TODAY'S MOST SERIOUS THREAT TO OUR FAITH

"For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matt.24.24)

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

It's happening now! This most serious threat to our Faith and to our children. It is something you may not even be aware of consciously. What you read here may surprise you. It should certainly alert you and put you on your guard. There is, today, an apparent convergence of many different streams of human desires and ideals -spiritual, social, environmental, philosophical - all focusing on man-centred creativity and achievement. Some people even speak of reaching the threshold of a new stage in human evolution. The term 'New Age Movement' is the label attached to these aspirations. It is this 'movement' which poses the threat to which we now refer. Under the patronage of this movement numerous loosely structured networks seem to be coming together to undermine the very foundations of the Church. As ordinary, responsible Catholics we must be equipped to deal with the dangers of this movement and its insidious encroachments. By the grace of God, and armed with the right knowledge, the faithful have successfully withstood onslaughts of error and heresy down the ages. Today there is a growing sense of urgency that we need once more to prepare to protect the Faith - this time against the ideas being spawned under the umbrella of the New Age Movement. Hence this synopsis as a contribution to awareness.

THE DANGER REVEALS ITSELF

In its basic form the philosophy of the New Agers is that 'God is everything and everything is God.' But beyond that simplistic definition is an immense array of dangerous and demonic pursuits and practices. So how is all this manifesting itself in everyday life? A book entitled *The Unicorn in the Sanctuary* examines the impact of the New Age on the Catholic Church. Written against the background of events in the United States its observations are equally relevant in Britain and elsewhere in Western society as we see more and more evidence of the New Age movement emerging.

The strange ideas of the New Agers, often masquerading in the name of Christianity, have surfaced in local Catholic prayer workshops and retreats, in Catholic education and in some religious orders. Using a down-to-earth style, and prompted by a keen analytical mind, the author of *The Unicorn in the Sanctuary* has written the first book devoted exclusively to the New Age from a Catholic perspective. He demonstrates how the 'movement' is a combination of Modernism, transcendental humanism, pagan superstition, self-deification, Satanism, feminism and witchcraft - all promoted widely by the media. In the following paragraphs we summarise, and give extracts from, the contents of this fascinating book. (Note: all direct quotations are in italics, followed by the relevant page numbers).

SYMBOLS, PROMISES - AND TOLERANCE

Why the 'Unicorn' *in the sanctuary? One of the most common symbols that the new agers use as an identifying device is the unicorn. The unicorn is a symbol of New Age transformation: a symbol of destruction and renewal. This mythical animal has often been associated with both Christ (wrongly) and with Lucifer. It is not the cute and gentle creature popularly portrayed ... but a symbol of tearing and trampling, breaking and crushing.*(p.4). In his Foreword the author writes: *The New Age movement promises hope for peace. Hope for a better life. It appeals to man's sensuality, for in the New Age movement there is no sin as we know it; and more important: no guilt ..... Western culture, which can seemingly stomach any perversity, is quite intolerant about one thing: intolerance. We live in a society that values, perhaps above all, tolerance ..... Within the Church, however, there must be limits beyond which the title 'Christian' can no longer apply. The Church is not wedded to the passions of the moment but bound to the truth without regard for any momentary twists currently popular (in) the latest scientific or philosophic musings..... The purpose (of this book) is not to condemn the individuals involved but to permit the reader to understand these errors and the forces behind them .....* It is every Catholic's duty to judge teachings and actions in the light of the truth he claims to hold and serve, (pp.5-9)

SEARCHING - OR SURVIVING

The Introduction to the book touches on the changes that have been witnessed in the Church during the last twenty years. It reflects the searching which has resulted from poor pastoral shepherding and the fact that it is the governance of the Church, not its authority, which is in question. If this were not the case then it is reasonable to suppose that the New Age movement would never have attained its present strength and that, even now, it could be stopped in its tracks. The author states: *The Church has survived two thousand years, much of that time under attack. Yet, in the last one hundred years, the breeze has stiffened; there is malignancy in the air - the breath of the evil one. True, man is capable of much mischief, but the New Age movement is not from men.* (pp.13-14)

ENOUGH TRUTH TO FOOL US?

Of the eight chapters, the first is concerned with the background of the movement pointing out that it is a worldwide phenomenon. It is suggested that there are two lies which are the foundation of every pagan religion and cult: *You will not die and you will be like God. In every imaginable fashion these ideas are woven into endless patterns along with enough truth to fool nearly everyone.*(p. 18) The chapter continues with short sections on each of the following topics: Modernism; Immanence; Pantheism; Holism; Hinduism; Reincarnation; the Divinity of Man; Evolution; the Law of Avatars; Maitreya; Yoga; Transcendental Meditation and Visualization; Holistic Health and New Age music. It is noted that the interplay of many of these factors was foreseen by Pope St Pius X in his encyclical *Pascendi Gregis* published a century ago.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION - OR IS IT?

