

A CALL TO VIGILANCE (Pastoral Instruction on New Age)

Archbishop Norberto Rivera Carrera

A few months after being appointed ordinary of Mexico City, Archbishop Norberto Rivera Carrera issued a pastoral letter Jan. 7, 1996 on the New Age movement "as a response to the concern so many of you have expressed to me, either directly or through your pastors." Addressing "pastors...religious, missionaries, spiritual directors and confessors, teachers and catechetical instructors, and all the lay faithful engaged in apostolates in the archdiocese," the primate of Mexico examines the origins and content of the New Age movement, the reasons for its rapid spread, its incompatibility with the Gospel, and the responsibility of all Catholics to counteract its influence.

Introduction

1. The end of the millennium is approaching, and with it, the celebration of the great jubilee of 2000 years of God's living and definitive Revelation to humanity. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, man's only Redeemer, has been, still is, and always will be the reference point for discerning the meaning of history and for defining the final goal toward which all creation is heading.[1]

2. The hopeful promise of the Son of God, "Know that I am with you always. even to the end of time" (Mt 28:20), seems particularly directed to today's world. In our time mankind seems to have issued almost a collective entreaty to the God of the universe, who transcends the frontiers of race, culture, and religion so as to make himself present among men, so as to shed light on our path and free us from confusion and uncertainty, from the injustice and fear that darken the horizon.

How forcefully is this desire expressed in our nation today! Has Mexico's history ever witnessed a more enormous and insurmountable array of problems and challenges than those we face today? At what other moment have we had such a need for a hope founded on God's Providence, which would sweep away the deep concerns of our people? Undoubtedly, the present situation of our country- social, economic, political. moral, and religious-

vehemently demands a response from the Church founded by Jesus Christ to guide the faithful and to restore confidence and peace in the hearts of all men of good will.

3. To this end, the Pope, in his apostolic letter <Tertio Millennio Adveniente,> refers to the beginning of the 21st century as a new advent for humanity, with the figure of Christ at the center of man's aspirations. (a) The Church is redoubling her effort to announce this Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and always (Heb 13:8) and thus help mankind "cross the threshold of the third millennium as a threshold of genuine hope." [2]

New Age And The False Hope

4. If the end of the millennium brings with it a heightened yearning to break away from the deep evils afflicting the world, it also can favor the spread of false hopes and misleading promises. In our days there is a new awakening, for the umpteenth time, of a spirit of millenarism, that is, the anticipation of an imminent new age, of an instant, radical change that will put an end to the present state of things.

5. Perhaps the most humanly attractive, but also the most ambiguous and questionable, expression of this millenarist tendency is what is commonly called the <New Age> movement. (b) Contrary to what the Adventist sects envision for the end of the millennium (a catastrophic event the only survivors of which will be members of their own group), <New Age> preaches a golden era for all mankind. <New Age> is the belief in the beginning of a qualitatively different and better world than this one. This evolutionary step will bring with it an enlightenment of man's consciousness. Our fragmented perception of reality will fade away, and, supposedly, we will see the entire universe as it is: a living and unique whole of which we ourselves are just a part.

6. The entire <New Age> message shines with unbridled optimism and emphasizes what is positive, easy, and immediate for the transformation it proposes. No wonder, therefore, that precisely in these years its diffusion all around us has been so widespread.

Everywhere we notice the multiplication of bookstores, stores, courses and workshops, spiritual retreats, films, and television programs that promote the ideas and values of <New Age>. Its ideas, awareness campaigns, and spirituality appear with increasing

frequency in our children's classrooms and even in the preaching and religious teaching of Catholic institutions.

Addressing this, Pope John Paul II clearly warned a group of bishops not too long ago:

New Age ideas often open up a way for themselves in preaching, catechesis, congresses, and retreats, and thus come to influence even practicing Catholics who may not be aware of the incompatibility of those ideas with the faith of the Church.[3]

The Rapid Spread Of New Age

7. Not only the proximity of the century's end is stimulating this widespread interest in <New Age>. Among many others, we can point out four factors that have facilitated its rapid expansion:

1. The Rapid Process of Globalization in All Fields of Human Activity

8. Thanks to remarkable computer and communications systems, man has immediate contact with ideas and lifestyles previously unknown.

