

## **What is New Age? A new order, a new humanity, a new faith**

### **Cardinal Godfried Danneels**

"Something is coming, and you can awaken it in yourself, by joining together with millions of other people gathered in a kind of new "host of saints", which through its power and its inner creativity has at its disposal such a propelling force that it can shock the entire world" (excerpt from the booklet "Global cooperation for a better World"). In the opinion of New Age, we are now on the threshold of unusual events. Around the year 2000 the Sun will enter the new constellation of Aquarius, and unexpectedly the speed of the universe and of history will be changed.

The empire and religion of Mesopotamia was the age of the constellation of Aries, and the current constellation of Pisces is the age of the Christian religion. The age of Aquarius will bring a new world order, a new humanity, and a new religion. This is the premise which, in an abbreviated and objective way, answers the question: What is New Age. The author, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Primate of Belgium, vividly compares New Age with Christianity.

### **A "religion" that wants to encompass the world**

The searches of many people are already aimed not only at traditional sects, which narrow the horizons of human thought, but also at something open, something that expands these horizons. The former world will thus reach its boundary, and traditional religions will no longer manage to change anything. Let us search for something even bigger, something wider. Let us try and find something universal. Away from the narrowness of old dogmas, from morality, with its ossified institutions, which exude a moldy smell. Have you never felt something similar? Aren't you missing something else, a new breathing, for a more universal wisdom of life, which would be a thoroughly rational science, and would serve a united and fraternal world?! Such is the system of positive thinking, and in it is found a new chance for you and for your past. We are not interested in the errors of vague dogmas, we want to go forward, under authentic signs from heaven. We are ruled not by a phantom Holy Spirit, but by mysterious cosmic waves. It's possible that there exists a direct experience of something divine, but what am I saying! We can simply become God! As a first impulse you will ask: who can believe this? This reminds one of science-fiction! No contemporary person will go for this! But I must say that you are wrong: millions of people have accepted this message. And first of all in the form of New Age, this new religion, which has spread like a sudden tide from California to the whole world; and in a way that is hard to believe. First in super modern Scandinavia, and then in all developed countries of Western Europe. And here millions of people were also infected by this. Books about New Age are snatched up in book stores like freshly-baked buns.

What is it all about? About some pleasant sorcery? Judge for yourselves.

### **Are you ready to create a new world?**

"All agree: something should change in this world! But what? When? How? And the main thing, by whom? You can answer these questions yourself. Don't wait for your neighbor to take the first step.

Abandon any hope that the government or administration will read in your head what you desire most. You should create and act. Promptly, right away! You should express what lies buried inside you. Don't remain alone! Join with millions of people who have that same goal: unite, ponder, and act together, creating a new future. Think positively about the world. Describe, paint, or in some other manner imagine the world to yourself, the world on which you depend. Don't linger on current crises and problems. It's not a matter of counting them, but rather to conquer, to expand your vision of the subject and shift it into the future. Concentrate only on your surroundings, on the desires that you feel: on your family, your profession, on your inner life. Take the first step! Make such a gesture or act which will concentrate your concept of the future. This as a beginning. This wave of positive cooperation, which flows through the entire globe, is already by itself a contribution toward changing the world, because at this same moment millions of people are taking such a step. Your ideas and your activity are not for naught; they bring a dynamic, an originality and a universal dimension to this project of joint creation! Owing to your artistic talents, owing to your activity or simply owing to your inner change, you will change something somewhere on earth". This text is contained in a small booklet, published by "Global cooperation for a better World", one of the offshoots of the new "religion". Actually, it is about a kind of religion! Waiting for a new world that is different from the present, an anticipation formulated in a deeply messianic and didactic language: "something is coming, and you can awaken it in yourself, by joining together with millions of other people, gathered in a kind of new "host of saints", which through its power and inner creativity has at its disposal such a driving force that it can shock the whole world". Besides the style, which has obvious American features, by means of such language everyone feels being called. This is not a trifle. To possess such potential for formulating a world outlook, and at the same time to join with millions of others and, relying on spiritual power, emanating from inner change and from artistic creativity, to make this into a fraternal and dynamic reality. By means of this first step it is possible to achieve what no government, no political coalition, no administration could achieve: to do this collectively.

