

Feature

'New Age'?!

Our feature this issue concentrates on a phenomenon, or series of phenomena, in modern society labelled 'New Age' religion. A number of themes emerge in the papers which give a comprehensive overview to what on the surface are quite disparate manifestations. Philip Almond places New Age soundly in the continuum of Western thought showing it to be not 'new' but rather a synthesis and re-emergence of many earlier traditions. Michael Hill takes up the story from a sociological perspective examining theories predicting the development of just such a religious form. He enumerates the central characteristics of New Age religions, and suggests why such religions are so persuasive in modern society. Rachel Sharp and Jan O'Leary look at various distinguishing aspects of New Age and offer a Christian critique. Michael Stanley utterly refutes New Age as 'new' and shows how many of its key concepts were developed, often more convincingly, by Emanuel Swedenborg in the eighteenth century. We end with two practical manifestations of such religion - a negative offshoot where Jenny Barnett and Michael Hill consider the emergence of accusations of satanic child abuse, and a more light-hearted example of 'channelled' poetry from John Wren-Lewis - and end with a book review from John May.

Towards an Understanding of the New Age

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The term 'New Age' denotes a range of theories and practices which aim at self-transformation, self-realisation, and the fulfilment of human potential. Its various therapies, its concerns for humanity and the environment, its respect for nature and feminine wisdom, are all based on the conviction that through the self-transfor-

mation of the individual, society as a whole can be transformed. It is a creed of radical individualism, of 'self-religiosity', flavoured with altruism.

But how can we understand the vast variety of disparate phenomena that shelter under the umbrella of the term 'New Age'? Should we view it sociologically as

a rejection of the values of advanced capitalism or effete socialism for a new set of personalistic beliefs and attitudes? Perhaps we should view it psychologically as a refuge for those alienated from themselves and others. Or, should we rejoice in it as a new Reformation, rekindling the fires of spirituality for so long dampened by the technological rationalism of the modern industrialised West? Is it a continuation of the counter-culture of the '60s with its (pretended?) rejection of bourgeois culture, or the ultimate in the capitalist commodification of spirituality, or both? However we interpret it, there can be little doubt that the New Age is playing a significant role in the construction of late twentieth century Western mentalities.

But is it all that new? I want to suggest that it may fruitfully be seen as another resurgence of what may be called the Western esoteric tradition - of neo-Platonism, particularly of its theurgic elements, of gnosticism, of Hermeticism, of medieval magic and alchemy. In short, it is a revival of the 'other' in the history of Western thought, often in conflict with orthodox Christianity, sometimes in creative tension with it, occasionally suppressed by it.

The notion of a New Age is an apocalyptic one. From the beginning of the Christian era, the habit of predicting the Second Coming of Christ and/or the Millennium had entered the fabric of Western culture. But it was with the twelfth century Cistercian monk, Joachim of Fiore, that the idea of distinctive 'ages' in history that lead, in linear fashion, to a cosmic conclusion took shape. Thus did people for the first time begin to think of themselves as participants in an Age with a unique and particular spirit. The term 'the New Age' symbolises, then, a radical

change in beliefs and values, and more specifically, a fundamental spiritual change in our individual and mass consciousness, in Joachimite terms the third and final age, in more contemporary terms the Age of Aquarius.

For some New Agers, being in the New Age is a sign that the end of the world is near. The cultural weight of the end of a century - the end of a millennium - plays a large role. Traditional millenarian expectations are in play. For example, pop eschatologist Hal Lindsey's *Countdown to Armageddon* was in 1981 the best-selling religious work of the year in the United States. This was traditional apocalyptic guesswork with its linking of contemporary events to Daniel and Revelation. As ill-suited to clear predictions as the books of Daniel and Revelation, the New Age fascination with the obscure quatrains of the sixteenth century 'prophet' Nostradamus is likewise a powerful sign of its apocalyptic trends.

But it would be wrong to suggest that all New Agers are apocalypticists, either in the Christian or the esoteric sense. There is a strongly secularist, 'this-worldly' edge to much New Age thought. There is often little suggestion of a cataclysmic end to the world through divine intervention. Indeed, in so far as 'God' remains part of the rhetoric of the New Age, it is of a being essentially non-interventionist, immanent within rather than transcendent to the world, conceived both impersonally (as, for example, Being itself) and personally, and in the latter case as both male and female, as magna Mater, the Goddess, the male Deity often construed as an inferior form of the dominant female.

However that may be, remnants of apocalypticism remain in the ideal of the Utopia that would arise, of the Paradise

that would return, were the beliefs and practices of the New Age to become dominant, or will do as humanity moves inexorably towards a higher evolutionary plane of consciousness. Here, of course, is the link between the New Age vision of Paradise regained on earth, a classic image of Western Utopian and millenarian thought, and New Age concerns for the Environment. Underlying environmental concerns for both animate and inanimate nature is the vision of a world in which the earth, animals, and humankind co-exist in fruitful and mutually beneficent harmony. And communicate too: whales sing, dolphins have a message for us, and vegetarianism rules in the new Eden, all to the accompaniment of Pan pipes. Nature restored is civilisation rejected, or at least radically transformed.

Such environmental concerns are reinforced by an inchoate pantheism (or panentheism), a sense that all is divine, or all is in the divine, or the divine is in all. This echoes Hindu concerns, a tradition which still provides dominant motifs for the New Age. But it reflects too Chinese Taoism with its emphasis on cosmic harmony, on the creative interplay of opposites necessary to cosmic and individual well-being. In short, from traditional Western Utopianism, and from (invented?) Eastern attitudes to nature, the New Age has constructed a powerful symbology, uniquely suited (certainly far more than traditional Christian symbolism - though a 'catch-up quick' Christian environmental theology progressively appears) to Western environmental concerns.

The most celebrated, certainly the most California-style aspect of the New Age is channelling, the process by which persons (predominantly women) act as channels or mediums for messages (usually platitudinous folk-wisdom - it's the

medium not the message) from sources (usually discarnate, sometimes extra-terrestrial) in answer to questions from this side of the divide. Against the materialism of late twentieth century culture, the New Age boldly declares its belief in the realm of spirit.

The immediate antecedents of channelling can be found in the mid-nineteenth century movement known as spiritualism. From the Fox family of Hydesville, New York, who purportedly communicated with spirits that responded to questions with ghostly rappings and knockings, Spiritualism in both Christian and 'non-Christian' forms rapidly spread through the United States, England and Europe, progressively developing more sophisticated techniques for communicating with the other world - with the spirits of dead friends, relatives, and 'spirit-guides'.

Spiritualism, with its cosmology of a universe populated with spirits was itself a resurgence of a medieval and early modern European world view, one in which the realm of spirit - angelic and demonic - continually interacted with the world of the living. More broadly, spiritualism and channelling may be seen as one embodiment (so to say) of a universal religious phenomenon - that of communication with the spirit world - typified in shamanic traditions.

The New Age too has its shamans, its founding father Carlos Castaneda. In a series of works (which seem progressively to reflect trends in New Age thinking), Castaneda detailed his encounters with the Yaqui Indian sorcerer 'Don Juan', thus becoming heir to a magical tradition that putatively stretched back 500 years to pre-conquest Mexico. Whether fact or fiction, in the writings of Castaneda, the genre of magical autobiography was revived. Magical transformations, esoteric

wisdom, mystical initiations, all create for the reader powerful images of an alternative reality embedded in nature, lost to those endowed only with modern Western urban culture, and they conjure up a world in which spiritual laws and ancient wisdom provide access to ultimate personal truth. Native American spiritualities remain archetypal for the New Age.

The New Age interest in magical traditions has its roots in the Western fascination with the occult. The direct source of the contemporary vogue of occultism is nineteenth century France. It is from the writings of the French seminarian Eliphas Levi that the modern interest in the occult has developed. His own works were an eclectic combination of traditional Western esoterica, the Cabbalism of Isaac Luria, of Christian Rosenroth, of Jacob Boehme, and Emmanuel Swedenborg, all of whom were themselves influenced by the revival of the occult during the Renaissance, particularly as a consequence of attempts then to harmonise Platonism, neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Hermeticism and Cabbalism with Christian doctrine.

Of all the revived arcane disciplines, the most popular in the New Age is astrology. At one level, astrology enables the mapping of the meaning of the universe as a whole - the New Age is the Age of Aquarius. But it also confers meaning on individual lives. True, one's life is determined by the movements of the Heavens. But what grandeur! Human life, my life - has a purpose, a cosmic meaning, a pre-established pattern. No longer am I an anonymous individual fated to live out life in a godless, absurd and meaningless universe.

And of life after life? As nineteenth century spiritualism was motivated by a quest for the certainty of post-mortem ex-

istence, so also is the New Age in its focus on out-of-the-body and near-death experiences. For these prove, for New Age believers, the existence of consciousness in a non-material form, and its continuation after death. Moreover, near-death experiences suggest not only post-mortem consciousness but happiness and contentment beyond the grave. Satan, sin, death and hell are no more. The New Age vision of the after life is of universal happiness.

An alternative New Age scenario of the after-life is provided by reincarnationism. The New Age provides technologies of past-life regression by which our past lives can be discovered (Indian and Egyptian kings and princesses abound), thus giving an understanding of who we are now by who we have been in previous lives. It does so in a context informed by both the reincarnation ideas notably of Hinduism, and by those of the Western tradition, notably the seventeenth century Cabbalism of Isaac Luria mediated through the Theosophical Society. But in contrast to the Indian traditions which view the infinite process of birth, death, and rebirth as that from which escape must be made, the New Age views rebirth much more positively. Reincarnation guarantees future lives. So it functions as an alternative immortality to the traditional Christian vision.

The provision of technologies is central to the New Age - technologies of past-life regression, of meditation, of relaxation, of self-centring, of re-birthing, of healing, of massage, and so on. Generally speaking, the aim of all these is to facilitate one's inner growth, to maximise one's potential, to discover who one really is by piercing beneath the everyday self, to harness the resources at the depths of the self, and to 'exorcise' the demons

within which curtail one's ability. In its conviction that the true self is a 'something' apart from, indeed juxtaposed to, the set of 'psycho-physical' characteristics that make me who I am at the present moment, it is typically modernist. The New Age does not resonate to post-modern notions of the deconstruction of the self. On the contrary, the self is the final arbiter of truth, and any ideology and any technology which assists in its development may be utilised.