Contacts and choices are almost infinitely multiplied. The certainties and values of one's own culture run the risk of being relativized unless this new openness is accompanied by a discernment solidly based on faith and rigorous logic.

2. The Aggressive Commercialization of All Aspects of Human Life

9. The mass media's power to create fashions and impose lifestyles makes the home and society, both traditionally based on human and spiritual principles rooted in Christianity, very vulnerable. Everything is quantified; things are valued according to their usefulness: the more immediate the result, the more profitable the system, etc. This attitude has penetrated the view of the human soul itself, producing a supermarket of religions and spiritual alternatives, with little concern for their veracity or their intrinsic consistency.[4]

3. The Banishment of Faith from the Horizon of Human

Knowledge

10. Almost three centuries dominated by different strains of philosophical rationalism, the exaltation of empirical sciences, and the spread of a positivist mentality have managed to relegate faith and theology to the level of feeling, or at best, to that of personal opinion. What is real, objective, and scientific is only what is produced in the laboratory, or what can be measured by graphs and statistics. Religion ends up being a question of subjective preferences with no essential link to the truth. This being the case, all religions and all spiritual paths are equal, that is, equally irrational and irrelevant.

4. The Human Person's Unshakable Thirst for a Transcendence that Would Give Meaning to Life

11. As a reaction against all that came before, the last thirty years have been shaken by an unprecedented world-wide search for some kind of spiritual experience. Both the nations that endured long years of materialistic socialism and the free nations, prisoners of a selfish well-being, have witnessed yet another renewal of the human soul's eternal tendency towards transcendence. But because of the doctrinal and moral confusion of our time, and the increasing disenchantment with traditional forms of religion, the most immediate result of the new religious awakening has been the proliferation of sects, the defection to nature worship and magic, the popularity of eastern spirituality, and the tendency to take refuge in personalistic, individual religiosity.

New Age Beliefs

12. Against this background rises the shadow of <New Age>. It is not a sect or a religion. It is not a single organization, and it does not follow unanimous and universal guidelines. It is not a science or a philosophy, even though it cloaks itself with pseudo-scientific arguments and confused discourses that combine philosophical and theological ideas containing a certain originality.

13. At times <New Age> is spoken of as a movement in order to point out its nature as a network of many individuals and groups sharing a particular world view and a common aspiration to change the world. What unites them is not an organizational structure or a code of clearly defined teachings, but a common mentality and an extremely fluid communication. In this sense, we can speak of

certain basic beliefs shared to a greater or lesser degree by <New Agers>. This is how we can describe a phenomenon so vast and elusive that it defies a unifying definition.

Environmentalism

14. Ecology has been placed at the vanguard of public opinion, and is the preferred cause of high ranking political, scientific, and economic circles. The awakening of public awareness in the face of serious abuses that endanger the life of the planet, and campaigns to achieve a climate of responsible cooperation among rich and poor nations are an urgently needed good. Preserving and respecting our bio-system is everyone's responsibility.[5]

Nonetheless, <New Age> has developed its own vision of the relationship between man and the planet, which it often refers to as depth ecology. It denies the basic difference between human and non-human existence. It speaks of a bio-centric equality, whereby a mountain, a flower, or a turtle would have the same right as would a man to its own fulfillment. It considers that the cosmos is animated by one spirit or is guided by a universal consciousness of which man is merely one more participant. It fosters a religious worship of nature or of mother earth as if it were a divine reality. It ends up labeling man as an intruder and considers him a curse for the cosmos. At the heart of the radical "green" movement, it pressures governments for legislation that would cut back the human population and limit technological development in order to heal the planet.

15. From exaggerated environmentalism emerges a kind of planetary spirituality that desires to "ensoul" the entire cosmic reality or to bestow on creation a magical force. It loses the notion of a personal God, really distinct and superior to the created world, in favor of an impersonal, divine force that is everything and is in everything. This return to naturalistic pantheism, which was definitively overcome by the event of Christian revelation, finds support in many new religious movements coming from the east and in a return to pagan religions. Therefore, the <New Age> Movement often paints an unrealistic, romantic picture of the pre-Christian cults and of eastern mysticism, as if they were "more natural" for man, or "more in harmony with the cosmic spirit."