### **This is no Utopia: look, it is already happening**

All this is not a dream, they argue. Look around you: this is already being confirmed. After all, you will agree that something is dying in this civilization. What have science and technology brought? Progress and comfort, but also a sea of poverty, pollution of the environment, materialism and infertility. You are becoming a number in a row; your feelings and emotions don't interest anybody. You are like a bird in a golden cage. And what's more, you have lost living contact with nature and the cosmos, you are only a poor orphan in the Universe.

Fortunately, better people have understood this. They discovered a new concept of life, a new philosophy and a new "religion". And thus in this century of "satisfaction" there appeared something unexpected and beautiful: we are discovering our souls anew. It appears as an offshoot of this civilization of science and of technology, deprived of individuality; this beautiful, sleeping creature is finally awaking. Something is beginning to stir even among great scientists: Nobel prizes are being awarded for ideas written not on scientific subjects, but directly concerning human happiness. Big businessmen are searching for new kinds of relations in their corporations and are coming out against the blind prioritizing of profitability and gain. Religious leaders are gathering and praying together for

peace on earth. Everywhere consciousness is beginning to rise above matter, feelings above intellect, wisdom above technical knowledge, the soul above external reality.

### **If you really feel this, then you should be with us**

if you are suffering from many frustrations. If you are seeking something else. If you are watching films like "ET" or "The Dead Poets Society". If you are using guaranteed long-lasting products. If are choosing non-traditional medicines and natural methods. If you decided to increase your human potential. If you participated in discussions on this subject. If esoteric or occult treatises are among your favorite books (you, naturally, are familiar with these books, in elegant black bindings, with gilded lettering). If you are interested in mysteries, in everything that is strange or hidden, in the art of science-fiction. If you are convinced, that your "I" is penetrated by cosmic rays and waves, and that the stars are affecting your destiny. If you are seriously searching for something, posing fundamental questions, and if you are not finding any answers, neither in ritual, nor in science, nor in practice. Then your place is with us: in New Age. Most likely many "classical" Christians will have doubts, and will not recognize themselves in the above portrait. But few of them will be able to say that nothing touched them while reading these words. As to "non-classical" Christians, millions of them will recognize themselves totally in these words: this is their portrait. In their eyes this is not a trend that has come to us from the Orient or America. The emptiness of contemporary people, for whom Christianity has become alien, is very dramatic: they are ready to buy this.

### **New Age**

It is difficult to define New Age. It is not a religion, nonetheless something religious, it is not a philosophy, but a view of humanity and of the world, and also a key to interpreting reality; not a science, although it rests on scientific laws, even if it searches for them in the stars. New Age is a nebula consisting of esotericism and occultism, of some mystic and magical ideas on the subject of life's mysteries, and also a small portion of Christianity; and all this mixed together with ideas derived from astrophysics. This movement was born in California, and its beginning is associated with the publication of a book by Alice Ann Bailey (1880 -1949) "Le retour du Christ" ("Return of Christ"). From that time her ideas spread and became a common heritage of a large number of societies, brotherhoods, and movements. Such as the Great White Brotherhood, the Grail Brotherhood, the Rosicrucians, the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, and so on.

Indeed, there is no founder in New Age, no center, no sacred books, there are no leaders or dogmas. It is spirituality in a broad sense, a spirituality without God and without His grace. But it corresponds to the spirit of the time. True, New Age can boast of a series of famous advocates: Aldous Huxley, Carl Gustav Jung, D. Lessing, R. Sheldrake, W. James, Rudolf Steiner, and also Teilhard de Chardin and Meister Eckhart. Although, as far as the last two are concerned, this is not true. New Age has achieved an unprecedented success. The number of its followers are counted to be several millions, bookstores and used bookstores can cite over 18,000 book titles (most of them sold in RR station newsstands and in supermarkets); there are between 40 and 50 thousand information centers and consulting offices. "A

leap is occurring in the evolution of the Universe, that is as important as the leap of energy and of life itself that occurred 35 million years ago" says Peter Russell.