If there is a post-modern aspect to the New Age, it is its syncretism, or perhaps its eclecticism. 'I believe in anything' is, to put it a little harshly, the credo of the New Age. This is the result of a New Age attitude to truth which sees it in predominantly personalistic terms. To paraphrase Kierkegaard, the truth that edifies is the truth for thee. Still, there are direct historical precedents for this propensity to embrace everything - from psychic counselling to palmistry, from the Tarot to trance, from reincarnation to re-birthing.

Historically, we can see the New Age as the child of the Theosophical movement, itself a product of the fascination with mysticism, magic and the occult during the latter part of the nineteenth century. In England, it was the age of Esoteric Buddhism, of the revival of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, of Cabbalists, Spiritualists and Hermeticists. Palmists and astrologists abounded. Mesmerism had waned, but hypnotism waxed. Books on magic and the occult sold briskly. Books on the lost years of Jesus in India - 'The Life of St. Issa', 'The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ', - provoked controversy.

In this milieu, the Theosophical Society found a comfortable home. Founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and her part-

ner Henry Olcott, it was both a product of late Victorian culture, and a conduit of traditional Western occult thought. It is hardly surprising that, with the discovery and, late in the nineteenth century the publication of the Scriptures of the Eastern religions, Madame Blavatsky should have stressed the Eastern origins of her teachings. But in the late nineteenth century, the term 'theosophy' conjured up images, not only of her Mahatmas in the snowy reaches of the Himalayas, but of the Western esoteric tradition, and particularly of the Gnostic notion of specially-initiated adepts with access to secret documents that encoded the key to unlock the secrets of the world's sacred texts. (Is this the clue to the extraordinary popular appeal of Barbara Thiering's *Jesus, the Man?*)

The Theosophical movement synthesised the 'other' of Western thought. It constructed a unity of opposites by maintaining that the same mystical truth lay beneath all the esoteric books, doctrines, beliefs, and practices of the occult traditions, of the sacred books of the East, of the Talmud, the Quran, and the Bible. In this notion of a hidden wisdom known only to a few adepts we have the unifying idea which enables the different, the disparate, the contradictory to be held together. Within the context of this synthesis, Theosophy strove to develop what it perceived as human faculties to their highest capacities.

The Theosophical Society was instrumental in introducing many Eastern religious concepts into Western parlance, all of which still abound in New Age discourse: exoteric concepts such as karma and reincarnation; but also more recondite teachings such as those of the chakra system, the bodily aura, the division of consciousness into several subtle planes, the astral body. And it spawned other esoteric

groups such as the Order of the Golden Dawn to which the New Age owes the forging of the links between Tarot, astrology, and the Cabbalah.

The New Age then does draw on ancient traditions - albeit inchoately and generally unconsciously - and from both West, East and Primal traditions. In that sense it is not new. What is new is the

combination of all these in the service of radical religious individualism for the masses. The term 'the New Age' represents the democratisation, the popularisation, and the commodification of esoteric traditions. And so much so, that one can legitimately ask 'Is the 'other' any longer 'other'?'.

The New Age - A Sociological Assessment

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Novelty is a central motif in the culture of consumerism - with which, as will be shown later, many contemporary religious movements have a strong affinity - but it is a motif that requires close scrutiny. It will be argued here that the "New" Age has a long historical pedigree and that its appearance was predicted in remarkable detail by sociologists almost one hundred years ago¹. While some of the features of movements located in the diffuse New Age network have a highly contemporary content and immediacy, these should properly be seen as reworkings of established cultural themes rather than as cultural inventions.

An example of this process can be found in the way that cultic groups 'mystify' areas of uncertainty or incomplete knowledge: in the 1950s outer space was just such an area, and there was a period of florescence in UFO and cosmic cults. By the early 1960s outer space had been partly demystified and the exploration of "inner space" became a major preoccupation of New Religious Movements; indeed, it will be argued that this remains a

preoccupation of the contemporary New Age.

Historical antecedents of the New Age can be traced through the development of individualism in Western thought, and especially its religious variants. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the broader context of this development, but a key aspect of it - and therefore a plausible reference point for the present argument - can be located in the Protestant Reformation. In both Calvinism, with its 'unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual', and Lutheranism, where the believer 'feels himself to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit', there are unmistakable pointers to the emergence of the individualised style of religiosity found in the cultic milieu of the New Age. In the absence of structure or of clearly defined ideological boundaries, the social context of individualised religiosity depends on its adherents experiencing parallel emotions: instead of constituting a community of worshippers, they are - to use the kind of technical analogy which is often adopted by such movements - 'in phase'.

That such developments were well established by the turn of the present century can be seen in the work of two exceptionally prescient sociologists, Emile Durkheim and Ernst Troeltsch. Throughout his career, Durkheim was pre-occupied with the question of social solidarity and the means by which it could be maintained in modern complex societies. His treatment of this theme involves an analysis of, and predictions about, religion in complex societies. The problem for Durkheim was that, while in traditional societies - characterised by a low level of division of labour - the basis of social solidarity could be found in moral consensus (or a strong collective conscience), in highly differentiated contemporary societies the same degree of moral consensus is not required because social solidarity is based more on the mutual interdependence between people brought about by the division of labour. Implied in this account is the shrinkage of that part of the **collective conscience** maintained by religion and the reorientation of the latter in an increasingly secular, human-oriented direction. The social significance of religion would weaken, and there would be a decrease in the number of beliefs that were strong enough, and held on a sufficiently collective basis, to take on a religious character.

A theme which would take on a more central role in shared values was the way in which the individual was regarded. Hence, a supreme value would be placed on the rights and dignity of the individual and, being socially shared, this would assume a religious form, so that there would emerge a 'cult of humanity'.

The following is his account - first presented in 1897 - of how this will occur, and is therefore his prediction of the form religion would take in complex societies:

As societies become larger and more densely populated, they become more complex, labour is differentiated, individual differences multiply and one can foresee the moment when there will be nothing in common between all the members of the same human group except that they are all human beings. In these conditions, it is inevitable that collective feeling will attach itself very strongly to the single aim that it shares and to which it attributes by that very fact an incomparable value. Since the individual human being is the only entity which appeals without exception to all hearts, since its exaltation is the only goal which can be collectively pursued, it cannot but acquire an exceptional importance in all eyes. It thus rises far above all human objectives and takes on a religious character.

In arguing that humanity itself would come to be seen as sacred, there are obvious links with emphases in Protestant theology: 'This is why man has become a god for man, and it is why he can no longer turn to other gods without being untrue to himself. And just as each of us embodies something of humanity, so each individual mind has within it something of the divine, and thereby finds itself marked by a characteristic which renders it sacred and inviolable to others'.

There are more detailed observations in Durkheim's prediction that offer insights on New Age religiosity. His statement that the 'cult of humanity' will appeal in particular to those who are aware of having 'nothing in common' - which can be interpreted to refer to those who occupy specialist roles in the occupational structure and who lack primary group membership as a source of identity - describes the environment of the skilled and the mobile who have been the main consumers of New Age religiosity. He also thought there would be a variety of groups within the overall 'cult of human-

ity', appealing to specific social constituencies through the special emphasis of their beliefs but united in their elevation of human personality to an absolute goal. Contemporary scientific ideas, rather than being rejected, would be incorporated in the belief systems of such groups, though possibly in a transmuted form. Again, the presence in the New Age network of groups emphasising therapy and self-transformation through esoteric techniques would appear to confirm his prediction.

An almost identical prediction about the future of religion was made in 1911 quite independently by Ernst Troeltsch. His church-sect dichotomy is well known, but he also developed the concept of an emergent form of religiosity in Western societies to which he gave the label 'mysticism'. Like Durkheim, he predicts a religious form characterised by individualism and combining religious ideas, often drawn from non-Christian religions - with modern scientific thought, albeit in a flexible, free-floating way. Adherents to mystical forms of religion, he suggests, have little desire for organised fellowship and place more emphasis on the importance of freedom for the interchange of ideas. He continues:

Gradually, in the modern world of educated people, the third type has come to predominate. This means, then, that all that is left is voluntary association with like-minded people, which is equally remote from Church and Sect... It is neither Church nor Sect, and has neither the concrete sanctity of the institution nor the radical connection with the Bible. Combining Christian ideas with a wealth of modern views, deducing social institutions, not from the Fall but from a process of natural development, it has not the fixed limit for concessions and the social power which the Church possesses, but it also does not possess

the radicalism and the exclusiveness with which the sect can set aside the State and economics, art and science.

Troeltsch uses virtually the same words as Durkheim when he argues that in this form of religion 'The isolated individual, and psychological abstraction and analysis become everything'.

In view of the emphasis among New Age groups on the discovery and enhancement of the self, there is much resonance in Troeltsch's suggestion that self-perfection and self-deification are the ethical absolutes which emerge from modern individualism: when these are coupled with a strong emphasis on tolerance, these goals are highly congruent with the pluralist environment of a modern, complex society. Pluralism can also be related to syncretism - another feature of the New Age movement - since consumers of mystical religion 'mix and match' their beliefs from a variety of sources, both secular and spiritual - the latter also involving non-Christian sources of beliefs. Finally, Troeltsch saw the appeal which Romanticism - both because of its idealisation of the individual and its pantheistic notion of an all-pervasive spiritual quality within the world - might have for liberal, educated Protestants (and, we might indicate, for participants in the New Age). The end product is 'simply a parallelism of religious personalities... This is the secret religion of the educated classes'.

Troeltsch's concept of mysticism was adapted by Becker, who used the term 'cult' to depict the end-point of Christian individualism (note that his use of the term should be strictly distinguished from its current media usage). Becker drew attention to the way in which the 'I' became the centre of the believer's cosmos, and thought that only a highly atomistic

and secular social order could give rise to the cultic form of religion. In view of some of the more recent manifestations of New Age esoterica, it is interesting to note that even in the 1930s Becker could refer to a variety of 'pseudo-Hinduisms' associated with 'Swamis and Yogis who consent, for a consideration, to carry their messages to the materialistic Western World'.

