "Gender and Power in Magical Practices", in Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (eds.), *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press) 2000, p. 139.

clearest articulation of the concept of holism is in the "Gaia" hypothesis.¹⁰¹

Human Potential Movement: since its beginnings (Esalen, California, in the 1960s), this has grown into a network of groups promoting the release of the innate human capacity for creativity through self-realization. Various techniques of personal transformation are used more and more by companies in management training programmes, ultimately for very normal economic reasons. Transpersonal Technologies, the Movement for Inner Spiritual Awareness, Organizational Development and Organizational Transformation are all put forward as non-religious, but in reality company employees can find themselves being submitted to an alien 'spirituality' in a situation which raises questions about personal freedom. There are clear links between Eastern spirituality and psychotherapy, while Jungian psychology and the Human Potential Movement have been very influential on Shamanism and "reconstructed" forms of Paganism like Druidry and Wicca. In a general sense, "personal growth" can be understood as the shape "religious salvation" takes in the *New Age* movement: it is affirmed that deliverance from human suffering and weakness will be reached by developing our human potential, which results in our increasingly getting in touch with our inner divinity.¹⁰²

Initiation: in religious ethnology it is the cognitive and/or experiential journey whereby a person is admitted, either alone or as part of a group, by means of particular rituals to membership

¹⁰¹ Cf. M. Fuss, *op. cit.*,_ 198-199.

¹⁰² 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 (Edinburgh University Press) 2000, pp. 201-219.

of a religious community, a secret society (e.g. Freemasonry) or a mystery association (magical, esoteric-occult, gnostic, theosophical etc.).

Karma: (from the Sanskrit root *Kri* = action, deed) a key notion in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, but one whose meaning has not always been the same. In the ancient Vedic period it referred to the ritual action, especially sacrifice, by means of which a person gained access to the happiness or blessedness of the afterlife. When Jainism and Buddhism appeared (about 6 centuries before Christ), *Karma* lost its salvific meaning: the way to liberation was knowledge of the *Atman* or "self. In the doctrine of *samsara*, it was understood as the incessant cycle of human birth and death (Hinduism) or of rebirth (Buddhism).¹⁰³ In *New Age* contexts, the "law of karma" is often seen as the moral equivalent of cosmic evolution. It is no longer to do with evil or suffering - illusions to be experienced as part of a "cosmic game" - but is the universal law of cause and effect, part of the tendency of the interconnected universe towards moral balance.¹⁰⁴

Monism: the metaphysical belief that differences between 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. A further problem arises for Christianity when the question of the origin of evil is raised. C.G. Jung saw evil

¹⁰³ Cf. C. Maccari, *La "New Age" di fronte alia fede cristiana*, Leumann-Torino (LDC) 1994, 168.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. W.J. Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, 283-290.

as the "shadow side" of the God who, in classical theism, is all goodness.

Mysticism: *New Age* mysticism is turning inwards on oneself rather than communion with God who is "totally other". It is fusion with the universe, an ultimate annihilation of the individual in the unity of the whole. Experience of Self is taken to be experience of divinity, so one looks within to discover authentic wisdom, creativity and power.

Neopaganism: a title often rejected by many to whom it is applied, it refers to a current that runs parallel to *New Age* and often interacts with it. In the great wave of reaction against traditional religions, specifically the Judaeo-Christian heritage of the West, many have revisited ancient indigenous, traditional, *pagan* religions. Whatever preceded Christianity is reckoned to be more genuine to the spirit of the land or the nation, an uncontaminated form of natural religion, in touch with the powers of nature, often matriarchal, magical or Shamanic. Humanity will, it is said, be healthier if it returns to the natural cycle of (agricultural) festivals and to a general affirmation of life. Some "neo-pagan" religions are recent reconstructions whose authentic relationship to original forms can be questioned, particularly in cases where they are dominated by modern ideological components like ecology, feminism or, in a few cases, myths of racial purity.¹⁰⁵

New Age Music: this is a booming industry. The music concerned is very often packaged as a means of achieving

¹⁰⁵ On this last, very delicate, point, see Eckhard Turk's article "Neonazismus" in Hans Gasper, Joachim Müller, Friederike Valentin (eds.), *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen. Fakten, Hintergründe, Klärungen*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien (Herder) 2000, p. 726.

harmony with oneself or the world, and some of it is "Celtic" or druidic. Some *New Age* composers claim their music is meant to build bridges between the conscious and the unconscious, but this is probably more so when, besides melodies, there is meditative and rhythmic repetition of key phrases. As with many elements of the *New Age* phenomenon, some music is meant to bring 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 of America. Its origins were in idealism, of which it was a popularized form. God was said to be totally good, and evil merely an illusion; the basic reality was the mind. Since one's mind is what *causes* the events in one's life, one has to take ultimate responsibility for every aspect of one's situation.

Occultism: occult (hidden) knowledge, and the hidden forces of the mind and of nature, are at the basis of beliefs and practices linked to a presumed secret "perennial philosophy" derived from ancient Greek magic and alchemy, on the one hand, and Jewish mysticism, on the other. They are 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, in turn, influenced various currents in the *New Age*.

Pantheism: (Greek *pan* = everything and *theos* = God) the belief that everything is God or, sometimes, that everything is in God and God is *in* everything (panentheism). Every element of the universe is divine, and the divinity is equally present in everything. There is no space in this view for God as a distinct being in the sense of classical theism.