Gnosticism

16. The tendency to exalt human reason and to ascribe to it extraordinary powers is nothing new in human history. In the religious realm it manifests itself as gnosticism, and it was one of the first threats to the purity of the Christian faith. Gnosticism appeared some years after Christ's death, due to Christianity's encounter with the atmosphere of Greek philosophy. It claimed to see a hidden message in Sacred Scripture which only certain enlightened minds could decipher. In general, the Gnostics appealed to a higher wisdom that would form the true religion and be the focal point of all spiritual and mystical paths.

Gnosticism, a deviation present in all the great religious traditions, has survived and diversified, finding in <New Age> a privileged field of action. The Theosophical Society founded by Helen Blavatsky at the end of the last century and its derivatives or affiliated organizations (Anthroposophy, The Great Universal Brotherhood, the Rosicrucian Order, the Universal and Triumphant Church, the metaphysical current of thought represented in Mexico by authors such as Connie Mendez, the religious activist group "I Am," the New Acropolis, and many others) are the ideological forerunners of <New Age>, and are currently its dedicated promoters.

The symbols, ceremonies, and initiation degrees of Freemasonry and of para-masonic organizations also reveal a close alliance with Gnosticism.

17. While Gnosticism seeks to open the door to a superior intellect, esoterism and occultism offer a passage to superhuman activity. These two currents, sisters of Gnosticism, strive in distinct ways to empower the human will, making use of supposed secret, cosmic forces. By means of a thousand techniques, new and ancient, they would come into contact with angels, disembodied spiritual guides, with so-called "previous lives" according to the myth of reincarnation, etc. Numerous people and organizations offer services such as fortune telling and horoscopes, hypnosis, magic, channeling, (medium), astral projection, and other equally absurd activities that are causing lasting damage to their clients, who, for the most part, are confused and vulnerable people. In short, <New Age> commercializes what is irrational and harmful to the human soul and sells it by guaranteeing the transformation of the consumer.

Pseudo-Science

18. The promoters of <New Age> are eager to provide scientific proof for their ideas and techniques. They misuse the observations of subatomic particles to draw out applications for man's spiritual life. Thus, for example, they strive to erase the separation between spirit and matter, between biological life and human consciousness, affirming that everything, in the end, is nothing other than energy radiated by the cosmos itself.

19. Astrology and ufology (study of UFOs) are taken to be true sciences like physics and chemistry. But true scientific experts distance themselves from <New Age> and, in general, deplore their unfounded conclusions.

20. Few fields have been as susceptible to manipulation by <New Age> as psychology and biology. Starting from the research of the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and the theories of the "collective unconscious" and of archetypes propounded by his disciple Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), there has been a varied succession of currents of thought in psychology that are connected to a greater or lesser degree with <New Age's> ideas and therapies. In particular, so-called transpersonal psychology, founded by the Italian psychologist Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), attempts to go beyond the individual's psychic experience in search of a superior collective consciousness that would be the door to discovering a "divine principle" lying at the core of every human being. This gives rise to a multitude of <New Age's> typical techniques: biofeedback, hypnosis, rebirthing, Gestalt therapy, and the provocation of altered states of consciousness, including the use of hallucinogenic drugs.

21. At the same time, a series of "alternative therapies" have arisen as a result of a more integrated view of man's biological, psychological, and spiritual facets, and as a reaction against the positivist mentality that at times characterizes the practice of medicine. <New Age> has frequent exaggerations and abuses in the field of "holistic" medicine, which bases its healing methods on the interrelation of body, mind, and spirit. Thus, for example, chromotherapy, or healing through colors; healing by way of energy fields surrounding us; and "Reiki," which promises to recover the balance of personal energy by applying universal energy by laying hands on various parts of the body.

