

**EXCERPTS from**  
**Jesus Christ The Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the “New Age”**  
Pontifical Council for Culture &  
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue  
(Readers would benefit from reading the whole document)

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20030203\\_new-age\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html)

FOREWARD: 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.

...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).

P1: ...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” (*I P* 3, 15 f.).

### **1.1. Why now?**

... to see clearly what is and what is not consistent with the Christian message.

...*New Age* is attractive mainly because so much of what it offers meets hungers often left unsatisfied by the established institutions.

...The important thing to note is that God is reduced in certain *New Age* practices so as furthering the advancement of the individual.

...It appeals to those who have problems with patriarchy. It “does not demand any more faith or belief than going to the cinema”,(

...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.(

### **2.1. What is new about *New Age*?**

...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”

...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”.(

...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.

...*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.

### 2.2.3. Health: Golden living

...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 visualisation, nutritional therapies, psychic healing, various kinds of herbal medicine, healing by crystals, metals, music or colours, 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.

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... 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 behaviour 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.

### 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 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 civilisation, while it would be more accurate to link them to gnosticism, in particular to Manichaeism...

## 2.3. The fundamental principles of *New Age* thinking

### 2.3.1. A global response in a time of crisis

**...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”**

### 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.

...Helena Blavatsky, a Russian medium who founded the *Theosophical Society* with Henry Olcott in New York in 1875.

...The first objective implicitly rejects the 'irrational bigotry' and 'sectarianism' of traditional Christianity as perceived by spiritualists and theosophists...

...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.

...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.

...To realise 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.

...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... (2.3.3)

### 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 co-operation with divine grace).

...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.**

.....Psychology is used to explain mind expansion as “mystical” experiences. Yoga, zen, transcendental meditation and tantric exercises lead to an experience of self-fulfilment or enlightenment. Peak-experiences (reliving one's birth, travelling 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. (2.3.4.1)