

Among errors found in his writings are the following assertions:

- A profession of faith and belief in God or in Christ impedes access to truth.
- The Catholic Church has made the Sacred Scriptures into an idol and banished God from the Temple.
- The Catholic Church has lost its authority to teach in the name of Christ.
- Evil is mere ignorance.
- Good and evil are mere mental evaluations imposed on reality.

Consequently, the congregation stated that his writings are "incompatible with the Catholic faith and can cause grave harm." [10]

In Deuteronomy, God warns: "There shall not be found among you . . . any one who practices divination" (Deut. 18:10). Also forbidden is collaborating with "a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD; and because of these abominable practices the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God" (Deut. 18:10 -- 13).

As noted above, the Church has forbidden embracing theosophic philosophies and practices. Because the New Age movement is a theosophic movement, participation in the movement is an act of disobedience to the Church. Most Catholics who participate in the New Age movement lack proper formation in the Catholic faith. Their lack of formation allows the lies and pitfalls of theosophic philosophies to go unnoticed. Such Catholics should be brought to a deeper understanding of the faith through catechesis.

To foster effective dialogue with these Catholics, we need three things:

1. Proper formation. We must be properly formed in the faith. We cannot explain the faith if we do not know it and live it. By living the faith, we invite others to seek the truth.
2. Strong prayer life. At the heart of discipleship is a strong prayer life. Through prayer, we come to know God intimately, and receive grace to soften the hearts of those to whom we witness.
3. Understanding, patience, and charity. We must understand that we do not change people. God provides the grace, and we can offer an opportunity, but the ultimate decision belongs to the person involved. To be most effective in providing an opportunity, we must try to understand why a person believes what he believes. If we understand his

reasons for participating in the New Age movement, we can better refute the errors. Through patience we can better understand the person, and through charity we can better witness to the truth.

In our witness to the truth, we must not lose heart, but strengthen our efforts through fellowship, the sacraments, and prayer. We must remain close to the Magisterium and heed the guidance of our sacred pastors.[11] Most importantly, we must keep the great commandments, to love God above all things, with our whole heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God (cf. Mt. 22:34 -- 40). These laws find their greatest fulfillment in the salvation of souls, wherein the angels in heaven rejoice (cf. Lk. 15:7).

Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion:

1. What is the history of the Theosophical Society? What has been the Church's response to this movement?
2. Read Catechism, nos. 2110 -- 2128. Why do New Age beliefs and practices involve a violation of the First Commandment?
3. Do I know anyone who is currently involved in the New Age movement? How can I effectively evangelize or catechize such individuals?

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Pamphlet 212

The New Age Movement

ISSUE: May Catholics participate in New Age activities?

RESPONSE: No. The ideas associated with the New Age movement are incompatible with the Catholic faith. They are incompatible with doctrines essential to Christianity, such as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and the God-ordained necessity of the Church for salvation. The New Age movement is rooted in the ideology and practice of witchcraft. Because of the direct opposition between New Age ideas and the truths of the faith, participation in New Age activities is gravely sinful and is offensive to Christ and His Church.

DISCUSSION: The New Age movement is characterized by a combination of practices and beliefs. Those who promote doctrines of the New Age movement root their ideas and practices in theosophic philosophy, the occult, pantheism, and many teachings of non-Christian, Eastern religions. Many of these ideas have spread among Catholics and other Christians. As our Holy Father points out, there are many who are "unaware of the incompatibility of those ideas with the Church's faith." [1]

Origin and Early Development

Theosophist philosophy provides the modern foundation of the New Age movement. One of the founders of the Theosophical Society was Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who published *Isis Unveiled* in 1877.[2] This book contains information about primitive scientific practices, Eastern philosophy, witchcraft, and even serpent worship. Her fascination with the occult developed after she met the diabolic "master" of her dreams. The Theosophical Society's periodical, *Lucifer*, was published to spread its beliefs throughout the world.[3]

In 1891, Petrovna was succeeded as president of the Theosophical Society by Annie Wood Besant. Besant wrote under the pen name "Ajax." Within her writings, she promoted ideas such as the necessity of birth control.[4]

Four of the basic ideas of the Theosophical Society -- later embraced by the New Age movement -- can be summarized as follows:

1. The constitution of the soul is pantheistic.
2. The evolution of man to a higher consciousness enables him to achieve perfection.
3. The reincarnation of the soul benefits man as he inches closer towards perfection.
4. The force of one's activities (karma) determines one's reincarnated state.

Under the pontificate of Benedict XV, the Holy See condemned theosophic doctrines. The Holy Office, when asked "whether the doctrines which are called theosophic can be reconciled with Catholic doctrine," gave a negative reply.[5]

Thus the Holy See's condemnation encompasses more than the Theosophic Society itself: The condemnation extends to all theosophic doctrines and forbids joining any society that promotes theosophic doctrines, attending meetings of such societies, and reading any materials of these societies.

Pantheism

Pantheism is a philosophy of religion that denies the Christian understanding of God as three divine Persons in one God. Pantheists believe that the entire natural order, both visible and invisible, makes up the being of "god." This god is considered to be a limited, always changing, impersonal force. Because everything is god, all gods are true gods and man himself is god. This error in the understanding of God is at the heart of all other errors.