Based on the work of Durkheim and Troeltsch, and incorporating the more recent evaluations of Frances Westley and Colin Campbell, I would suggest the following inventory as a way of typifying the characteristic features of New Age religion:

1. It is **individualistic**. In a society with an increasing division of labour there is a demand for beliefs and lifestyles which permit individual choice and expression. There is considerable variety in religion of this sort, but a second feature provides its common thread:

2. It emphasises an **idealised human personality**. The ideal personality takes on a sacred quality as adherents pursue the goal of self-perfection and a realisation of their human potential. This will not lead to mere egoism, however, since an awareness of others in pursuit of similar goals will lead to a third feature:

3. It maintains a degree of **tolerance**. Though different elements in this humanised religion appeal to different social constituencies, with a prevailing emphasis on occupational specialists lacking intense primary group membership, there is a free exchange of ideas and a relativistic acceptance of alternative views and versions (though the precariousness of such groups may well undermine their capacity for tolerance). As a result:

4. It is **syncretistic**. A range of ideas - from the beliefs of different world relig-

ions, philosophies, esoteric and scientific traditions - is shaped into a relatively plastic amalgam by adherents and adepts. As well as an emphasis on idealised human personality, this set of ideas has in common a fifth feature:

5. It is **monistic**. Humanised religion rejects the dichotomy of body and mind, matter and spirit in favour of a worldview which sees spiritual power as diffuse and all-pervasive. In therapeutic groups, the conception of the human being in relation to the natural environment is holistic. From this follows an important feature of the ritual of humanised religion:

6. It emphasises a process whereby individuals are **"morally remade" or empowered**. Though ritual may be minimal in this associational milieu - sometimes involving only a guru/practitioner-client relationship - when it does exist it dramatises the release of inner power from a newly-enabled personality.

With specific reference to the New Age, Campbell's claim that such groups operate within a 'cultic milieu' is valuable. Networking and the interchange of ideas are prominent features of the New Age, and there is a large range of alternative networks which advertise and service consumer needs. In Britain there is The Holistic Network (a division of Earth Enterprises Ltd.), and publications such as *The Rainbow Ark* - which published 'The Networker's Diary' in issue no 4 - and *Glastonbury Communicator*. New Zealand has its Rainbow Network ("Your health and New Age network") which offers a similar smorgasbord to that of its British counterparts. Even though New Age practitioners may have a competitive, market-oriented approach, they show an awareness of complementary groups and therapies and eschew the ideological closure and monopolistic conception of

"membership" which is more typical of sectarian groups.

This results in part from the perception they have of their adherents or clients less as "members" than as "seekers". The term 'seekership' has been employed by several sociologists to highlight the self-conception of many of the adherents of groups in the cultic milieu as serial consumers of new ideas, constantly looking for a truth or truths that will meet their own personalised situations. An important aspect of this is the emphasis placed on geographical mobility. In Britain, for instance, there is now a sizeable army of 'travellers' - estimated at over 15,000 - whose lives are constructed around journeys and gatherings, often at places of symbolic significance to the New Age such as Glastonbury. The historical parallel of pilgrimage is not very remote from the contemporary pursuit and the notion of sites of intense spirituality links the New Age with prominent locations of mainstream Christianity. After two decades of agonised debate about their relevance to the contemporary world, Anglican cathedrals in Britain are now attracting revived attendance because they provide extraordinary settings for experiences which people find lacking in parish churches.

But 'seekership' includes other forms of mobility. One of the most remarkable phenomena of the post-1960s period - and one which the New Age has intensively canvassed - is the issue of labile identity. The idea that identities can be - perhaps even *should* be - continuously reshaped and rediscovered has spawned a veritable industry of therapies and self-transformation techniques. One source of this particular quest lies in the humanistic psychology of the 1960s Human Potential movement, and it has been constantly re-

packaged - often with the input of Eastern religious ideas - to provide a protean resource for identity-management. Therapy books are to the twentieth century what etiquette books were to the nineteenth. One of the principal themes of New Age culture is how to access spontaneity, and it is plausible to suggest that the techniques offered by various groups have special resonance for those involved in what Hochschild calls 'emotional labour'. In response to the experience of personal inauthenticity in a work environment dominated by the management and commercialisation of human feeling, solutions are sought in the therapeutic context of techniques such as Alexander, Bio-rhythms, Channelling, Crystals, Rebirthing, and T'ai Chi. In the United States, where many of these techniques originate or are at least first successfully marketed, the rewriting of identity has grown to epidemic proportions; and for those who are dissatisfied with one, a diversity can be offered. Aldridge-Morris has commented on the 'dramatic incidence of multiple personality syndrome in the United States relative to its virtual absence elsewhere in the world'². Given the capacity of psychological styles to be disseminated rapidly, this disparity may not long continue.

One very prominent facet of the New Age is a form of ethnic seekership which can best be labelled noble savagery. In several Western countries there is a search for "roots" among educated and affluent sections of the population which doubtless reflects a wider sense of anomie in a period of economic and social dislocation: and in Durkheim's sense this would indeed typify mobile individuals lacking strong primary group membership. Thus in Britain the 're-invention of the Celt', as folklorist Marion Bowman calls it, has provided a mythical model of

spiritually immanent, ecologically sound religion which attracts a significant tourist trade to the western fringes of Britain. Glastonbury may well be a magnet for down-at-heel (or more likely, tyre) New Age "travellers", but it has an extensive commercial network as well, where well-heeled American and British tourists can purchase relics of their true spiritual home. As Bowman has pointed out, in Glastonbury two trees constitute a "Druid Grove"! In North America itself New Agers also have recourse to indigenous Indian spirit guides through whom spiritual power may be channelled. In New Zealand there has been a resurgence of interest in Maori spirituality, though this has probably had greater influence on sections of the mainstream churches than on the New Age network.

These remarks introduce the final section of this paper because they refer to New Age consumerism, which is seen as embodying three aspects. The first concerns Colin Campbell's argument in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Much simplified, his thesis is that mature capitalism requires for its maintenance a consumer ethic through which wants are converted into needs and consumers are persuaded through advertising that consumer items or services are essential to their lifestyles. While the austere and ascetic work ethic of the early Calvinists may have been a necessary factor in the generation of entrepreneurial capitalism, it is no longer required for its maintenance - as Weber himself noticed. In its place has been inserted an ethic which Campbell traces back to its origins in Lutheran pietism and its wider social dissemination through the Romantic movement: this is the ethic which emphasises the enhancement and embellishment of the self and which thus creates a sense

of constant dissatisfaction, inducing an expanding cycle of consumption. There is a strong affinity with some sections of the New Age movement here, because those groups offering self-transformative and therapeutic insights offer the opportunity constantly to rewrite one's personality in conformity with the latest gnostic style.

A second interpretation of the part played by consumerism among New Age movements is provided by Reg Bibby, who sees new religious movements as providing supplements for science. It will be recalled that both Durkheim and Troeltsch were discussing groups which operate on the boundaries of, and which incorporate transmuted versions of, science. Bibby terms this milieu the area of 'a-science' and suggests that 'a-science' explanations are drawn upon either because scientific explanations are unavailable or because the questions asked are not amenable to scientific answers. Because there is a potential for people to supplement science, a market for a-science is created. Arguing that such a-science products as an integral component of modern consumerism, he suggests that 'a-science advocates who can read and create consumer demand, as well as publicise and deliver their products stand to know market gains'³.

Finally, Paul Heelas offers an analysis of the New Age which brings us full circle, centring on the Durkheimian theme of 'the sacralization of the self'⁴. He perceptively traces the transformation of 'self religions' from the drop-out culture of the 1960s to the more materially attuned New Age movement of the 1990s. The following passage encapsulates the process admirably:

Of particular note, whereas hippies steered well clear of the capitalist mainstream, many

'Naps' (New Age professionals) have acquired beliefs - of a kind not found in the counterculture - which enable them to believe that self-religiosity can be practised in the world of business. Findhorn, the well-known commune in the northeast of Scotland began life with a strong countercultural orientation but is now involved in management and business activities. Some Findhornians work as 'angels in pinstripes' in Hampstead. Self-sacralization, it seems, can be pursued in an experiential setting far removed from that provided by rural tranquillity.

The New Age has in fact penetrated the capitalist mainstream, offering packages of transformational techniques and stimulating a considerable literature: researchers in the field of contemporary religion could profitably spend some time browsing in the Australian Institute of Management bookshop. In addition to companies like Cunard and Pacific Bell, which have sent their executives on training courses based on the teaching of Erhard and Gurdjieff, one of the major multinational financial companies to be influenced by New Age thinking was the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Heelas draws attention to the resonance between New Age capitalism and the Western ideology of perfectibility. This has a considerable history in the American tradition of positive thinking, but in many Western societies there is an increasing emphasis on spiritual, psychological and material progress, and these

are ideals which New Age enterprises stress. Within this market, 'designer' religion (I prefer to think of it as 'deli' religion, in contrast to the more limited fare of parish/corner 'dairy' religion) is likely to prosper. 'So long as the consumer ethic retains its hold, it will seem that the ultimate act of consumption is to 'consume' all that could possibly lie within whilst obtaining all that lies without.'

Notes

1. This paper reviews and extends the material in Michael Hill, 'New Zealand's Cultic Milieu: Individualism and the Logic of Consumerism' in B. Wilson (ed) *Religion: Contemporary Issues. The All Souls Seminars in the Sociology of Religion*, London, Bellew Publishing, 1992; and 'Ennobled Savages: New Zealand's Manipulationist Milieu' in E. Barker, J.A. Beckford, and K. Dobbelaere (eds), *Secularization, Rationalism, and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993.
2. Ray Aldridge-Morris, *Multiple Personality*, Hove, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989, p108.
3. Reg Bibby and H.R. Weaver, 'Cult Consumption in Canada: A Further Critique of Stark and Bainbridge', *Sociological Analysis*, 46, 1985:451
4. Paul Heelas, 'The Sacralization of the Self and New Age Capitalism', in N. Abercrombie and A. Warde (eds), *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, pp139-166. The quotations are from p152 and p161.