Parapsychology: treats of such things as extrasensory perception, mental telepathy, telekinesis, psychic healing and communication with spirits via mediums or channeling. Despite fierce criticism from scientists, parapsychology has gone from strength to strength, and fits neatly into the view popular in some areas of the *New Age* that human beings have extraordinary psychic abilities, but often only in an undeveloped state.

Planetary Consciousness: this world-view developed in the 1980s to foster loyalty to the community of humanity rather than to nations, tribes or other established social groups. It can be seen as the heir to movements in the early 20th century that promoted a world government. The consciousness of the unity of humanity sits well with the *Gaia hypothesis*.

Positive Thinking: the conviction that people can change physical reality or external circumstances by altering their mental attitude, by thinking positively and constructively. Sometimes it is a matter of becoming consciously aware of unconsciously held beliefs that determine our life-situation. Positive thinkers are promised health and wholeness, often prosperity and even immortality.

Rebirthing: In the early 1970s Leonard Orr described rebirthing as a process by which a person can identify and isolate areas in his or her consciousness that are unresolved and at the source of present problems.

Reincarnation: in a *New Age* context, reincarnation is linked to the concept of ascendant evolution towards becoming divine. As opposed to 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 essentially something immaterial or spiritual; more precisely, it is consciousness, that spark of energy in the person that shares in cosmic

or "christic" energy. Death is nothing but the passage of the soul from one body to another.

Rosicrucians: these are Western occult groups involved in alchemy, astrology, Theosophy and cabbalistic 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* (AMORC) linked success with a presumed ability to materialize mental images of health, riches and happiness.

Shamanism: practices and beliefs linked to communication with the spirits of nature and the spirits of dead people through ritualized possession (by the spirits) of a shaman, who serves as a medium. It has been attractive in *New Age* circles because it stresses harmony with the forces of nature and healing. There is also a romanticized image of indigenous religions and their closeness to the earth and to nature.

Spiritualism: While there have always been attempts to contact the spirits of the dead, 19th century spiritualism is reckoned to be one of the currents that flow into the *New Age*. It developed against the background of the ideas of Swedenborg and Mesmer, and became a new kind of religion. Madame Blavatsky was a medium, and so spiritualism had a great influence on the Theosophical Society, although there the emphasis was on contact with entities from the distant past rather than people who had died only recently. Allan Kardec was influential in the spread of spiritualism in Afro-Brasilian religions. There are also spiritualist elements in some New Religious Movements in Japan.

Theosophy: an ancient term, which originally referred to a kind of mysticism. It has been linked to Greek Gnostics and Neoplatonists, to Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Boehme. The name was given new emphasis by the Theosophical

Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and others in 1875. Theosophical mysticism tends to be monistic, stressing the essential unity of the spiritual and material components of the universe. It also looks for the hidden forces that cause matter and spirit to interact, in such a way that human and divine minds eventually meet. Here is where theosophy offers mystical redemption or enlightenment.

Transcendentalism: This was a 19th century movement of writers and thinkers in New England, who shared an idealistic set of beliefs 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. The chief figure is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who moved away from orthodox Christianity, through Unitarianism to a new natural mysticism which integrated concepts from Hinduism with popular American ones like individualism, personal responsibility and the need to succeed.

Wicca: an old English term for witches that has been given to a neo-pagan revival of some elements of ritual magic. It was invented in England in 1939 by Gerald Gardner, who based it on some scholarly texts, according to which 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".

7.3. Key New Age places

Esalen: a community founded in Big Sur, California, in 1962 by Michael Murphy and Richard Price, whose main 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 centers of the Human Potential Movement, and has

spread ideas about holistic medicine in the worlds of education, politics and economics. This has been done through courses in comparative religion, mythology, mysticism, meditation, psychotherapy, expansion of consciousness and so on. Along with Findhorn, it is seen as a key place in the growth of Aquarian consciousness. The Esalen Soviet-American Institute cooperated with Soviet officials on the Health Promotion Project.

Findhorn: this holistic farming community started by Peter and Eileen Caddy achieved the growth of enormous plants by unorthodox methods. The founding of the Findhorn community in Scotland in 1965 was an important milestone in the movement which bears the label of the 'New Age'. In fact, Findhorn 'was seen as embodying its principal ideals of transformation'. The quest for a universal consciousness, the goal of harmony with nature, the vision of a transformed world, and the practice of channeling, all of which have become hallmarks of the *New Age* Movement, were present at Findhorn from its foundation. The success of this community led to its becoming a model for, and/or an inspiration to, other groups, such as Alternatives in London, Esalen in Big Sur, California, and the Open Center and Omega Institute in New York".¹⁰⁶

Monte Verita: a Utopian community near Ascona in Switzerland. Since the end of the 19th century it was a meeting point for European and American exponents of the counter-culture in the fields of politics, psychology, art and ecology. The *Eranos* conferences have been held there every year since 1933, gathering some of the great luminaries of the *New Age*. The yearbooks make clear the intention to create an integrated world religion.¹⁰⁷ It is

¹⁰⁶ Cf. John Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement. A Critical Assessment*, London, (Geoffrey Chapman) 1999, p.1.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. M. Fuss, *op. cit.*, 195-196.

fascinating to see the list of those who have gathered over the years at Monte Verita.