New Age proponents express their pantheistic belief in various ways. Some divinize the created world in which we live. They believe the created order is actually a god personified, hold that a higher consciousness exists in all things, and believe that the purpose of life is to become aware of and enter into union with that higher consciousness. Some believe in Gaia, the mother goddess of all. Others worship Mother Earth. Still others worship Isis. In a twisting of Catholic doctrine, the liturgical honoring of Mother Earth takes place, and the Blessed Virgin is seen to be the goddess Isis. Some go so far as to identify the earth with Christ. Many believe the wounded earth will rise in the third millennium and usher in the dawn of a New Age and the destruction of the Catholic Church.[6]

In general, New Age philosophy promotes an understanding of creation contrary to the truths of the Catholic faith. The philosophy denies that God created all, that Christ redeemed man, and that man has dominion "over all the earth" (Gen. 1:26). The general philosophy emphasizes the existence of a common, psychic memory or consciousness found in all things. This common element unites us and embodies the reality of God. In violation of the First Commandment (cf. Ex. 20:3), this movement

encourages the worship of false gods, particularly the worship of the earth and all creation.

Perfection Through a Higher Consciousness

Proponents of the New Age movement often refer to a higher consciousness that enables man to achieve perfection or union with all. According to this mistaken belief, as man acquires a greater awareness of the common spirit in all things, he moves toward greater harmony and union with all. He achieves awareness through means like transcendental meditation. A common form of these means introduced into the Catholic Church is the technique of centering prayer.[7] Communication with this purported higher consciousness within all things is made through Anagrams, horoscopes, and other techniques (cf. Catechism, no. 2116).

The belief in and desire for union with a higher consciousness leads to a mistaken belief that man can transcend the evils of the world through his own power. Because man himself is god (according to this view), he creates his own reality that transcends the pains and problems of the world. An immediate and dangerous error flowing from this is the belief that man does not need Christ. Evil and sin are seen as a consequence of a lack of awareness and union, not a free choice. New Age proponents believe that an individual no longer has his own conscience; rather, they believe that the conscience belongs to an accumulated whole. This belief attacks the notions of an individual soul and salvation by Christ.

We are saved by the grace of God received through the Church established by Christ (cf. Catechism, nos. 846 -- 48). Our sins are forgiven because of Christ's death on the Cross (cf. Catechism, nos. 606 -- 23). Alone, we could never hope to achieve Heaven and attain the beatific vision of our Creator. We are not saved by our own acts, nor do we achieve union with God through techniques of transcendental meditation and means of communication with a common spirit. As noted above, belief in a higher consciousness present in all things denies the hierarchical ordering of creation. Such belief raises man to the level of God and ultimately leads to a denial of the reality of sin, guilt, eternal punishment, and the salvation offered through Christ's death on the Cross.

Reincarnation and Karma

Reincarnation is the belief in the rebirth of the soul, after death, into a new body or form of life. According to some, if your life was good, you are reincarnated into a higher consciousness. If your life was bad, you are reincarnated into a lower consciousness.

The goodness or evil of each life is determined by karma. A Hindu term meaning "action" or "force," karma refers to a series of cause-and-effect events that affect the moral and physical order of the universe. Each soul inherits

its own karma from a previous life after it has been reincarnated. Obtaining a good karma is central to obtaining good fortune in the next life.

Following the theosophists, the New Age movement adopted this philosophy of reincarnation and karma. Many associated with the New Age movement regard this entire process as a method of growth and maturity through evolution. Despite the underlying pantheism of the belief system, some erroneously find these beliefs compatible with Christianity. In short, they adopt religious syncretism: the belief that all religions are essentially the same. They deny that the Catholic Church, or any other community, has the right to declare itself as the possessor of the true religion.

Mello Out

The information offered above is only an introduction to the errors of the New Age movement. In general, its doctrines and philosophies contradict the truths of the faith. The movement denies the nature of the triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It denies the divine and human natures of Christ, His unique role as Messiah, and the necessity of His death for the salvation of all. It distorts the nature of man and denies that the ultimate purpose of man is union with God in Heaven.

New Age philosophy contains many contradictions and tolerates acceptance of conflicting beliefs. Such an approach allows practically anyone who holds to New Age ideas to claim allegiance to a particular religion. This approach readily encourages nominal Christians to be formed in New Age beliefs but still consider themselves members of their particular religion. Unfortunately, some Catholics ascribe to and participate in New Age activities. Some use the writings of Fathers Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., and Anthony de Mello, S.J., to prove compatibility of these beliefs with the Catholic faith. Indeed, both priests promoted ideas and beliefs that the New Age movement embraces.[8]

In considering the published works of Father de Chardin, the Holy Office stated, "Without undertaking to pass judgment on matters which pertain to the positive sciences, it is sufficiently clear that in the field of philosophy and theology the said works contain such ambiguities and even such grave errors as to offend against Catholic doctrine." [9] The statement concludes with a warning that his writings should not be used lest people be led astray.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also noted serious errors in the writings of Father de Mello.