The Christian Critique of New Age

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Since the late 1960s, western societies have spawned a proliferation of movements preoccupied with magic, miracle and mystery, sufficient to absorb for decades the attention of anthropologists seeking to penetrate the social construction of everyday phenomenological realities. Despite the apparent popularity of 'science' and official obeisance to scientific modes of analysing and resolving problems in the real world, at the level of popular consciousness it often seems as if the non-rational, the emotional, the spiritual dimensions of human existence have far more salience in forming people's world-views and activating motivation than supporters of 'science' might expect. It is as if the enlightenment has hardly touched us, and the filtering down of social science to popular consciousness is almost non-existent. In this post modern era, it is perhaps the critique of the enlightenment, spurred by various strands of post-modernist and post-structuralist theory within academia, which more effectively captures the ebbs and flows of phenomenological energy rather than the ghosts of the enlightenment and its commitment to the scientific project. In this paper, we will focus on one aspect of the burgeoning interest in spiritual matters, the phenomenon of what has been variously termed New Age. New Age, ontologically, comprises a heterogeneous body of beliefs and practices centring around a pre-occupation with the holistic health of the body, mind and spirit and the routines and rituals which might facilitate an appropriate balance between the individual

and the larger cosmic environment. Adherents to this New Age, sometimes described as the Age of Aquarius, are often thought to manifest a marked disenchantment with the organisational forms of orthodox religion and the prevailing Judaeo-Christian beliefs systems. In their place, they seem to want to substitute a range of beliefs derived from cultural borrowings from the orient, indigenous non-western healing systems, the occult, medieval witchcraft and so on, all complicatedly interfused with key ideological assumptions of bourgeois society.

It is not the intention here to attempt a sociological account of, or even a description of New Age. Rather, we want to note the salience of New Age in certain strands of Christian commentary on spiritual developments in western societies. The thrust of much of this commentary is concerned with what seems to be defined as a new resurgence of paganism which is thought to be overtaking large numbers of people who are trying to make sense of the human project. What is defined to be at issue by many Christian thinkers is the nature of the appeal of New Age: What is it about life in contemporary societies which renders meaning again problematic, and Christian answers to humanity's dilemmas not sufficient?

In this paper we shall attempt to outline, albeit briefly, the main themes which figure in the Christian critique of New Age.

The Christian critique of New Age has two main variants. One stems from those elements in Christian theology which

have made their peace with the Enlightenment, embracing its key tenets whilst preserving a level of human reality and its relation to the Divine Project which allows for God and the transcendent as well as spiritual means of access to the Divine which are irreducible to and beyond the sphere of science and reason. The second variant, which stems largely from the fundamentalist tradition, claiming all truth as revealed in the Bible as the Word of God, will not be the focus here. As with all fundamentalism, it is less inclined to take seriously the canons of rational argument and therefore, paradoxically, shares with New Age many common features, despite its self conception as bearer of divine truths, and its designation of New Age as the heathen "other".

The first element in the Christian critique is the charge of eclecticism, or, as the Christian might put it, syncretism. New Age is compared unfavourably with any of the major world religions in that each of them emerged and evolved in definite historical and social circumstances and are intimately related to the social structures and cultures which spawned them, whereas New Age borrows a little bit from here and a little bit from there, usually bastardising the traditions in the process. Particular beliefs and practices are abstracted from the living histories of their social contexts in a manner which eradicates their intelligibility. Any visitor to a New Age festival would be struck by the juxtaposition of beliefs and practices drawn from a multiplicity of often incompatible belief systems, but somehow grafted together in a manner that seems comfortable to potential adherents. That no criteria are suggested which might enable a rational choice between the various beliefs and practices which are on offer is of no consequence. The esoteric, the pre-

Christian, the oriental or what have you, secrete their mysterious and varied appeals self-evidently and vie with each to capture the consumers' gaze and harness their desires such that a feeling of comfort and well-being is achieved. That the various mysteries on offer frequently bear little resemblance to the symbolic meanings realised in their original context is also of little significance. We are not, in New Age, trying to undertake an elaborate use of *verstehen* to get inside the mind of the 'other' across cultures and centuries as a good initiation into Weberianism might prescribe. We are, rather, engaging in a twentieth century Cook's Tour of humanity's exotica, especially with respect to those cultural artefacts and rituals which, in our yearned-for union with the cosmos, and which our semi-erudition teaches us, have had something to do with the realm of the spiritual. From this array of offerings, we can and do take our pick, depending on how the spirit - or our spirit-guide - moves us. This eclecticism produces a lack of any intellectual or social coherence. Unlike the great world religions which, subjected to the systematic scrutiny of comparative study, could not fail to command respect, if not obeisance, the pot-pourri of New Age accoutrements reveals little more than a cosmopolitan market place, with cheap and shoddy goods, offered by a motley array of itinerant pedlars.

That we are invited to feel good, as we variously taste the offered wares, is but a more specific manifestation of the anti-rationalism of much of New Age. A significant strand in Christian thought, as we have suggested, would place itself both within the enlightenment tradition and more specifically accepting of the scientific revolution and the tools of critical thought, equally applicable to the study of

the natural and the social world. Whilst the loss of confidence in technocratic rationalism is often shared by Christians and New Age participants, leading to a critique of scientism and of many of the so-called products of science, what is retained by many Christians critics of New Age is the belief in reason - albeit limited in role, whereas New Age is thought by many Christians to have jettisoned the role of reason in the human endeavour. This is sometimes thought to be a symptom of the over concentration on the left side of the brain and the neglect of intuition, the aesthetic and feeling, all components of cosmic energies in balance, the search for which is a key characteristic of New Age.

This devaluation of human reason is but a more general manifestation of subjectivism, which displays itself at a number of levels: ontologically, in that reality is what the self defines it to be; epistemologically in that the basis of knowledge and the criteria of truth and falsity lie internal to the self and whatever is felt to be the case; and ethically, in that there is a rejection of any commitment to a supra-individual value system which might throw light on how to resolve ethical dilemmas or provide a form of moral appeal. If something seems right for you, then that is fine, and there is no possibility of further argument. Such a perspective would be anathema to any religion claiming to be on about the enunciation of moral and ethical truths, or at least providing frameworks which could be of use in guiding our thoughts about what we ought to do, as opposed to what we might want to do.

The Christian precept, to love thy neighbour as thyself and to love God and obey His Word, is far removed from a position which borders on ethical hedonism

in that what seems right to the individual and feels appropriate is endowed with moral value. It provides, as the Christians point out, no way of arbitrating between differences in moral judgement and offers no basis for a theory of duty and obligation.

Allied with its subjectivism, New Age is prone to a form of relativism, distancing itself from forms of knowing and evaluating which are seen to be claiming some timeless reality and objectivity. Everything is relative, to time, to place, and to context, but this larger relativism subsumed under some more inclusive cosmic unity which, through intuition, emotional balance and being in touch with our spiritual essence, can encapsulate our being and enable us to realise our divine destiny. Judgements as to right or wrong, truth or untruth, cannot be set against any transcendental truths and certainly not those emanating from such partial and one sided truths epitomising western Christianity. The truth claims of Christianity, therefore, claim no superior vantage point and are but one set of spiritual insights from which we can take what we please, according to our felt needs and preferences. Christianity, of course, rejects such a relativism. The truth of human destiny is to be found in the biblical message of salvation from sin and from suffering through the resurrection of Christ. Despite differences within the Christian tradition regarding whether we are saved through predestination, good works, or by faith, all are agreed that the Christian message has more than mere relativistic salience. It promises hope and forgiveness for human frailty, salvation in an eternal life here-after, and a body of principles through which to guide action which can offer humankind grace and the

'peace of God which passeth all understanding'.

The relativism and subjectivism to which New Age is prone is coupled, according to the Christian critique, to an illegitimate and exaggerated individualism. Such individualism, doubtless stemming in part from the alienation and fragmentation seen to be a characteristic of the form of contemporary societies, which through large scale and anonymous bureaucratic structures, tends to reduce the individual to a mere cog in a larger, amoral machine. But whereas the Christian tradition offers an escape from mere mortal insignificance via a personal relationship with God and the sacrifice of God's Son in the Crucifixion, and an overcoming of death through the Resurrection, New Age offers no such re-evaluation of the individual. Within Christianity, whether of the 'this worldly' or 'other worldly' variety, the concern with the individual destiny is in any case rooted in a larger human destiny - the salvation of humanity as a whole - a project which cannot be measured solely in terms of the spiritual fulfilment of the individual one by one, to borrow a Gramscian phrase. What seems objectionable to the Christian critics of New Age is the peculiarly selfish and self preoccupied form of individualism which seems to seek success and an accommodation with the status-quo and the market ethos which impels it. Just as with the conservative repulsion for anything overwhelmed by market principles and values, so too with the Christian critique. Despite New Age's claim to be offering a higher form of transcendent truths and a cosmic future open to infinite possibilities, Christians often believe that New Age sells out to the here and now and knows of no forms of success other than those offered through the present socio-economic structure with all

its greed, materialism, and the superficial rewards of mammon. All that is necessary, assert New Age devotees, for success is the will and the motivation for self transformation, and if these prove difficult to muster, one can call upon umpteen meditation tapes, visualisation techniques, the wisdom of one's spirit guide, or penetrate the movements of the stars as useful aids to the project of self-transformation. Indeed, one of the liveliest strand in New Age beliefs and practices is to be found in the commodification of the market in human potential, especially in corporate management training programs and weekend self help sessions for the middle classes.

Another element in the Christian opposition to New Age is the latter's alleged gnosticism, an age old alleged heresy which caught Christian attention from the second century onwards. The gnostics claimed to have access to the Divine truth through intuitive knowledge and esoteric lore which was believed to ensure the salvation of its possessor. Scholars differ as to the essential elements of gnosticism, but what unites the gnostic tradition to New Age, according to Christian commentators, is the belief in the Divine spark in humankind, thrust into a world of flux, fate and the inevitability of birth and death and needing to be re-awakened through the rediscovery of the spirit. The gnostic 'knows' and has become aware of his divine being and destiny. Through gnosis or self-consciousness, humankind can expect the final consummation of the world process. The influence of gnosticism on such movements as Theosophy in the twentieth century has been well documented, as has the historical legacy of the latter movement on the contemporary manifestations of New Age. The precondition for gnosticism was the experience of

the absurdity of and the alienation from the universe but through 'gnosis', the possibility of a divine spiritual re-integration is assured. The denial by the gnostics of the real body of Christ and of bodily resurrection remained an on-going sore in the battle between Christianity and gnosticism. The reduction of reality to mere spiritual reality and the elevation of humankind to the divine is what leads to the charge of gnosticism in the New Age Movement and the inevitable antagonism between it and Christianity.