The second chapter deals with a subject of concern to every parent: Education. Here we are introduced to Muller's Curriculum. Robert Muller was one-time Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and in that capacity was influenced by Buddhist U Thant whom he called his 'spiritual master'. Mr Mullers 'curriculum', it would appear, is as far removed from correct Catholic teaching as one could get. The author goes on to draw attention to the Kino Learning Centre founded by a Dominican nun. This (supposedly) Catholic elementary and secondary school has 'child-centred classrooms' where students are free to learn only what they wish to learn. For example: *If the child is not interested in the Ten Commandments then he doesn't have to learn them. The power is in the child to direct his life.* (p.62)

In the section headed The Local Catholic School we find this significant passage: *Every parent should be involved with what their children are learning in school. It does not take long to look over a religion textbook. Look for the minimizing of the deity of Christ and distortions of the fact of sin; look for the equating of Christianity with all other religions; or worse, the actual criticism of Christianity in comparison to the so-called 'higher' religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. While you are looking, notice what is* ***not*** *there: The authority of the Church and the Scriptures; the reality of heaven, hell and purgatory; the fact of the biblical miracles and a general lack of guidance for the child's moral growth,* (p.67)

DABBLING AND TEACHING

The third chapter is entitled 'Priest or Guru?' and it reveals how the actions and writings of such men as Dom Bede Griffiths, Fr Edward Hays and Thomas Merton have influenced the thinking of New Age advocates. The author concludes: *Some individuals have dabbled ignorantly in eastern religion. Others are fully aware of what they do. Priests and nuns are teaching Hindu meditation. An American archbishop reportedly does yoga. Thousands of Catholics have been introduced to spirit guides and visualization techniques. They are in danger. They need our prayers.* (p.81)

MATERIALISM GLORIFIED

Chapter four focuses attention on one person: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *The materialism of our society could be a roadblock to the popularity of the New Age movement were it not for the writings of the French Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is Teilhard whose work has glorified, rather than denied, the material world.....It is my intention to shine a critical light on this dead priest's influential teachings and ideas. My hope is that others will be warned away from the real but false appeal contained in his theories.* (p.83) The author goes on to examine Teilhard's life, theology and social theories.

MYSTICS AND MEDITATION

In chapter five the author looks at the New Age Mystic under the heading: *Different Path, Same God?* Here we read about Sadhana and Fr Anthony de Mello. This chapter further touches on Visualization and Spirit Guides; Rewriting the Scriptures, and the dangers of 'centering-prayer'. *It is important to ... distinguish between occult meditation, which is the foundation of all New Age beliefs, and Christian meditation which is basic to true spiritual growth..... Unlike occult meditation, whose goal is an emptied mind, Christian prayer has God as its object.* (pp.110 and 111)

INFECTIOUS DECEIT

Chapter six is concerned with *WomanChurch, Witchcraft and the Goddess*. It is in this chapter that the author looks at the 'doctrines' of ex-Dominican priest Matthew Fox who, it appears, champions the paganism of the West. His teachings are heretical and he has an enthusiastic following. *His brand of religion is aptly called 'Creation-Centred Spirituality' ... which is focused not on God the creator, but on god the creation,* (p.121) The chapter moves on to *The Craft (Witchcraft); Christianity and Feminism*, and ends with a section headed *The Infection Spreads*. It should be noted that Matthew Fox's teachings did not go unnoticed in Rome when he was a priest and after a four-year long investigation of his works his Order silenced him in 1988. This did not affect his popularity however. As the book records *Like his proud modernist forbears, it appears that Father* (sic*) Matthew Fox will carry on the tradition of minimal outward submission coupled with contemptuous defiance.* (p.137)

ON OUR OWN DOORSTEP

'Close to Home' is the warning of chapter seven. *If your parish hasn't been the scene of New Age stirrings and teachings, it is a real blessing ... (however) if the pastor is faithful, even if he is rock solid, he may be undermined by others in a large parish to whom he must turn for assistance. If that were not enough, he may shepherd a fine parish and still see his flock infected,* (p. 138) The author goes on to point out the danger of retreats and programmes which (sometimes inadvertently) act as a platform for New Age ideas. The chapter highlights such activities and topics as 'self awareness' groups; how to develop the power of divine qualities within ourselves; how to enhance our 'spiritual understanding'; centering prayer as a method of meditation; and Silva Mind Control. This last-named is a system which: *features both the meditative state of eastern religion and the pagan visualization techniques which give the method its power. In the Silva Method the student learns to achieve an altered state of consciousness (then) relaxation and problem solving.*(p.146) Catholic parishes are known to have promoted, and even hosted, such courses.

THE GREATEST CONFRONTATION

The final chapter of the book entitled *Fight It? ... or Forget It?* reminds us that: *Ideally, our church leaders will be faithful, but some are not. The strengths of the Catholic Church - our traditions and hierarchy - are no strengths unless the shepherds are faithful at every level ..... It should be clear that many unwary and innocent Catholics are being pulled in. Catholic clergy and laity are joining the New Age at least as eagerly as the rest of the world.* (pp.150, 151) Summarising his conclusions the author includes a quotation from Pope John Paul II when (as Cardinal Wojtyla) in 1976 he said during a visit to the United States: *We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think that wide circles of the American society or wide circles of the Christian community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-Church, of the Gospel versus the anti-Gospel. This confrontation lies within the plans of divine Providence; it is a trial which the whole Church ... must take up.* (p.155)

The Unicorn in the Sanctuary concludes with an Appendix of New Age Politics, Economics and Social Change and a list of recommended books for further reading.

NEW AGE AS A RELIGION

If the claims made in this book are to be taken seriously, then there is, today, a relentless mobilizing of forces against the Church and all its precepts. This is nothing new, you may say, but perhaps the one element which has been lacking in the past is the extent and the efficiency of today's mass-media and communications facilities. There is more than enough in this book to make us sit up and take notice. Distortions of Christianity are being presented as 'enlightened interpretations'; satanic pursuits and products are being passed off as 'harmless fun'; the blatant permissiveness of the drug-ridden pop/rock culture is ensnaring our young people and making contact between generations almost impossible; 'honesty' and 'freedom' are being used as a cloak for apostasy. The New Age 'movement' is not just a social phenomenon - it could be described as an anti-Christian religion. The book reviewed here turns a powerful spotlight on some of the dangers which face Catholics today. The author has done well to draw our attention to those dangers.

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