### **New Age is based on four pillars**

#### **First pillar: a scientific foundation**

New Age has acquired such momentum as a movement because, as a system, it rests on a scientific foundation. Contemporary man has dreamt for a long time about the unification of science and religion. The best religion would be the one which could explain the most important discoveries. And New Age can do this. Actually it no longer includes the classic physics that was applied from the time of Newton. That physics considered the Universe to be one big machine, all elements of which are in balance due to their interaction, and by some means they maintain the Universe in motion. Nonetheless Einstein proved that matter doesn't consist only of particles, or only of waves, but of particles and waves simultaneously. Is it not revealing that New Age considers nuclear physicist Fritjof Capra its ideologue? Therefore, because New Age is in step with the times, New Age states: No, the Universe is not a machine; it is a single, big, living organism, that is founded not on mechanics, but on qualitative relationships. All beings are related among themselves and form one big family. Man is part of this community, part of the whole: he just participates in the organic life of the whole. He cannot be an outside observer or an independent subject. Man must be part of the family. As a result man is not really free, not responsible for his acts: he participates in the community all the same, even if he doesn't feel this. Everything is unity (monism), and even God is part the cosmos (pantheism). There is no place here for any creation. Inasmuch as all is one, all differences are erased: between soul and body, God and the world, intellect and feeling, inner world and outer, conscious spheres and unconscious spheres; between heaven and earth. It is not possible to follow the road on which New Age is going. Science should keep its autonomy and its rights, and the fact that New Age is utilizing it for its purposes reminds one of the good old concordism. Nonetheless one cannot help but agree that somewhere in the depth of man there exists this dream about a totality, about unification with God and the cosmos. All the more so because this dream is especially attractive in our epoch, an epoch of endless divisions and of collapse. We so strongly wish for kinship with everyone.

#### **Second pillar: Oriental religions**

Without doubt Oriental religions are concretizing this dream of original unity and fusion. Thus for ancient Chinese wisdom (Taoism) all reality is one living organism, the opposing forces of which, yin and yang, mutually balance one another. Yin is the feminine, dark, passive, superficial, introverted, synthetic; yang is the male, bright, active, creative, extroverted, analytic. Man can be happy only when he realizes in himself the law of nature, that is an equilibrium between yin and yang, inasmuch as he is created for inner agreement. In New Age there is yet another reason to look eastward. Oriental religions are built mainly on experience, rather than on intellect and authority. They are based on feeling. Christianity, as New Age asserts, and all other large Western religions, are religions of the Book. These religions are based on dogmas and on morality, and they are imposed from the outside. Possibly not without reason New Age accuses Christianity of insufficient use of experience, of a distrust of mysticism, of endless

moral comments and exaggerated emphasis on orthodoxy of doctrine. All the more so because in recent years Christianity has narrowed almost to a system of ethics. The role of the Credo (confession of faith), as a vital principle and as a religious and mystic experience, remains forgotten to a considerable extent. Many have grown tired of this insistent moralism, and they began to look for calm elsewhere. Didn't Christ Himself say: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." (Matthew 11, 28-30). There is yet another reason to contrast New Age and Christianity. Christianity introduces divisions, it has brought nothing into the world except conflicts, schisms, inquisitions and religious wars. Christianity confers much meaning to the "I", to freedom and responsibility. The Orient says that the "I" is not what is most profound in man; deeper than the "I" is the "person" who participates in our historic existence in this world. And this deepest person merges with God. In this case man indeed cannot sin. He is sinless, even incapable of sin. Every concept of personality, dear to Christianity, is here obliterated. Man should really search for this deep personality. He attains this through intuition and experience, through a detachment from all that is associated with this superficial "I". Certain systems (like Yoga and the contemporary phenomenon of mind machines) as well as teachers can also help. And if all this was not realized in this life, there will always be the possibility later, in the next incarnation. That is so, because reincarnation exists, and it is repeated as often as man needs to arrive at emptiness, completely calmed and happy. These concepts may appear strange, but 23% of Catholics in the West, and among practicing Catholics 31%, believe in reincarnation. And who among us didn't dream at least once to begin life anew? Who will free me of responsibility for this act? Why so many prohibitions? Why are there in Christianity so many commandments and taboos, and so little attention is paid to experiments, to feelings and to mysticism? Why has everything already been written in books, and so little place remains for my perceptions?