A further and related concern expressed by Christian critics centres around the interest in the occult by New Age participants. This interest takes many forms, ranging from a revival of witchcraft, the belief that crystals hold the mysterious key to the energies of the universe, the fascination with the identification of bodily auras, the belief in astral bodies, and, not least the movement of the stars captured through the ancient art of astrology which gives meaning to the cosmos as a whole and to the individual's place in it. The secrets exuded by the occult take on a peculiarly bourgeois form as any reader of the star columns in the mass media will attest, as luck in money making, romantic love and success in the work-place are predicted aspects of one's lunar destiny. Christians have fought throughout their history against a belief in the occult. The objections range from its denial of human responsibility for individual circumstances, and for the state of sin in the world, its rejection of a personal God with an interest in the redemption of humanity through the Divine Sacrifice of God's Son, and its belief that there are a range of supernatural forces in the universe, access to which can be activated by magical rituals of various brands (depend-

ing on which particular occult tradition is being drawn upon).

At the heart of much of New Age thinking is a commitment to a monistic view of the universe. This is the belief that all reality is one and that there is a profound interconnectedness between all of reality's apparent elements and this interconnectedness is ultimately spiritual. Such an idea is rejected by Christians who want to preserve a dualistic distinction between the spiritual and the material and the uniqueness of the human species from all other living beings. This monism tends to abolish the relevance of the category of history and the role that human interaction with matter, with material reality, has played in specifically human history. Whilst Christians want to hold onto the role of spiritual factors in the evolution of the human species and in questions of the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, their belief in the reality of bodily death is often far removed from the ideas about death articulated by members of New Age. We have referred above to the idea of spirit guides. Pervasive in New Age is a belief in reincarnation, the idea that we have lived before and we will live again and that we can remain in touch with the spiritual manifestations of our previous existences through the art of channelling. Much has been written about our so-called ability to choose our spirits and decide whether or not we will listen to their messages, depending on whether we feel comfortable with what is said. This belief has given rise to a proliferation of techniques for gaining access to our spirits, such as past-lives therapy, the discussion of near-death experiences, creative visualisations through which we might contemplate which form we might assume in the next life, and rebirthing. Again, the New Age commitment to rein-

carnation takes on a very different form from its manifestations in such religions as Hinduism. But however its refashioning, it is not hard to see why Christians should take exception to it. The crucial significance of the historical Jesus and his Crucifixion and Resurrection is accorded no place.

We have now alluded to the main themes which figure in the Christian critique of New Age. The astute observer will notice a variety of points where the apparent sins of New Age appear to conflict. How can one, for example, simultaneously believe in the occult and yet

subscribe to an individualist faith where one's future lies in one's own hands and where through releasing one's transformative energies one can achieve an appropriate karmic balance? Or how does one reconcile an idealisation of the material level of reality with a preoccupation with one's physical health which characterises many New Agers? We merely note here that New Age is not a single religious phenomenon but includes a range of tendencies some of which would be more guilty of the spiritual errors identified by Christians than others.

This New Age Business: a Constructive Critique

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Introduction

The wide appeal and success of the burgeoning New Age movements with their colourful and zestful forms of spirituality, is proving an ever greater challenge to waning Christian orthodoxy, and seen as a threat by the still-successful evangelical religions. Drawing on diverse sources such as ancient mystical teaching, myths, the Perennial Philosophy, esoteric Christianity, depth psychology, and the New Physics, New Age teachings and practices cut across the divisions of religion, blurring the old edges and letting go of all the traditional formalities and creeds.

If nothing else, New Age phenomena could be seen as providing a valuable service in highlighting the possibility of a genuine spirituality of life as opposed to a mere conformity to the creeds, dogmas

and rituals of a religion. They raise the question: 'Which is more important - what you profess and what you do, or, what you are becoming? - i.e. religious status or spiritual development?' But the enormous variety of New Age teachings and practices, with their frequently external or sensuous appeal, cries out for some well-founded basis for evaluation; some deeper criteria with which to attempt to judge the real quality and significance of what is going on in this modern spiritual 'marketplace'.

My main purpose in this paper is to turn back to the 18th century to present some of the spiritual principles that can be drawn from the works of Emanuel Swedenborg¹. For me, these provide a firm foundation for evaluating the diversity of New Age thinking.

Swedenborg's cross-disciplined spiritual philosophy drew on theoretical sci-

ence, philosophy, psychology, biblical interpretation, theology, and his own lengthy experiences of a cosmic spiritual dimension that opened up within his deeper soul. Key elements in the ideas and general philosophy of subsequent forerunners of the New Age, such as Blake, Schelling, Alice Bailey and Carl Jung, as well as leaders of the American New Thought Movement², such as Emerson, can often be traced back to Swedenborg's deep and wide ranging teachings and spiritual experience, suggesting that he, perhaps, may be looked back to as a main source of inspiration for the New Age, and may indeed provide the basis for evaluation of the bewildering plethora of spiritual teachings and revelations flooding into the world at this time.

Spiritual principles drawn from Swedenborg, together with a brief outline of analysis of discrete levels of consciousness, will be drawn on to form the basis for a critique of genuine spirituality and spiritual development in the New Age.

Spiritual Principles for the New Age³

1. Oneness of All Life

New Age thought affirms that there is and can only be one source of Life, which is necessarily in all created forms for them to be maintained in existence. This one Life has been given many names - the Source, the Infinite, the Absolute, the Divine, God, Brahma, Allah, etc. Although essentially invisible, 'It' manifests in infinitely many ways. Humankind's fundamental mistake, or 'Fall', is to see and regard himself or herself as distinctly separate from nature, other persons and God - a sense of separation constantly reinforced by 'Old Age' orthodox Christian

teaching and neo-orthodox teaching of God as 'wholly other' than humans.

Swedenborg emphasises that 'oneness' is not a simplistic non-differentiation, but the interconnection and interpenetration of many distinctive 'parts' drawn by Love into a harmonious whole.

*A form makes one the more perfectly in proportion as the things which enter the form are distinctly different and yet united.*⁴

2. Diversity in Unity

So, in the holistic thinking of the New Age, all of creation is a unitary whole and at the same time a complete network of interrelationships, with reality lying not in objective units, but in dynamic functions or patterns of life, each interacting ultimately with all others. This reflects Swedenborg's Universal Human, encompassing all God's creation in its order and perfection in which the one Whole can be viewed as manifesting countless interrelated functions exactly mirrored by all the various functions of the physical body, so that human physiology presents a correspondential picture of the collective world of spirit infilled with the Divine.

From this, the concepts of variety within unity and universal religion follow, implying the need for many varied forms of religion and spirituality with one common but infinite Source - and all serving the one Divine Life in unity of love. So in Swedenborg's concept of heaven, we find teaching and worship indefinitely diverse, with each society of souls reflecting Divine Love and Wisdom in their own unique way.

*The perfection of heaven is the result of variety in worship, for unity, to be perfect, must be formed from various parts.*⁵

So the true heart of all religion is love of the One God of a thousand names, and the fellowship of all peoples. Jesus himself expresses this universal principle when he draws together the two great commands, 'Love God and love your neighbour', as the basis for evaluation and interpretation of the scriptures.

3. Universal Christ as the Link between the Divine and Humankind

Present in much New Age thinking is the concept of a Higher Self, or True Self, as the dwelling place of the Divine within individual human consciousness which links God and humanity. In Christian thinking this would be called 'the Christ in humanity', or, the true Christian is said to be part of the 'Body of Christ'. But unlike the old Christian orthodoxy which still regards Christ as a separate individual divine Person, the New Age concept is a universalised one which can be based as much on a concept of universal Buddhahood as that of Christhood or Christ spirit.

Each individual partakes deep within of a universal spirit which is God's inner presence, even though he or she may not yet be conscious of the fact or may be obscuring it beneath delusions and distortions of all kinds.

Swedenborg introduces a new term - 'the Divine Human' to denote the eternal manifestation of the invisible Divine in perfect Human Form. By 'Human Form', he envisages the **pre-creation** manifestation of the invisible Divine itself, which is perfect and complete in itself, depending on no prior form, and being therefore the Archetype or Original from which all created forms, spiritual and natural, are derived. In the dimension of time, this eternal Form manifested in the historical Christ as the Perfect Human perfectly transmitting the invisible divinity as the

Holy Spirit. This Divine Human is the second aspect of an eternal trinity or trine within the nature of the Divine.

Whereas the old orthodox theology had separated the one Divine into three co-equal Persons, each effectively having a different personality, Swedenborg describes the universal trinity within the Divine as:

*The Divine called the Father is the Divine Being (esse), the Divine Human called the Son is the Divine Manifestation (existere) from that Being; and the Divine called the Holy Spirit is the Divine Proceeding from the Divine Manifestation and from the Divine Being.*⁶

This trine is mirrored in the finite created human being as soul, body and an outflowing sphere.

This essential trine is tending to become obscured by prevailing New Age interest in the trine of physical, mental and spiritual health, as observed in recent festivals of Mind, Body and Spirit. A negative consequence here can be the subtle encouragement of an exclusive focus on the health of the individual rather than on the quality of one's relationship with God and with humanity as a whole as the bearer of Divine Spirit.

To spotlight another error in some New Age thinking, the concept of the inner Christ does not mean that we **are** Christ or divine, but rather that our Higher Self is part of, and partakes in, the eternal Human manifestation of God that is the Universal Christ.

However, some individuals in the new Age claim to be the Christ. To what extent are they partaking of the universal Christ, and to what extent perhaps of personal inflated ego? Here the New Age treads on very 'thin ice' and might do well to look to the Mahayana Buddhist ex-

ample of the bodhisattva who declines the achievement of full buddhahood in favour of remaining compassionately in touch with less enlightened beings.