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CONSULTATIVE WORDS

Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

CONSECRATED VIRGINS

What are the requirements for admission to the order of virgins? Is it necessary to have kept physical virginity up to the moment of consecration or is it enough the intention of observing perfect chastity from the moment of admission ? Who can ask for admission to that kind of consecration? Do they live in community?

* * *

Nowhere have I heard or read that physical virginity is one of the requisites to enter into the juridical institute called "Order of Virgins" (one of the oldest forms of individual consecrated life within the Church), in spite that the women who are incorporated into such institute promise to observe perfect chastity.

Instead, the requisites that appear in the official liturgical rite for the consecration of Virgins (*Ordo consecrationis virginum*,

Vatican City, 1968, and AAS, 62 [1970] 650ff), for those women who apply for this state of consecrated life, are the following three conditions:

- a) "that they have never married nor lived in public or flagrant violation of chastity";
- b) "that by their age, prudence, and universally attested good character they give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbor"; and
- c) "that they be admitted to this consecration by the bishop who is the local ordinary." (Actually it is for the bishop to decide on the conditions under which women living in the world are to undertake a life of perpetual virginity).

The Order of Virgins, as recently restored by the Second Vatican Council, has the following main canonical elements:

- (a) The *sanctum propositum* or sacred resolution to live a life of perpetual chastity. (This resolution does not need to be expressed through a vow; it may be a promise. What is indeed important is that the consecration is received through the ministry of the diocesan bishop. In any case it does not constitute diriment impediment of marriage and can be dispensed by the Bishop);
- (b) The dedication to the service of the Church in their respective dioceses. The ritual provides for the giving of the veil and ring in accord with local custom; and
- (c) The consecration to God through the diocesan bishop, who, with his hands extended, pronounces the consecrating prayer.

Who can ask for admission to that kind of consecration?

The rite speaks of consecration both "of nuns and of women who live in the world." For the diocesan bishop to consecrate nuns it is required that they have never married nor lived in public or flagrant violation of chastity; that they have made their final profession, either in the same rite or on an earlier occasion; and that their religious family uses this rite because of long-established custom or by new permission of the competent authority.

Do consecrated virgins live in community? Life in common is not a requirement. The norm simply states that "virgins can be associated together in order to observe their own resolution more faithfully and to perform by mutual assistance service to the Church in harmony with their proper state" (c. 604 §2). While consecrated virgins normally live on their own, they *may* also live together in groups, constituting small communities with a predetermined plan or way of life. Such association, however, is not obligatory, and certainly the provision does not refer to the 'common life' lived by members of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life.

Homilies for September-October 2003*

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

September 7, 2003

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Is 35:4-7/Jas 2:1-5/Mk 7:31-37)

Poverty is considered today an evil that must be eradicated at all cost. Perhaps, that assessment is true if we believe, as most people do, that wealth is a good that must be gotten also at all cost. But when you hear Jesus saying that the poor are not that bad for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven, and again that the rich will find it more difficult to enter heaven than for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle, then perhaps you will start to ask yourselves, "Who is right, Jesus or governments and people who abhor poverty as they would a snake?"

Probably what we have here is a problem of semantics. Maybe what governments and people really want to eradicate is

* The Homilies come from the book of Rev. Msgr. Mario Baltazar, OP entitled Treasures: *Old and New* (Homilies for everyday, 3 vols.)

penury and the squalor that goes with it. Poverty is a different thing. Neither should governments and people encourage indiscriminately the amassing of wealth which, experience proves, goes only to a few, and its inordinate desire leads to many other evils, real evils, than the fact of being poor but with honor and dignity.

It is not surprising, therefore, that we have in today's second reading (James 2) a brief lecture on poverty and riches. The apostle is rather hard on the rich. That is why he finds it unexplainable for Christians (who, for the most part, belonged to the lower income bracket in James' time) to be flattering and courting the rich, while snubbing the poor during their regular assemblies.

James tells the Christians that if they must play favorites, they should rather choose the poor than the rich, in imitation of God who, according to James, "chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith, and to possess the kingdom he promised to those who love him."

You probably must have heard the phrase, "option for the poor" which is in currency today in church, government and non-government circles. This is a laudable development, provided the popular phrase does not remain a mere slogan but a factual and sustained program with adequate funding, sound strategies and honest implementation.

"Option for the poor" is not a discovery of our modern era. But let us concede. It is a rediscovery of an ideal and practice that had been in existence since biblical times but which suffered a partial, if not total, eclipse during the last two centuries characterized by a mad scramble for wealth.

In the first reading, for example, (Isaiah 35) the blessings and happiness that would herald and follow the coming of the

Messiah, are promised preferentially for the poor in spirit and in fact. To drive home this point, Isaiah singled out the most pitiable among the poor who will be recipients of the messianic blessings, viz. the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the lame. Are these disabled persons to be taken in the strict and physical sense? Isaiah intended principally to say there is no condition of poverty, even the most abject kind, that cannot be reached by the compassion and mercy of God and his Messiah.