22. There are human empowerment programs of doubtful scientific origins, such as Dianetics, the Silva Method of Mental Control, Transcendental Meditation, and others, which produce an unbelievable amount of graphs and reports that supposedly verify the solidity of their claims. A pseudoscientific language permeates their books and discourses to create the impression of being a fully tested procedure. It could be that some of their clients experience an initial well-being, achieve a greater tranquility, acquire the habit of greater concentration at work, or whatever was promised them, but many times these programs conceal a defective view of man, the world, and God. They imperceptibly lead the participant to affirm or to accept what common sense and the Christian faith reject.

The Incompatibility Of New Age And The Gospel

23. <New Age's> most worrying characteristic, the result of its conglomeration of beliefs, is its religious, spiritual, and moral relativism. <New Age's> final goal is to introduce man to what their ideologues call a "new paradigm," that is to say, a totally different way of seeing themselves and of perceiving reality.

According to this goal, man, in order to fulfill himself and to transform the world around him, will have to realize that he is part of one, cosmic being fully engaged in evolving towards perfect self-consciousness. Human consciousness, despite its seeming individuality, is nothing more than the penultimate evolutionary stage of the revelation of the cosmic consciousness. Man's ultimate destiny is not a salvation that would free him from his fallen nature, but a mere merging, like a drop of water into the nameless ocean of being.

24. <New Age> would have us believe that "things as we see them now" (culture, knowledge, family relationships, life, death, friendships, sufferings, sin, goodness, etc.), are a mere illusion, the product of an unenlightened consciousness. The step from the affirmation that "everything is god," to the one that says "there is no god outside yourself" is a small one, and New Age takes it with an air of self-sufficiency.

25. Within the setting of <New Age>, God's revelation in Jesus Christ loses its unique and unrepeatable character. There could be many "messiahs" who have appeared throughout history, that is, especially enlightened teachers who emerge to guide humanity.

Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Quetzacoatl, Muhammad, Sun Myung Moon, Osho, Sal Baba, and countless others would be prophets of the same stature with the same message. Christianity ends up being little more than a passing period in history.

26. Notwithstanding the fact that the <New Age> Movement espouses a confused religious syncretism which is not always well-intentioned, some of its ideas have found a warm reception among some people and institutions within the Catholic Church. The so-called "global theology" traces the signs of divine revelation in all known religious expressions, in search of a common denominator that can serve as a meeting point for religions.

In practice, unfortunately, this theology usually forgets that revelation is God's initiative, not man's invention and that it has its culmination and definitive expression in the Incarnation of the only Son in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth; in this way, it often empties Christianity of its exceptional content in order to put it on the same level as other beliefs. When this trend appears (openly or veiled) in the teaching of certain seminaries and Catholic educational institutions, it can only cause a deep concern in the hearts of the faithful and their bishops.

Reincarnation

27. Among the basic ideas of <New Age>, "reincarnation" or the "transmigration of the soul," which is found in the religious mythology of some peoples, and especially in eastern spirituality, merits special attention. The idea that a human being's personal "I" passes cyclically through various existences (changing only its body) over the course of hundreds of thousands of years until it achieves its "definitive enlightenment" is something completely irreconcilable with the Christian faith.

28. Belief in reincarnation affirms that the unique, personal identity of each man is an illusion, or at least that this identity is independent of each one's body. Such a belief shows disdain for the deep meaning of human corporeity and belittles the value of the freedom and moral responsibility of each human person. But what is most worrying is that reincarnation is openly contrary to Christian revelation.

"...or else [Christ] would have to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once

and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself. Since men only die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself" (Heb 9:26-28).

29. The popular literature inspired by <New Age> abounds with "testimonies" and stories that supposedly prove not only the fact of "previous incarnations," but also the possibility of remembering them fully and consciously. The new religious movements related to <New Age> often recognize their leaders as reincarnations of other historical or mythological figures who have returned to life to continue their work of enlightening humanity.

The alternative therapies of some human empowerment programs try to help their clients discover the roots of their present problems in their "past lives" through hypnosis and other auto-suggestion techniques. All of this has sown doubt in the minds of numerous Christians.