4. Ego - Mark of Human Creation

In the psychology of New Age thinking, human creation emerges within the One Life as an awareness of separate selfhood or 'I-ness'. This state of ego consciousness is termed 'proprium' by Swedenborg, who shows that it is essential to the divine purpose that there be a reciprocal love between the Creator and human creation - a love which flows from the Divine Source, God, and is received as a distinct human experience. However, as Swedenborg points out, it is this experience of apparent separateness from the Divine Source that can lead to error and distortions of the inflowing Divine Life.

Much is rightly made in New Age teachings of exclusive ego awareness as the origin of all negativity and evil; and when the paradox of ego - with its negative and positive aspects is not understood, there is the danger of seeking to extinguish ego as something totally undesirable. Again this can lead to a belief that 'I am God' - the ultimate error, or blasphemy as some might regard it. But if ego consciousness is understood to have an essential function in the Divine purpose, then in any state in which ego seems to be absent, it may be realised that far from being extinguished, ego must in fact be 'alive and kicking' in the unconscious. Then, the belief 'I am God' is seen simply as ego masquerading as God.

5. Power of Inner Belief

The powerful effect, for better or worse, that a person's often unconscious inner belief system has on her or his spiritual state is becoming widely recognised in the New Age Movement; and also, just

how much this belief system may be at variance with her or his overt conscious beliefs. The latter, when merely an intellectual set of beliefs is, in Swedenborg's terms, 'dead' - having no power to save one from the spiritual ill effects of a separated, self-centred inner life.

For Swedenborg, a 'saving faith' is an effect of the spiritual desire to love and serve others, stemming from an inner belief system based on Divine Love as the only reality and source of true happiness. This true or living faith, which at first may not be coupled with an overt faith in God or some religious teaching, has real power to change one's life from within, so that the spirit is enabled to experience the divine states of peace, love and joy. This may explain why some New Age groups are not overtly religious and offer 'self-realisation' or 'holistic health' in place of 'salvation'; and insofar as they are sought for increasing one's power to affect others beneficially, these too are ways of receiving the flow of Divine love and spirit from the Source.

6. Esoteric Significance of Sacred Texts

The New Age approach instinctively looks beyond literal meaning to facets and aspects of the soul mirrored in the sacred stories.

The ancient esoteric mode of expressing spiritual realities through the medium of myth, fable and parable was clearly recognised by Swedenborg who has provided a key to reopen the door to the universal law of correspondence between the spiritual and material domains.⁷ Swedenborg provides a spiritual language in terms of levels and facets of love and wisdom, and their opposites, with which to grasp intellectually as well as intuitively the esoteric correspondential meaning of sacred scriptures and of the elements of nature which forms their col-

ourful backdrop. Thus, the spiritual is always mirrored in the natural forms and images, not through any random arbitrary use of symbols, but by a universal divine process in which all outer natural forms are created as correspondential uses or functions to forms of spirit from which they originate.

*From the things which come forth in the natural world can be seen as in a mirror the things which are in the spiritual world.*⁸

The principle on which correspondence between inner and outer, or spiritual and natural, rests is that of use or function. So, for example, spiritual light serves the same function in the spirit as natural light does in the world, namely, to show up what is there so that it can be seen and identified. This rational principle, illustrated countless times in Swedenborg's writing, combines wonderfully with the openness of meditation to provide illuminating insights into one's inner psyche, its dynamics and the Divine Love at the heart of Life.

7. Spiritual Transformation and Growth

Unlike Western orthodox Christianity which stresses human weakness, guilt and sinfulness, the New Age affirms an inherent potential in humans for Spiritual development. Because he or she is essentially linked to God, and drawing on the power of God within him or her, a person's potential can be developed limitlessly, though within certain personal constraints. What is needed is to discover the inner blocks which are inhibiting growth and to seek guidance and practise in removing them. Much of Swedenborg's theology is concerned with this process, which he terms 'regeneration', and which is an ongoing transformation

of spirit from within as negative elements are brought to light and rejected. Effectively, this regeneration is the same as becoming united to God.⁹ The pattern of spiritual growth is not linear but a cyclic upward spiralling, advancing through states of enlightenment alternating with states of spiritual darkness, or 'temptation combats', which arise as hidden or buried selfish tendencies emerge into consciousness.

The process of spiritual growth for Swedenborg also involves the concept of healing of the spirit which figures in much New Age practice. However, there are several pitfalls in the area of spiritual transformation that are not always being avoided. The success of many techniques for personal and spiritual development, along with rejection of a blind 'faith alone' Christianity, can lead many to dispense with the need for Divine salvation. Also, there is the fall into sensuous pseudo-spirituality, which is a typical example of confusion of levels of consciousness as when experiences of heightened sensitivity to colour, sounds, etc. and experiences of 'cosmic consciousness', or oneness of all life, are mistaken for deep spirituality.

8. Freewill, Responsibility and Divine Providence

In New Age thought great emphasis is rightly placed on freewill and personal responsibility for one's choices. Reliance on external authority of any kind is felt to have a stifling effect on spiritual growth - the only true authority being the internal one of conscience, the inner teacher, the Christ within. So, too, in Swedenborg we find this vital though generally unpopular doctrine made central. Self-examination, the seeking of enlightenment through meditating on the Scriptures, and the deci-

sion of the will are essential for regeneration, or spiritual growth.

*It is the part of a wise man to know the purposes that are in him...He must pay attention to the various states in which he is, for they greatly vary his perception...How important it is to explore and know from what origin the affections are.*¹⁰

Unfortunately, in the New Age there appears to be a growing tendency that runs counter to this principle, that is to surrender this responsibility by becoming dependant on predictive techniques for guidance. The result is to lose sight of the necessary ultimate freedom and responsibility of the soul to make its own fundamental choices.

9. Balance of Right and Left Brain Modes of Thought

In his own time Swedenborg's insight into the different functions of the two halves of the brain went completely unnoticed, and is generally not known of even today. According to Swedenborg,

*the left side of the brain corresponds to rational or intellectual things, and the right side corresponds to the affections or things of the will.*¹¹

He was well aware of the extreme imbalance in his day in favour of coldly rational and argumentative disputes, and he taught that the two aspects of 'head' and 'heart' need to be balanced. Recent brain research indicates that the right brain is associated with intuitive, holistic, synthesising thought as opposed to the analytical logical thought associated with the left brain.

In New Age circles high profile is given to the intuitive right brain mode, though sometimes at the expense of intellectual rationality. However, the need for

harmonising complementaries, or polarities, is generally recognised and stressed.

A common method of method of keying into the intuitive mode is that of meditation - a technique regularly used by Swedenborg. However, he also stressed the importance of a framework of rational teaching as a safeguard against ingrained spiritual fallacies being reflected back to the meditator.

10. Spiritual World Communication

Belief in the person as an immortal spirit is universal in New Age thinking, though controversy continues to rage over whether after death the spirit lives through cycles of physical or spiritual re-birth before re-uniting with its divine Source.

The ability of discarnate spirits to communicate spiritual truth to incarnate spirits in a variety of ways is widely recognised and, indeed, much New Age teaching is claimed to have come from relatively recent sources of this nature.

Swedenborg, who sheds a wealth of light not only on the nature of the spiritual world, but also on the fundamental principles which govern it, describes the natural and widespread communication of angels with humans in the first, or 'most ancient' period on earth, and how in the course of time spiritual degeneration set in when mankind generally lost the ability to receive such highly spiritual messages. But he also warns of the danger of deliberately seeking to communicate with the spiritual world and of being influenced by communications from lower spirits, ignorant, deceptive or malicious, who are drawn by one's less pure motives. However, with the coming of the New Age, he foresees genuine angelic communication becoming a common and widespread experience.

11. Angelic Help

It is one of Swedenborg's key teachings that all angels are from the human race¹², rather than the static orthodox belief in angels as a prior separately created species. This dynamic concept of spiritual development of human consciousness into angelhood is growing more prevalent.

Many New Age movements regard angels not only as intermediaries or guides in the process of revelation, but also as very present helpers to those in lower natural states of consciousness and life, serving as channels of Divine love and Wisdom. Swedenborg provides a fundamental framework of teaching on the flow of both life and light from the Infinite down through various spiritual or angelic levels and into man's normal everyday consciousness, providing intuitive perception and those essential impulses to loving activity.

There are many now claiming to receive angelic communication and guidance, but the danger is that some may rely on their 'spirit guide' to the exclusion of their own potentially deeper spiritual discernment.

12. The Second Coming of Christ

Those New Age movements influenced more specifically by Christian sources often see the spirituality and awareness which is emerging as a new Christian dispensation, and as a triumphant revelation of the inner Christ which forms his prophesied 'coming at the end of the age'. In Swedenborg's teachings this view is fully presented as a coming of Christ consciousness in the spirit of humans with an opening up of spiritual insight to an esoteric understanding of Sacred Scripture, revealing to modern man 'the glory of the risen Christ concealed within the 'clouds' of their literal level'.

Thus, in the New Age, the manifestation of Christ's Second Coming is to be seen in the emergence of a renewed inner spirituality and deepened spiritual awareness, which had all but disappeared after the original 'primitive' era in Christianity.

Conclusion

Perhaps we are now in a clearer position to see that in any religion or spiritual movement the essential mark of true spirituality, as opposed to pseudo-spirituality, is the presence of developed or developing natural-rational and spiritual-rational levels of consciousness (in Swedenborg's terminology). Without these, religion or New Age spirituality will tend to be primitive, immature, superstitious and subject to error and egocentricity. It is hardly surprising to see such tendencies emerging in this still very youthful and, as yet, inexperienced New Age. But when both these vital rational levels are being developed, there may well be further transcendence towards consciousness of an essential unity at the spiritual heart of all philosophies and religions - the one Truth or Reality - the One God.

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3. M.W.Stanley. 'The relevance of Emanuel Swedenborg's theological concepts for the New Age as it is envisioned today' from R. Larsen (ed.) *Emanuel Swedenborg. A Continuing Vision* Swedenborg Foundation Inc., New York

4. E. Swedenborg. *Divine Providence* Swedenborg Society, London. para 4
5. E. Swedenborg. *Heaven and Hell* Swedenborg Society, London. para 56
6. E. Swedenborg. *Apocalypse Explained* Swedenborg Society, London. para 1111
7. E. Swedenborg. *Four Leading Doctrines* Swedenborg Society, London; M. W. Stanley.