The third reading, however, (Mark 7) points out that the pitiful human conditions Isaiah mentioned, are to be understood, even in the physical sense. Jesus made the really blind to really see, and so with the really deaf, dumb and lame. If Jesus could effortlessly help the physically disabled poor, how much more easily can he not help the other poor for whom he has demonstrably shown a preference, a predilection, a bias. You want to know what's "option for the poor?" Just study Jesus.

Will Jesus make the poor rich? He certainly can do that. But will he? St. James has already cautioned us with his above-quoted statement. "God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith (not in wealth) and to possess the kingdom which he (not men or the devil) promised to those who loved him (not those who ignore him).

Lord Jesus, have pity on us your poor people. Heal our spiritual blindness so that we may acknowledge you as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Open our ears so that we may always listen to your Word. Loosen our tongues so that we may always praise you in good and in bad times. Touch our hearts so that we may always love you with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever.

September 14, 2003

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Is 50:4-9/Jas 2:14-15 (or 18)/Mk 8:27-36)

For the past three Sundays we have listened to, reflected on, and discussed about scripture selections from the letter of St. James and the gospel of Mark. If we felt edified and pleased about the themes St. James and St. Mark took up these last three Sundays, we will be more enlightened and gratified by the crucial themes the two authors are going to touch this Sunday.

The scriptural selections taken from them for today's readings constitute the heart of St. James' letter and St. Mark's gospel. They indicate the why and wherefore James and Mark wrote their respective compositions. Being the heart of their writings, these selections give the clue to the understanding of all other parts of the letter and the gospel. By failing to grasp the heart of the matter, we will not understand clearly why and for what purpose they ever wrote at all.

So brace yourself for more startling insights as we prepare to enter into the "heart" of James' letter and Mark's gospel. Let us begin with the third reading (Mark 8). Accordingly, Jesus makes a survey of opinions people have been forming about him as he is about to conclude his ministry in Galilee. Thereafter, he will start his ministry in Judea and Jerusalem.

Jesus is conducting, as it were, an opinion poll, not for his own interest, but for the advantage of those who, by contact or hearsay, claim to have a knowledge about him, including his own disciples. Generally, the survey gives him a favorable rating. Just recall in last Sunday's reading what the people exclaimed in amazement of Jesus after he cured a dumb and deaf man, "How well he does everything!"

Somehow, their opinions fall short of the crucial truth: who is Jesus really for them? Though well-disposed towards him, people acknowledge him only as a prophet in the calibre, let us say, of John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or even Moses. But is he not more than a prophet? Perhaps the Messiah himself, the deliverer whom God had promised to send to free his people?

Only Peter, speaking on behalf of his co-apostles, 'makes that brave confession. Why could not the people give that title to him? Surely they also awaited the coming of the Messiah. But Jesus does not fit into their idea of a messiah, which is that of an opulent, powerful, conquering and unbeatable king. Such messiah would restore Israel, God's people, to its former grandeur and dominance in world affairs, provoking the envy and subservience of all other nations.

This idea of a messiah gained wide acceptance, generations before the birth of Jesus, due to superficial understanding of scriptures and the abject social and political conditions of the Jewish nation. Not even Peter was free from this misconception. For no sooner Jesus predicted that as Messiah, he would suffer much, be rejected by the people and their leaders, be put to death than Peter protested such outcome, prompting Jesus to rebuke him and call him Satan, the tempter.

Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed of God, will deliver not only Israel but all mankind from their enslavement to sin and death, futility and emptiness of life, by accepting suffering and death upon himself, as predicted and described in Isaiah 50 (first reading). And all who would follow him will have to go the same way, to obtain deliverance from every kind of enslavement and thus, enjoy true freedom.

A man who shies away from responsibility because it hurts and demands sacrifice is not truly free but a slave. A man who

gives in or seeks all kinds of gratification because it pleases and thrills is not truly free, but a slave. A man who is not truly free is less of a man and a plastic Christian. Jesus, the true Messiah, carried his cross and died on it to bring true freedom to man. Man must also take up his cross and follow Jesus to enjoy true freedom.

Finally, let us take a look at St. James' passage. Although he devotes two long chapters, praising the virtue of poverty and excoriating the evils of wealth, he cannot be labeled as reactionary to progress and an enemy of development. He is not a money-hater *per se*. He calls for a rational and Christian use of wealth which, in his view requires the combination of faith and action. Faith alone, without good works, is dead and useless. Faith, in order to be able to save one, has to be accompanied by good works. This is the heart of St. James' letter. In the light of this central truth, all his other exhortations, rebukes, warnings, fulminations are to be explained and understood. And doubtless, they are fiery and intensely stated.

September 21, 2003

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Wis 2:12, 17-20/Jas 3:16-4:3/Mk 9:30-37)

Wisdom is the catchword or common theme connecting all three readings of today's Mass. At the risk of stating the obvious, I affirm that wisdom is the knowledge possessed by a wise man, and that a man is made wise by possessing wisdom. Unfortunately, we human beings have the knack of putting things upside down and inside out. We produce smart guys in plenty but not many wise men. We use our knowledge to put one over our neighbor in order to get ahead of him, and we call that wisdom.

Just the same, wisdom is a value everyone desires to acquire or pretends to have. Nobody likes to be called "*promdi*" or "*ignorante*". It is important, however, to acquire the true wisdom and not settle for substitutes, or worse, for the "*peke*". On the other hand, all ignorance is not bad. There are things that are better ignored or left unnoticed because they do more harm than good. At best, they waste our precious time that could be spent on better things.