30. But it is the historical and hope-inspiring truth of Jesus Christ's Resurrection that reveals the ultimate end of man. We cannot deny the indisputable evidence that some time or another death is placed before our eyes: it catches up with every man as the final outcome of his existence. Returning to this life is impossible and does not occur. After this life there is a total, eternal transformation of each individual, not an endless, meaningless succession of lives and deaths. Christ conquered death once and for all and we share in his triumph:

<For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about—'Death is swallowed up in victory'> (1 Cor 15:52-54).

Non-Christian Meditation

31. Another phenomenon that is especially disconcerting to the Catholic faithful is the inexplicable enthusiasm with which certain priests, religious, and people dedicated to teaching the faith have embraced techniques of non-Christian meditation. Frequently imported from the east, forms of asceticism historically far removed from Christian spirituality are practiced in retreats, spiritual exercises, workshops, liturgical celebrations, and

children's catechism courses.

32. These practices were unquestionably born as spiritual disciplines or religious acts within traditional religions (as in the case of Zen, tai chi, and the many forms of yoga), or in sects or new religious movements (as in the case of transcendental meditation and dynamic meditation). At times an attempt is made to "christianize" these forms, as occurred, for example, with "centering prayer" and "focusing," but the result is always a hybrid form with slight gospel basis.

33. However much proponents insist that these techniques are valuable merely as methods, and imply no teaching contrary to Christianity, the techniques in themselves always involve serious drawbacks for a Christian:

a) In their own context, the postures and exercises are designed for their specific religious purpose. They are, in themselves, steps for guiding the user towards an impersonal absolute. Even when they are carried out within a Christian atmosphere, the intrinsic meaning of these gestures remains intact.

b) Non-Christian forms of meditation are, in reality, practices of deep concentration, not prayer. Through relaxation exercises and the repetition of a "mantra" (sacred word), one strives to submerge himself in the depth of his own "I" in search of the nameless absolute. Christian meditation is essentially different inasmuch as it consists in openness to the transcendent and a relationship with someone who addresses us in a personal, loving dialogue.

c) These techniques normally require the one who practices them to turn off the world of his senses, imagination, and reason to lose himself in the silence of nothingness. At times the intent is to achieve an altered state of consciousness that temporarily deprives the subject of the full use of his freedom. Christian prayer, on the contrary, demands the conscious, voluntary, and active participation of the whole person. Christ's prayer in Gethsemane (Lk 22:39-44) is an example of the fundamental role our emotions and our existential conflicts play in prayer. Christian meditation, far from being an escape from reality, teaches us to find its full meaning.

34. Basically, a prayer that disregards the Word of God and Christ's life and example, a prayer that is not a conversation with the Beloved and a commitment to charity, has hardly any place in the life of a Christian. In regards to these observations and others that

should be made about the theme of non-Christian meditation, it is highly recommended to read carefully the letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: "Some Aspects of Christian Meditation" (15 October 1988).

35. Finally, we must emphasize the fact that the promoters of <New Age's> spirituality usually affirm its absolute compatibility with Catholic faith and doctrine. In some cases this might be out of ignorance or superficiality. But in general, at least in Mexico, it probably comes from market studies: since the Mexican population is mostly Catholic, they strive not to wound the religious sensitivity of potential clients. It is not unusual for organizations such as the Great Universal Fraternity and programs such as Silva Mind Control, to name a few, to dress up in a very "Christian" vocabulary and present their beliefs as the ideal complement to Catholicism. Nonetheless, they lead their initiates towards pantheism and the denial of the essence of Christianity.