- Universal Law of Correspondence* New Church College, Manchester, U.K.
8. E. Swedenborg. *Heaven and Hell* para 56
9. E. Swedenborg. *Divine Providence* para 92
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- 12 E. Swedenborg. *Heaven and Hell* para 311

When the Devil came to Christchurch

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On Saturday June 5 1993, a verdict was reached in New Zealand's most extensive child sex abuse case, with the defendant being found guilty of sixteen out of an original total of twenty five charges put to the jury after a six-week trial. On June 22 the childcare worker was jailed for ten years. In a New Zealand context, this was no ordinary sexual abuse case; indeed, a number of similarities exist between this case and the noted McMartin preschool sexual abuse case - detailed later - in Los Angeles during the early 1980s. Both cases involved bizarre claims of ritual sexual abuse, implied satanic conspiracy, and referred to child pornography networks. How, in a society as secularised as New Zealand, do claims of satanism gain widespread public acceptance? To answer this question, it is worthwhile to trace the events leading up to the Christchurch case, taking note of the way in which a moral panic concerning child sexual abuse lay behind the initial allegations and later spread throughout the country, involving allegations, and sometimes convictions, against members of other religious groups including Catholic priests,

the leader of the Centrepoint community, and most recently the leader of the Cooperative Christian community. There are many similarities in the nature of the allegations and the response by authorities to the simultaneous investigation of The Family in Australia.

The satanism scare has been to the 1980s and early 1990s what the religious cult scare was to the 1970s¹. As in the case of the religious cult scare, an Antisatanism Movement was mobilised in the United States to meet the threat posed by alleged satanic cults. It was led by family-based groups and Christian fundamentalist interests - the latter subscribing to a millennial belief in an 'end time' when the forces of satan would be especially strong, evidence for which they found partly in the proliferation of New Age groups with an interest in esoteric or occult themes - with strong support from some mental health professionals and local law enforcement officers. It was about the time when the initial stages of the religious cult scare began to recede that public concern about satanic cults began to escalate. The origins of the satanism scare

can be dated precisely: in 1980 the book *Michelle Remembers* was published, jointly written by Michelle Smith - the first of a succession of alleged ritual abuse 'survivors' - and her therapist, later husband, Lawrence Pazder. The latter had been a medical practitioner in West Africa in the early 1960s at a time of great public concern there over secret cannibalistic cults.

From the early 1980s, and with escalating consequences, a widespread moral panic about satanism spread across the States. Its scenario broadened to incorporate a number of alleged elements: the large-scale abduction of children, the abuse of children as part of satanic ritual, human sacrifice, and cannibalism. The panic was disseminated through secular networks as numbers of police officers, social workers, and other public officials became involved in seminars and workshops aimed at combating the menace of satanism. The anti-satanic movement spread to Britain later in the 1980s, and as in the United States it was propagated by fundamentalist Christians who presented themselves as 'experts' in this unfamiliar form of child abuse and were consequently invited to speak at social worker and police seminars.

The satanism scare came in the wake of other campaigns in the United States to protect child victims. In the early 1960s this took the form of concern over the 'battered-baby syndrome', then by the late 1970s it became increasingly focussed on sexual abuse through child pornography and prostitution. In the early 1980s a movement to locate missing children emerged among claims that strangers abducted 50,000 (or by some estimates 90,000) children a year. Though research consistently linked child abuse and neglect with structural problems such

as unemployment and poor housing, this was anathema to conservative politicians from Nixon onwards, and the problem was therefore framed as one of 'stranger danger'. After the emergence of accounts by alleged adult 'survivors', members of the child-saving movements began to speak of 'satanic abuse', claiming that satanic cults were at work and were responsible for child abductions. It should be remarked that an important source of deviance construction is the existence of agencies established for its detection and processing, who are often the most prominent claims-makers. Thus the agencies of child-protection created a large-scale network of social workers, police officers, counsellors, and psychiatrists whose task was to help child victims. The satanism scare enabled them to assume responsibility for an allegedly new form of child victimisation and as a result they were able to expand their organisational base.

While the psychological dimensions of the satanism scare are too complex to permit brief summary, some aspects should be mentioned². The first is the syndrome labelled post-traumatic stress disorder, which sprang to prominence in the 1980s: this is a condition of maladaptive behaviour which could be explained by reference to supposedly traumatic experiences in the patient's past. The condition was sometimes coupled with multiple personality disorder - a now frequently-diagnosed condition in America - and the syndrome became a typical attribute of 'occult survivors'. Furthermore, it became a dogma of therapists treating such individuals that denial indicated proof; indeed, patients' denials of having been involved in satanic ritual were dismissed as a typical symptom of the underlying disorder.

In both the States and Britain the media, especially popular newspapers and television talk shows, were much involved in spreading the satanism scenario. Even the exposure of fraudulent claims could be seen as 'good copy' by newspapers, and the inference that, even in the absence of corroborative evidence, satanism was nevertheless being practised was regularly made. Coupled with the suggestion that 'pillars of the community' might be involved - a feature of earlier suspicions about paedophile rings - the capacity to conceal evidence was thus explained. The purported activities of satanists became a 'perfect conspiracy', since they left no evidence of large-scale abduction or breeding of infants for sacrifice, which was commonly alleged.

In seeking explanations for the particular concern over the welfare of children, it is important to be aware of the tension experienced by parents who rely on daycare to support dual-career families but who sense that they are losing control over their children's socialisation (and here one should recall the fundamentalist goal of re-domesticating the mother). In the States the symbolic focus of concern has become the daycare centre, and in 1983 the now well-publicised McMartin pre-school case surfaced, in which the mother of a two-year-old boy made bizarre allegations about abuse at a pre-school: she was later hospitalised and diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, but the publicity the case attracted further drew attention to a perceived widespread problem. It was at about this time that the term 'satanic abuse', which sometimes elicited skepticism, began to be replaced by the term 'ritual abuse'. Joel Best has commented on this 'secularisation' of an allegedly religious problem:

The danger posed by redefining a religious problem (satanism) in these secular terms (ritual abuse and the like) is that the imagery of the threatened child is so powerful and compelling. Who can resist taking the children's side, joining the cause of child protection? The parents involved in several ritual abuse cases organised around the slogan "Believe the children"... But in most cases, the children's voice is heard through their interpreters - the therapists who interview child victims and adult survivors - who, through these interviews, extract the damning testimony of satanic abuse.³

Support for this interpretation would seem to lie in the significant finding that the overwhelming majority of interviewees, both adults and children, do not say anything about satanic cult ritual abuse when they embark on their interviews.

Following the 'pillars of the community' logic, it has been demonstrated that police in the United States adopt a four-tiered, processual model of satanic crime in which adepts are supposed to progress from marginally delinquent dabblers, through psychopathic drug use, followed by organised satanic involvement, to major occult crimes as 'pillars of the community' (and hence able to conceal their activities effectively). The implausibility of this sequence should be apparent, but it has not prevented 'cult cops' from propagating the model at child protection and law enforcement seminars. As with the involvement of therapists and social workers, the involvement of police as 'secular' professionals (since not all American 'cult cops' are Christian fundamentalists) gives a degree of credibility to a scenario which might otherwise be dismissed as absurd. This involvement has also assisted in the international spread of the satanism scare through occupational networks.

In New Zealand, the satanic ritual abuse scenario came as a direct import from the United States. In August, 1991, a visiting American Christian sexual abuse therapist, speaking at various fundamentalist backed workshops and venues, was quoted as saying that

it had been found in the United States that the usual damage caused to children by satanic ritual abuse was a multi-personality disorder. Research showed that about half the children suffering multi-personality disorders had been victims of satanic ritual abuse. (Christchurch Press, 27.8.91)

In the same news item, the Commissioner for Children added a cautionary note saying that while 'there was a worldwide phenomenon of satanic worship, ... whether it related to abuse of children or just mass hysteria, was another matter'.

During the following month, satanism and ritual abuse received further attention in the form of a workshop presentation given at a Family Violence Prevention Conference in Christchurch: the workshop was a prominent feature of this particular conference. Reports of a paper to be presented at this workshop on behalf of the Ritual Action Group (RAG) had already appeared in two Sunday newspapers prior to the workshop (see *Dominion Sunday Times* 1.9.91, and *Sunday Star* 1.9.91).

The content of this presentation deserves scrutiny because it draws upon both anti-cult and anti-satanist literature, beginning with a definition of ritual abuse as 'physical, sexual and psychological abuse that is systematic, ceremonial and public.' (FVPPCC, vol 2:6) This is followed by comments on types of cults which 'are most often sources of ritualised abuse' including fundamentalist Christian churches, Freemasons and oc-

cult/satanic cults. The likelihood that such ritual abuse is being practised in New Zealand at 'pre-schools, day-care centres, churches, summer camps, and at the hands of baby sitters and neighbours' is suggested. Sources quoted in this presentation come directly from the USA, from Peg West in New South Wales, and from the claimed accounts of local adult 'survivors' of ritual abuse.

The satanist/cult scenario is presented as progressive in nature, with victims being subjected to ritual abuse and intimidation from early childhood. Abuse and participation in abuse continues through adolescence. By the time victims reach adulthood, they become the perpetrators of abuse, having been indoctrinated into the belief system of the cult from an early age. According to the RAG group, cult recruitment is often carried out on an inter-generational basis within families so that ritual abuse becomes a way of life. The bizarre nature of many of the assertions made in the presentation deserve comment, because they are identical with those of the American antisatanist literature. Parents, for instance, are advised to be on the lookout for: a black covered book or computer counterpart that has types and locations of rituals and contracts for suicide or homicide; ceremonial knives; candles; chalice; robes; photos and/or videos; books about belief systems, eg satanic; and 'animal bones and human bones, especially skull, right upper leg, rib and upper portion of right arm'.

The RAG presentation at the conference in Christchurch in September, 1991 was followed by a period of intensified media interest in claims of satanism. In November, a newspaper report noted that police investigations into ritualistic cults were being stepped up following bizarre claims coming from Australia which told

of satanic cults which were linked to child pornography rings and which killed and ate babies (*Sunday News* 3.11.91). In this report, it was noted that a 'prominent New Zealand policeman' had recently spent time with various American police departments studying their investigation techniques, particularly with regard to the links between satanism and child pornography: here we see an example of 'cult cop' networking. This same policeman had earlier been reported as having links with the RAG group. The first allegations in the Christchurch creche case, which led eventually to the conviction of the childcare worker, were made in the same month.