The three readings keep our minds well on focus to the most essential wisdom, failing to acquire which, all other wisdom become mere garbage as Paul once wrote, and to quote him, "Now I reckon everything I used to value as complete loss, as mere garbage for the sake of what is more valuable - the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8)

The author of the first reading (Bk of Wisdom 12) wrote to strengthen the faith of his exiled compatriots. They were living in the glitter of a civilization, whose prosperity and advances in science brought in their wake a markedly pagan mentality and fashionable worldliness. (Do not forget we are talking about Jews in the second or first century before Christ!) Already some in that community of believers had succumbed to the allurements, temptations, novelties and permissiveness of the environment. These apostates from Jewish faith in turn become tempters of their fellowmen, seeking to subvert their faith and steadfastness to God by means of scandal, sarcasm or open persecution.

Thus, a division was created in that Jewish community, with a group adhering to the guidance of wisdom from above and another group that conformed to the wisdom from below. Do we not, Christians of today, find ourselves in the same situation? Are we not now a divided country in more than one account? What kind of wisdom is each of opposing groups being guided

by: the wisdom from above or the wisdom from below? The first reading is as relevant to us, Christians of today, as it was to the Jews of the second or first century before Christ.

In the second reading, it is St. James writing to the Christian communities of his time. He laments the fact that some among them enjoyed fighting, quarreling, pleasure seeking, even plotting to kill, yet they boasted of being wise! James says such wisdom does not come from heaven, that it belongs to the world, that it's unspiritual, demonic. The wisdom from above, continues James, is pure, peaceful, gentle and friendly, compassionate, fair, sincere and abounds in good works.

God's wisdom is incompatible with the world's wisdom, and according as you follow one or the other, you act wisely or foolishly. Nowhere is this more evident than in the third reading (Mark 9). When Jesus spoke to his disciples about his impending passion and death, they could not understand him. Why? They were yet steeped in worldly wisdom. Thus, when the Master continued talking about his "rejection" by the "Jews", the disciples on their part were disputing hotly among themselves as to who among them was the greatest. That was terribly out of place.

Incidentally, for the word "rejection" Mark used a Greek term indicating doing an action when one is out of his mind. So, to reject Jesus is an insane decision. In conclusion, the bible allows you no rest if you permit yourselves to be lulled to sleep by the false sweet embrace of worldly wisdom. But it encourages and gives strength to those who remain steadfast in the faith and are determined to be guided by the wisdom that comes from God.

September 28, 2003

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Num 11:25-29/Jas 5:1-6/Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48)

Our three readings today deal on the topic of prophets. Is the topic important and relevant? Do we need to know more about prophets, besides what we already know about them? My answer is yes. However, I wish first to correct a misconception that prophets should be able to predict the future to deserve the name of prophets. One may never have to talk about the future and still is a prophet in the biblical sense of the word. Just as, in contrast, there are many people who claim to know the future and are not genuine prophets.

Now, just what is a prophet? A prophet is the men or women authorized and empowered by God to speak and act in his name. Thus, he is God's spokesman, his press secretary as it were, his agent with full powers-of-attorney. He may sometimes perform miracles or predict the future to prove that he was sent by God. But that is not necessary. What is paramount is that God has chosen and given his/her authority to speak and act in his name.

Who can be a prophet? Or, let us put it this way: is prophethood restricted to a special, hence, smaller group of individuals, of race, of socio-cultural background? That was the thinking of Joshua when he asked Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying, because the two were not in the group of 70 leaders (Numbers 11, first reading). That was how also the apostle John thought when he asked Jesus to stop the man who was driving out demons in his name because the man didn't belong to their group. (Mark 9, third reading)

In these two instances, we see an exclusivist or elitist mentality, which restricts God's gift of prophethood to a small and special group of people. Joshua and John seemed oblivious of the fact that God was actually empowering to prophesy and drive out devils, those very people against whom they were objecting.

But what did Moses and Jesus reply to the protesters? The former said, "I wish that the Lord would give his Spirit to ALL the people and make ALL of them prophets." The latter replied, "No one who performs a miracle using my name will later on turn against me. For whoever is not against us, is for us."

In other words, who will put limits to God regarding the distribution of his gifts? Who are we to tell God whom to give or not his gift of prophethood? If he wants to give it to everyone, who will stop him?

Actually (this is going to surprise you), God has made every baptized person a prophet, authorized to speak and act in his name. This is the teaching of the Church, who sees in this munificence of God the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that said, "The time is coming... when none of my people will have to teach his fellow countrymen to know the Lord, because ALL will know me, from the least to the greatest." (Jeremiah 31)

If that was surprising for you, this one will be more surprising. "Why is it that not all the baptized Christians, supposed to be prophets, are speaking or acting in God's name? There are some who even speak or act against God and his Church. A great number remain silent and passive regarding God's interests, moral law and the common good. Have their gifts of prophethood gone to sleep or are simply resting? Why can't all of us, in our respective homes and workplaces, speak words of encouragement, advice, warning, consolation, and instruction in

God's name? Why can't all of us, in our family circles, relations, friends, co-workers, co-citizens perform deeds of good example, service, charity or justice, in God's name?