36. In his recent book, <Crossing the Threshold of Hope>, Pope John Paul II says:

<We cannot delude ourselves that this (New Age) will lead toward a renewal of religion. It is only a new way of practicing Gnosticism, that attitude of the spirit that, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting his Word and replacing it with purely human words. Gnosticism never completely abandoned the realm of Christianity. Instead it has always existed side by side with Christianity, sometimes taking the shape of a philosophical movement, but more often assuming the characteristics of a para-religion in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian.>[6]

37. In this brief analysis of the <New Age> phenomenon, we have been able to allude to some of its elements most opposed to the Christian message:

- a) it depersonalizes the God of Christian revelation;
- b) it disfigures the person of Jesus Christ, devalues his mission, and ridicules his redeeming sacrifice;
- c) it denies the unique, unrepeatable event of his Resurrection by affirming the doctrine of reincarnation;
- d) it empties the Christian concepts of creation and salvation of

their content;

e) it rejects the Church's teaching authority and its institutional form;

f) it relativizes the Gospel's original, unique, and historically based content;

g) it deforms language, giving a new meaning to Christian and biblical terms;

h) it falsely bases its opinions on the writings of Christian mystics and turns their true meaning upside down;

i) it irreversibly waters down the practice of Christian prayer;

j) it discards the human person's moral responsibility and denies the existence of sin;

k) it misleads children and young people in their religious formation;

l) it divides Christian families and exploits them for financial gain.

38. These are the negative aspects that directly affect the life, behavior, and faith of the Catholic faithful. Of course, it would be an error to label as harmful everything New Age provides and offers. Its spirit of openness and dialogue, its insistence on the human need for a deep religious experience its deep concern for preserving the environment, its confidence in the creative power of the human being, its healthy recommendations for dieting and physical fitness, and its attitude of optimism in the face of the grave evils afflicting the world are but a few of its positive points that spontaneously come to mind.

39. This being said, we must recognize in all honesty that these points of light are scattered amid wide voids and disconcerting ambiguities. The force with which Religion New Age's ideas and activities are being promoted, and the attractive marketing techniques that disguise them demand that Catholics respond dearly and vigorously in favor of their faith and their vital convictions. For this reason, I would like to close this letter with some concrete recommendations for the faithful's active response to <New Age.>

The Responsibility Of Catholics In The Face Of The New Age Confusion

40. We all have the obligation to look into this complex phenomenon and be informed enough to understand it and discern among its contents what is good, what is neutral, and what is incompatible with our faith.

41. Catholic educators and parents must painstakingly watch over the contact their children may have with the ideas and fashions <New Age> promulgates, to help them avoid confusion, doubt, and dissatisfaction. In particular, they should avoid the indiscriminate use of the media (television, radio, the movie theater, music, and, electronic information systems such as Internet) through which <New Age> is being spread on a large scale.

42. Those faithful who have the ability to influence the press and the mass media would do an invaluable service to Mexicans and the Church if they spread information and offer programs that will help to guide our people and give them Christian standards by which to evaluate the confusion <New Age> causes. In this way they would give a positive response to Pope John Paul II's much repeated invitations to become front-line agents of the New Evangelization, "because the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media." [7]

43. In addition to being well-informed, we Catholics must actively defend our faith and values in the real life of Mexican society. There are peaceful and legitimate forms of protest that help to pressure the promoters of those aspects of <New Age> that harm us: not participating in the activities of institutions and businesses that promote New Age, not watching television programs that spread those ideas, not buying the products of their sponsors, challenging public figures, educators, and politicians who publicly support <New Age> practices or ideas, by writing letters, articles in the press, etc.

44. Our parishes and educational institutions can offer courses and conferences on the most controversial themes of this current of thought; they can also spread critical literature and offer bibliographies to clarify the terms of the problem and give guidelines for making well-founded judgments.

45. How crucial are our priests, as shepherds of souls, in the work of educating, informing, and defending the faith of our people!

Aware of this, and with a sincere desire to support and accompany them in their effort to accomplish the Second Archdiocesan Synod's priority objectives, I make my own the Holy Father's recent invitation to renew our evangelizing action in view of present-day threats to the faith. We have to revitalize our preaching, "returning to it a kerygmatic force able to move the conscience of contemporary man, so often indifferent, at least in appearance, or interested in other affairs." [8]

46. The focal point for all pastoral efforts continues to be the message of Christ, Redeemer of man: "God loves you, Christ came for you." [9] This gives rise to the urgent need for courageous preaching, in touch with the real problems and doubts of our people. We have to lead the faithful, with our words and our example, to a life of deeper prayer; which will lead to a vital experience of Christ. We have to show them the deep truth of that doctrine that comes from our faith in him and help them to appreciate the liturgical forms uniting us with him in the family that the Church is. Likewise, I exhort you to seek out insistently and listen patiently to those members of the Mystical Body who are furthest away from the Church and are most exposed to doubts or to the unending traps that the modern world sets for the faith.