Links between child pornography, organised sex rings, and cults practising ritual abuse have been an important feature of the satanism scare. Almost a year after the first reports of satanism in New Zealand appeared, a moral panic which was focused on child sexual abuse broke. The catalyst was the abrupt closure of the Christchurch civic creche. In September, 1992 came the news of the closure of the creche and reports that a male childcare worker from this creche was to face charges of indecent assault and sexual violation of children. That same month, Wellington police 'exposed' a major paedophile ring which was reputed to have links with an international network. At about this same time, the leader of the Centrepoint commune was facing charges of child sexual abuse and claims of abuse were beginning to emerge from other childcare centres around the country. The Department of Social Welfare now began to express concern about the 'problem' of child abuse as they were having to deal with rapidly increasing caseloads of abuse. But perhaps the biggest item to fuel the panic came with the news that

four female workers from the Christchurch creche were also to face charges of indecent assault and sexual violation. The creche case was no longer one of a lone 'predatory' male abuser, rather it was a case of 'organised' abuse.

With the idea of organised abuse, ritual elements were introduced and increasingly bizarre details began to emerge. For instance it was alleged that

On one occasion, children had been taken to an address in Hereford St and put in a tunnel or cavity area beneath a trapdoor. Afterward they were removed and made to stand naked inside a circle of adults, including the five accused.

Indecencies were committed upon them and the children were made to kick each other in the genital area (Dominion, 3.11.92)

As the case against the accused progressed, this particular incident came to be known as the 'circle incident'. The media use of this term provided a vivid image which enabled the emerging details of the case to be located within an established stereotype of ritual abuse. It was also evident that some of the protagonists in the case had made a clear link with the ritual abuse scenario, since the mother of an alleged victim of abuse called for an overseas 'expert' in ritualistic abuse to be brought in to help with the inquiry (*Dominion* 4.12.92).

The events in Christchurch show that despite New Zealand's increasingly secularised social environment, religion continues to play a remarkably resilient role in the perception and amplification of deviance. As mainstream forms of religiosity decline and are transformed into, or replaced by, fundamentalist Christian groups on the one hand and the free-floating spirituality of the New Age on the other, there is likely to be increasing po-

larisation. In their attempt to address a wider constituency, Christian fundamentalists have had some success - initially in the United States but now in other Western countries - in interpolating their moral claims over such issues as child pornography and alleged satanic abuse into the rhetoric of secular agencies such as social work and counselling. Finally, it is no coincidence that children should have become the symbolic focus of this moral panic: in a period of economic and social upheaval, children in an important sense 'represent the fulfillment of adult potential'⁴.

Notes

1. There is a rapidly growing literature on the satanism scare, much of it of excellent quality. The principal work is Richardson J.T., Best J., and Bromley, D.G. (eds), *The Satanism Scare*, New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1991; and see Jenkins, P., *Intimate Enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain* New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1992. Other important contributions are Best, J., *Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern About*

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2. Once again, the literature is extensive, but some interesting references are: Aldridge-Morris, R., *Multiple Personality*, Hove, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991; Ofshe, R.J., 'Inadvertent hypnosis during interrogation: false confession due to dissociative state; mis-identified multiple personality and the satanic cult hypothesis', *The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 40, 3, 1992:125-156; Scott, W.J., 'PTSD in DSM-III: a case in the politics of diagnosis and disease', *Social Problems*, 37, 3, 1990:294-310; Spiegel, H. 'The Grade 5 syndrome: the highly hypnotisable person', *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 22, 1974:303-319.

3. in Richardson et al., (eds), *op cit*:105

4. in Richardson et al., (eds), *op cit*:29

Some Transcendental Reflections from a Really Dead Poets' Society

John Wren-Lewis (and Julia Ward Howe)

As mentioned in an earlier issue of the *ARS REVIEW*, my meditations have recently begun to be interrupted by what appear to be 'channelled' communications from deceased poets wishing to update their verses for the New Age. These quite frequently have bearing on my professional work in Religious Studies, but the most remarkable so far in this respect was

an update from Julia Ward Howe of her **Battle Hymn of the Republic**. Set to the tune of **John Brown's Body**, the new version is directly relevant to a study I have been making of Jungian analysis, in which I wish to argue that Jung's system in effect provides a complete 'spiritual path' in modern psychoanalytical terms.

While the chorus picks up on Jung's little-known study of kundalini, the verses follow the whole analytical progression through the integration of the various archetypal complexes identified by Jung, such as the 'Shadow' or rejected side of the personality, which is the source of our lapses from good behaviour, the Anima or 'inner feminine' of the male psyche, the Persona or social mask, the Wise Old Man image, the circular mandala pattern as a symbol of inner wholeness with the Higher Self as its centre, and Jung's notion of synchronicity or 'meaningful coincidence'.

Here is the complete *Hymn of Jungian Analysis*.

I'm getting really well advanced along the mystic way,
Not sitting in the lotus chanting mantras every day,
I've Carl Jung as my mentor, so I'll never go astray
As my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

Raise , oh raise the kundalini!
Raise it 'til my brain goes steamy!
Watch your ego going teeny!
As your soul goes marching on.
I learned about my Shadow I'd split off at mother's knee;
I've worked to integrate him in a higher harmony;
Now when I lose my temper - is it him, or is it me?
But my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

I thought I'd found my soulmate, and I worshipped from afar;
I asked her if she'd live with me and be

my guiding star.
She said, 'You're being silly - don't project your Anima!'
And my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

I sought my new Persona, to express my larger Whole;
My Wise Old Man said I should take a more assertive role.
I tried it on the boss at work , and now I'm on the dole,
But my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

I dreamed that I was Canberra, built on mandala plan;
I thought I'd really made it as an integrated man -
Then I realised at my Centre was a great big hot-air fan
And my soul went marching on.

CHORUS:

En route to my analysis I pass the TAB
I slipped inside one day and won a handsome lottery -
Then my analyst said, 'Here's your bill' - that's synchronicity!
And my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

I've practised lucid dreaming and engaged in astral flight,
My chakras start vibrating as I lie in bed at night;
It may be indigestion - or a flow of heavenly light -
And my soul goes marching on.

CHORUS:

Raise , oh raise the kundalini!
Raise it 'til my brain goes steamy!
Watch your ego going teeny!
As your soul goes marching on.

Book Review

Neues Zeitalter oder verkehrte Welt. Anthropologie als Kritik.

Ina-Maria Greverus, 1990, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt. Paper.

If the science of anthropology can fairly be described as a creation of Western culture, Ina-Maria Greverus turns it on its creator with critical intent, searching for reasons why Western societies are now spawning a spurious spirituality to conceal rather than solve their considerable problems. To try to reduce the teaming variety of the spirituality industry to some kind of order by systematic analysis and explanation would be to fail to grasp the methodological problem it poses. Instead, Greverus turns to the surrealist principle of collage with its inherent ambivalence - decadence or innovation? - to supply a kind of informal format and unmethodical method for her investigation.

She offers raw material from her field notes of visits to the exotic locations anthropologists usually frequent - including Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa - and to the workshops and communes of Western seekers of wisdom. It is not always clear what the one has to do with the other or whether collapsing 'experience' into 'interpretation' yields the insights she is looking for, but by and large the interplay of collage and de-collage, in which past ends become present means and the signifier becomes the signified, allows her the flexibility to view her elusive subject from all kinds of fresh and stimulating angles.

The book is an exercise in participant observation of the strangest culture of all: one's own in a state of profound crisis.

Greverus is ever on the alert lest she be taken in by the professional charlatans of the spirituality circuit, yet equally she is on the watch for signs of creativity, hope, and transcendence. The 'happiness' and 'togetherness' peddled by innumerable gurus do not amount to peace and often enough barely conceal aggressive violence. 'Modernity' is in crisis because people are beginning to doubt its ability to produce meaning, leaving individuals to attempt to do it for themselves. In the process they fall prey to 'a regression to institutions of total meaning such as sects'. Yet 'today home (Heimat) as meaning-filled community requires a multicultural society'.

Greverus confirms de Toqueville's premonitions of modernity turning into an all-consuming Moloch. The resulting society, typified by contemporary America, is characterised by a weak hold on objects and on history. From the New England transcendentalists to the beat generation she finds traces of a narcissistic and a-social attitude which indulges in the uncritical syncretistic spirituality of the 'oceanic feeling' and the sublimation of 'primary love' into an imitation of the absolute; Teilhard de Chardin, Fritjof Capra, and Ken Wilber all pass under her scrutiny. In the occult jargon cultivated by initiates of the various closed societies she sees symptoms of a life-long immaturity, a permanently repressed adolescence, a basic social disturbance which the spirituality market sets out to render unconscious. It is this that provides the setting for the syncretistic appropriation of other people's myths, the selective use of the 'foreign' and the 'exotic' in the attempt to find oneself. Perhaps her most damning illustra-

tion of this attitude is Fritjof Capra's observation that he actually found the polluting poverty of Bombay 'rich'.

Collage, like the bricolage of Lévi-Strauss, means transforming the everyday by creative juxtaposition in order to generate the 'spark of poetry' (Max Ernst) and thereby 'meaning'. It is a species of *pensée sauvage* and as such a form of protest. Disconcerting as it may be to see irrationality proclaimed rational and the boundary between physics and religion dissolved, some way must be found to restore the 'collective consensus on which socio-political existence is based' and re-integrate religion into the social order that banishes chaos. We face the prospect of achieving this by the deconstructive techniques of intellectual and spiritual bricolage, a *science sauvage* whose criterion is ultimate wholeness.

No summary can do justice to the subtlety of Greverus' argument or to the methodological risks she takes in pursuit of a collective self-awareness of what is happening in Western societies. She only hints at the role of the 'big' and 'little' traditions of organised religions could play in this spiritual reconstruction. She skillfully maintains the tension between the spiritual ecology of the idealists and the spiritual marketplace of the opportunists and opens up the phenomenon of syncretism to new lines of investigation. New Age or skewed world? The question demands constant critical attention of the kind Greverus proposes.

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