Quaintly, Moses expressed the wish that the Spirit of God be given to ALL the people so that ALL can shout like prophets. It seems to Moses that prophets have to shout to fulfill their duty. Really, there is a need to shout, to wake up today's Christian from their sleep and inaction so that all will begin to speak and act in the Lord's name.

St. James, in today's second reading, lashes out with shouting words at rich people not so much for the fact of their being rich, as for the meaninglessness of accumulating wealth for the sake of accumulation. For such people have forgotten their real wealth, namely, God's gift of prophethood given to them, so that they should have managed properly their material riches for sharing with others who are in real need.

October 5, 2003

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Gen 2: 18-24/Heb 2: 9-11/Mk 10: 2-16)

The month of October has arrived for us. To it we usually attach the remembrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And when we think of Mary, we think of the family, the mother, the sons and daughters, the husband - in short, we think of marriage. For Mary is all that: she is a daughter, she is a mother, she has a husband, she was married to him, given in marriage to Joseph from orders of God.

Appropriately, today's three bible readings deal about marriage. The topic about marriage is never stale. It has enduring interest and relevance for as long as there exists a human race

to talk about. Not long ago, it had caught nationwide attention of Christian Filipinos as well as our brother Muslims because of the controversies sparked by the so-called Cairo Conference, followed some time later by the Beijing Conference.

After all the noise, animosities, heated debates, flared tempers of delegates from some 140 countries in the sessions of these international conferences, what a relief to hear the clear and serene teaching of today's bible reading.

There is a statement of Jesus that riveted my attention, "In the beginning, at the time of creation, it was not like that." It is as if Jesus was telling us that problems concerning marriage started to arise because peoples have forgotten what it was like in its beginning when marriage came out fresh from the hands of God the Creator.

Nowadays, what kind of marriage do we find in the world? Marriages between two males or two females, temporary marriages, trial marriages, polygamous marriages, polyandrogamous marriages or its near equivalent prostitution, marriages without commitment, promiscuous marriages where husbands and wives share each other's partners, and all other aberrations that human libido can think of.

Arising from all those weird unions are the worldwide phenomena of abortions, sterilizations, contraceptions, divorces, separations and adulteries. Why do we have these happenings? Because men/women have forgotten and abandoned the original plan that God had for marriage. "In the beginning, at the time of creation, it was not like that."

What then does the bible teach about marriage? It says that God made them male and female, whence man Will leave father and mother and unite with his wife and the two will become one.

Unity in marriage is stressed by today's bible readings. A unity does not admit of unfaithfulness and dissolution. A unity that calls for sacrificing love, creative fruitfulness in progeny and good works, conscientious management of the family in regards to number and quality, and above all fidelity to God and his commandments. It is, therefore, a unity in which God is joined as a factor to be considered since it was he who made human beings male and female, to unite them into being one.

Finally, marriage is a unity in whose equation God wants his Son Jesus to enter also. According to the second reading, Jesus is the one who leads people into salvation through sacrificing love. The occasions and motivations of the various attacks against marriage can be traced invariably to this - the absence of the element of sacrifice in the love that unites man and woman. Indeed, it is not true love but selfish love that disturbs what was meant to be a stable and beautiful marriage.

If then marriage is what God had planned in the beginning, at the time of creation, it follows that there can be no place for divorce, infidelity, selfishness and domination; no place for homosexual unions, for experimental liaisons, for abortion, sterilization and artificial family planning methods: all of these are creations of men and the devil, not of God.

I conclude this homily by inviting you to join with me in raising our hearts and minds to the gentle Lady, to whom this month of October is dedicated. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the paragon of marital fidelity, steadfastness and life-long commitment, of creative fruitfulness, and unswerving obedience to God's will. May she heal our wounded families, console our distressed families, cheer on our sound and healthy families.

October 12, 2003

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Wis 7: 7-11/Heb 4: 12-13/Mk 10: 17-30)

Mark beautifully recorded for us the encounter of a young man with Jesus. He ran up to him, knelt before him, and asked the ultimate question as most young people do by reason of their irrepressible enthusiasm, daring and love of adventure. The youth usually aim for the best, the hardest, the ultimate. Hence, we see the young lad of the gospel story asking Jesus about the ultimate, "Good Teacher, what must I do to gain eternal life?"

Surely, you still remember the phenomenal encounter some years ago (1995) of the Filipino youth with the Jubilee Cross at the Luneta, and was presided by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II. The Cross had been making the rounds in all the provinces of the country before it was brought to Manila for the culminating events. Actually, it was an encounter not only of the Filipinos in the prime time of their lives, but also the adults and those in their golden years. But it was the youth, with their fresh looking faces and sturdy bodies, who took the lead in getting near the Cross, touching it, carrying it from province to province, keeping vigil and standing by it.

I think it was apparent to everyone that the reason for all the attention the Cross was getting from the youth was because the Cross stood for Jesus; it represented the person of the Good Teacher. It would not be a surprise therefore, that many of the Filipino youth may have asked also a similar question, "Good Teacher, what must we do to gain eternal life?" Do you remember asking that question if and when you were present at the Luneta Encounter? Nobody may have heard you to record it, as Mark did, for others to read later on. But surely, you must have asked

that question in one form or another, have you not? Otherwise, it is a sign that youth has passed you with all its enthusiasm and cranky old age, as they say, had overtaken you.