47. With complete clarity, at the inauguration of the IV General Conference of the Latin American bishops in Santo Domingo, John Paul II told us: "<After the example of the Good Shepherd, you must pasture the flock that has been entrusted to you and defend it from ravenous wolves. the cause of division and dissension in your ecclesial communities is—as you well know—the sects and the "pseudo-spiritual" movements of which the Document of Puebla speaks (n. 628), whose expression and aggressiveness must be confronted.> [10]

48. The Pope's reference to "pseudo-spiritual" movements, distinct from the sects, immediately brings to mind the long list of projects springing from <New Age's> ideological and religious background that we have considered in this letter. The responsibility to act incisively in the face of this multiform problem in our evangelizing work falls directly on each one of us.

49. Therefore, we are all obliged to pursue a continuous formation so as to understand <New Age> and its attraction for the people of our time. Like the wise man in the Gospel, who draws out of his treasure both the old and new (cf. Mt 13:52), we have to give witness to and preach the inexhaustible richness and penetrating truth of the Catholic faith in an increasingly accessible and

attractive way to all those who ask us about the reason for our hope. May the Catholic faithful, with our help, discover that everything they yearn for (a real spiritual life, inner healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, an encounter with the unfathomable mystery of the one true God and his saving plan) is already incomparably present in the Catholic faith, into which they were initiated at baptism.

50. Our faith is deep. It has as its source God himself, who reveals himself to all men in Jesus Christ. Over the past 2000 years, Jesus Christ has guided his Church by means of the Holy Spirit "to the fullness of truth" (Jn 16:13) as he promised on the night of his passion. A Catholic who experiences his faith, knows it, and lives it in all its greatness, will never feel the need to beg for <New Age's> vain promises and half-truths.

51. Finally, allow me, by way of exhortation, to echo that extraordinary invitation John Paul II made to the Mexican people from our Metropolitan Cathedral in his first and unforgettable visit to our country: <Mexico, always be faithful Mexico always faithful.[11]

52. Without a doubt, that will be our great challenge as the Mexican people on the verge of the third millennium: to be faithful. To be faithful to our history, enriched with the life of numerous saints and the blood of so many martyrs. To be faithful to our identity as Mexicans and as Catholics., notwithstanding the tremendous internal and external pressures our nation suffers. To be faithful to Christ who continues to be our hope and our goal. To be faithful to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, protectress of our people and an example of Christian life.

Endnotes

1. Cf. John Paul II, <Tertio Millennio Adveniente>, November 10, 1994.
2. John Paul II, Address to the Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, June 8, 1995.
3. John Paul II, Address to the bishops of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, U.S A. during their ad limina visit, May 28, 1993, in <L'Osservatore Romano.>

4. Msgr. Franc Rodj of the Pontifical Council for Non-believers defines <New Age> precisely as "a supermarket of religions where each one takes what he likes and leaves the rest." Cf. "Religious ideologies and the Christian View of God in Europe," in <Ecclesia> n. 8, 1992, pp. 379-387.

5. Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 25th World Day of Peace, January I, 1992.

6. John Paul II, <Crossing the Threshold of Hope> (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1994), p. 90.

7. John Paul II, <Redemptoris Missio>, n. 37, St. Paul Books & Media, 1985, p. 53.

8. John Paul II, Address to the Central Committee of the Great Jubilee for the Year 2000, June 8, 1995.

9. John Paul II, <Christifideles Laici>, n. 34, St. Paul Books & Media, 1985, p. 85.

10. John Paul II, Inaugural Discourse of the IV General Conference of Latin America: <Jesus Christ Yesterday, Today, and Forever>, n. 12, in Santo Domingo 1992.

11. John Paul II, Homily in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City, January 26, 1979.

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