But let us go back to the gospel dialogue. The young man asked the ultimate question. And Jesus replied that he must keep the commandments of God. The young man responded he had been doing that from the start, and enquired what more remained for him to do. At this show of candid innocence and thirst for new adventures and challenges, Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, "Only one thing remains for you to do. Renounce everything you have, and then come and follow me."

You know already how the story concluded; it had a very beautiful beginning, but its ending was very disappointing - for Jesus, for the young man, and for us who have listened to it. The spoiler, the kill-joy, was no other than wealth. The young man was immensely rich; his courage left him when challenged to renounce it all in favor of following Jesus. It is the same conflict, the same contest, that faces every man, just like the young man of the gospel story, where one side or the other loses out when a choice is made: either for the Word of God or for the gold of this world. In this particular instance, the Word of God lost out to the gold of the young man. How true is the popular saying, "Money talks."

For many people, money talks more effectively than any other consideration, despite the teaching of the second bible reading (Hebrews 7) that the Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, cutting all the way through. For many people, money is the ultimate, the greatest good, despite the testimony of King Solomon (first reading, Bk of Wisdom 7) that compared to the Word of God or Wisdom, all the gold in the world is a handful of sand, and silver is nothing more than a clay, and precious jewels cannot equal the worth of God's Word.

Jesus challenged the young man to renounce all his possessions because the latter had asked him the ultimate question. If that Cross from Rome, the Jubilee Cross could talk, did you hear it challenge you also? For sure, it did not ask you to give up all your possessions. But it could have asked you to renounce the use of drugs, of alcohol, of cigarettes, of dangerous companionships, of illicit sex, of culture of money, of disregard for just law and the like.

If the cross, or Christ whom it represents, had given you these challenges, what was your response? Did you also turn away sad, because you love those things more than you love the Word of God? Remember the teaching of Solomon and the letter to the Hebrews about the incomparable value of the Word of God. Also take note of the reward Jesus promised to Peter and his co-apostles who claimed they had left everything to follow him and obey his word.

October 19, 2003

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Is 53:10-11/Heb 4:14-16/Mk 10:35-45)

If you have a taste and a liking for good poetry, for melodious sounds, balance and contrasts, you will find that in chap. 53 of Isaiah, part of which is given in today's first reading. Seldom does the bible reach a sublimity of thought and image with matching style of words, as in this so-called "Song of the Suffering Servant." Go and read the whole chapter in your bible.

But if your inclination is for stories about personal challenges and dreams of glory, then you have one such a story in today's third reading (Mark 10). In it, you will not know whether to be annoyed by the presumptuous self-assurance of the two

brothers, James and John, or to admire their resolve to endure suffering for the sake of personal glory.

But the bible is not intended principally to showcase fine literature and good style, nor to satisfy our curiosity with ego-trip stories. It proposes, in today's instance (through the three readings of this Mass) the sublime doctrine of expiatory suffering, i.e. acceptance of undeserved sufferings, including the most excruciating and deadly kind, for the sake of the good of others.

To hold up this doctrine for our careful consideration, the bible takes advantage of what language can offer, of beauty of style and expression, and what human experience can teach of man's attractions and weaknesses. Isaiah mentions a mysterious Servant of God, whom however, he loves as a Son. It is surprising that despite God's fatherly love for this Servant, he has willed and destined him to suffer and die, to bear the punishments of all other men.

You ask why. God answers in this same Song of the Suffering Servant that his death is meant to be a sacrifice to bring forgiveness to all; that for what the Servant endured, God will forgive the sins of all men.

However, to anticipate objections of unfairness in making an innocent suffer for the guilty, it is pointed out that precisely in the expiatory suffering of the Servant, God carries out with success, his loving purpose. Besides, God assured his Servant that after a life of suffering he will again have joy, and that for his devoted obedience, he will live a long life and will get to see many descendents.

Who this Servant is, the people of Israel correctly guessed as God's promised Messiah. In the centuries that followed, the Jewish people slowly evolved the idea of a lordly, glorious and

political Messiah, conveniently forgetting that their promised Messiah was also the Suffering Servant. Tainted with this Jewish concept, James and John understandably asked Jesus to give them the choicest seats at his right and left in his Kingdom.

Jesus needed to correct the wrong notions about his Messiahship. He affirmed that the promised Messiah will rule after the manner and style of the Suffering Servant, and all those who would associate themselves to the Messiah will also have to follow the way of the Suffering Servant. Hence, the followers of Jesus are called to rule by serving, are destined for joy through suffering. In refusing to serve, they cannot rule with him; in refusing to suffer, they cannot enjoy with him.

The second reading (Hebrews 4) tells us how the combination of Messiah-King and Suffering Servant has issued in good results for us. Firstly, we can now approach with confidence God's throne in search of mercy, for Jesus has gone there, into the very presence of God to intercede for us as our High Priest. Secondly, Jesus will lend us his sympathetic ears whenever we approach him for patience and tolerance towards our weaknesses and failings because, as the second reading says, he had experienced in every way like us all our temptation.

October 26, 2003

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Jer 31:7-9/Heb 5:1-6/Mk 10:46-52)

If you count all the chapters of the two books attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, you will arrive at a total of 60. At the middle or center thereof is chapter 31 from which is taken the first reading of today's Mass. Thus, today we have for our reflection the heart, the center of all Jeremiah's prophetic words;

the summit and the crowning point of his more than forty years of prophetic ministry. It has also been said that the prophetic message in chapter 31 of Jeremiah constitutes the heart and center of all prophetic words in the entire Old Testament.

What then is Jeremiah's central message? Why is chapter 31 considered the prophecy of all prophecies, the prophecy "*par excellence*"? What kind of pronouncement would you expect from someone who is told to summarize in one chapter his lifetime experience and work as a prophet of God?

Jeremiah was a gifted writer, just as he was a profound believer and a sensitive human being. His love for his countrymen, despite their aberrations, was as deep and sincere as his loyalty and obedience to God who punishes the wrongdoing of men, whether these are his chosen people or not. His writings, therefore, in a style that clutches at your heart, reveal the painful dilemma that was tearing him between his sympathy for a hardheaded nation and his loyalty to a divine master.

You would expect consequently, that chapter 31 of Jeremiah will tick out a list of his people's transgressions ending with expressions of deep disappointment. You would expect an enumeration of God's matching threats and sanctions, capped by the prophet's plea for mercy.

But chapter 31 is none of that, and is much more positive than a catalogue of sins and punishments. It will be something you would not expect to appear in it, thus reinforcing the idea that God's ways are unpredictable and always go beyond our expectations. To be sure, Jeremiah does not make light of his countrymen's pigheadedness. He tells them clearly that all the painful upheavals occurring within the country were the results of their persistence in breaking the commandments of God. To add to his sadness, he knows well that, despite the sure destruction

they were bringing upon their heads, his countrymen will not mend their wayward ways.

Would God abandon his people then? Would He leave them to their deserved fate? One is tempted to reply, "Serves them right! They had it coming to them." But chapter 31 tells us that God is not like men, and his thoughts are not like our thoughts. He holds out to the remnants of his people, the light of hope and the staff of strength. In a burst of lyrical language, Jeremiah pictures God as personally inviting the remnants (we are reminded of Christ's expression "little flock") to sing with joy, for he will make them greater once more, such that all nations will also share in their blessings.

This is the central message with universal implications of the prophet Jeremiah, otherwise nicknamed as the prophet of doom and gloom. Divine goodness overcoming all human failings in the end, is at the heart of his two books. In fact, it is the central message of all the prophecies we find in the Old Testament. Its fulfillment is found in unexpected ways in Jesus, as we go over to the New Testament. For instance, our third reading today (Mark 10) narrates Jesus giving sight to the blind man of Jericho. Bartimaeus aptly represents humanity, seeking the light from above, which is no other than Jesus Christ. As John declared in his gospel, Jesus is the light that came into this world and shines on all mankind.

Another instance is presented by today's second reading (Hebrews 5) wherein Jesus is said to be our high priest who carried upon his person our human weaknesses and thus, became the source of salvation for all those who obey him. Once again, we get the message here that divine goodness chose to become weak so that it can lead weak humans to perfection and holiness.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

December 2002- February 2003

New Annuario Shows Catholic Population Growing: Clerical Ranks Slightly Thinner

The 2000-page volume of the official Vatican yearbook (*Annuario Pontificio*) 2003 shows a decline in the number of Catholic priests in the world, but a growth in the number of lay missionaries and catechists. The data showed a slight decline of 111 fewer priests than in the previous year. The number of priests in religious orders fell by nearly 1,000 from the year 2000 to 2001, while the number of diocesan priests grew by 667. There was a slight (1.5%) increase in the number of seminarians training for the priesthood, with the bulk of that increase coming in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In the past 25 yrs. The number of baptized Catholics in the world has grown considerably: from 757 million in 1978 to well over 1 billion today. There are now 4 million people fulfilling pastoral roles, including 4,649 bishops, 405,067 priests and 792,317 religious, 139,078 full-time lay missionaries and 2,813,252 lay catechists.

New Book - "The Future of the Asian Churches"

Edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan

A new book edited by James H. Kroeger and Peter C. Phan, focuses on the Asian Synod and the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*. Unique features of the 200-page work are the following: nine contributions on the Asian Synod experience; twelve pieces of commentary on *Ecclesia in Asia*; special "study-edition format" of *Ecclesia in Asia*; a comprehensive analytical index (over 1,100 items) to the content of *Ecclesia in Asia*. The book attempts to bring the content and message of the "Asian Synod Experience" to all Asian Catholics. For information contact: James H. Kroeger; Maryknoll Box 285; Greenhills Post Office; 1502 Metro Manila, Philippines. Fax number: 632-426-6112 E-mail: jkroeger@admu.edu.ph

Free CDs

The response of our Asian Bishops and seminaries to the offer in the previous FABC Newsletter of the free copies of an English language CD (Compact Disk) on Pro-Life material has been very gratifying. The donor has informed this office that the IBM headquarters are trying to fix the CD, so that it will also be accessible to all computers; which should be ready by Easter. Our bishops, may send their requests to FABC: 10/F, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong (e-mail address: fabc@hkdvac.com).

N.B.

The article featured on the May-June 2003 issue entitled "Pastoral Care of Victims and Offenders: Handling Cases of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct by the Clergy" by the CBCP-Commission on Clergy still needs the approval of the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Therefore we advise the readers not to consider *final* the said paper.