### **Third pillar: new psychology**

Arguments originating in the sphere of psychology still enjoy great popularity among our contemporaries. And New Age appears to be making use of arguments of this type. Actually the concept of a "conscious I", floating in an ocean of super personal consciousness, has something in common with what was proclaimed by C.G. Jung, the prominent Swiss psychologist, at the beginning of the 20th century. Nonetheless Jung's ideas are complex and contain very many nuances; he never wanted to overstep the boundaries of his scientific domain. New Age accepted certain elements of his ideas, understanding them however in its own way and simplifying them excessively.

In the opinion of New Age, Jung argued that there exists a massive unconsciousness in all people. It is like a label for the primary experience of man. It consists of depictions, conceptions, analyses, and manners of thinking. In normal situations these things are not perceived, but one may gain access to them, at least partially, in certain dreams, fairy tales, myths and legends. Furthermore, in the opinion New Age, Jung argued that one of the things in the depths of our soul was "personality", and that it would be close to God, if it were not directly God Himself. If this is so then we can, penetrating deep into ourselves, encounter God: He is in us. One may understand this in two ways (Jung didn't specify this). The first one: God lives in us, but is different from us; he is our Creator and Lord. This assertion is purely Christian: after all, didn't Saint Augustine write this? But New Age understands this thus: God is what is

found deep in ourselves. He is not different from us: we are God. This is something completely different, this assertion is not for the understanding of a Christian. Who didn't feel at least once some "presence" somewhere in the depths of oneself? Wasn't this God, or at the very least something like Him? There exist some rare experiments, when the consciousness is opened wide and reaches some nearly supernatural fullness and bliss. There exist supersensory, mystic states of consciousness, and some saints felt them. Perhaps this is not something so exceptional, but those who attained such a state rarely dared speak of this. New Age asserts that it is possible to relive the experience of one's error, and, from the other side, it's possible to undergo the experience of a state bordering on death. New Age systematically shows such phenomena: rebirth (in order to remove certain psychic traumas), a "journey to the gates of death", and also what is known as channeling, or coming into contact with things or beings from an invisible world.

#### **Fourth pillar: Astrology (it is written in the stars)**

The fourth pillar of New Age is the strangest, and possibly that is why the most tempting: it is esotericism and occult knowledge

Humanity always believed that somewhere there should exist some concealed sources of knowledge, roads to happiness, which remained closed by the gods, in order not to let people in there; these forms of knowledge are accessible only to the initiated; however, whoever can gain such access, will have authority over everything. First of all, this means reading the stars (astronomy and casting of horoscopes, which emanate from it). From ancient times attention was paid to mysterious knowledge. All the events of our life are written in the stars. There is a belief in New Age that we are on the threshold of unusual events. In fact around the year 2000 the sun should enter a new stellar system, into the constellation of Aquarius. Suddenly the speed of the Universe and of history should change. There was a time when man lived under the sign of Taurus; this was the age of the mysteries and of the religion of Mesopotamia; later came the constellation of Aries, together with the Mosaic faith and Judaism; currently it is Christianity with the constellation of Pisces (isn't ichtios, the fish, the symbol of Christ?). Around the year 2000 we will enter the constellation of Aquarius. It will bring a new world order, a new humanity, a new religion. Few people acknowledge that they believe in the stars, but that doesn't prevent them from reading horoscopes in their favorite newspapers on weekends. Astrology is nothing but a completely anti-scientific belief: it is taken from something authentic, in order to draw from it invalid conclusions. "Obviously the sun has an influence on earthly life, although not necessarily on the love life of human beings; the moon plays a role in the cycle of tides, but is not capable of giving useful advice concerning one's destiny; the planet Mars is reddish and bears the name of the god of war, which people gave it, but this doesn't mean that this planet has military characteristics and that it causes conflicts". (A R Van De Walle).

#### **Occult knowledge and occult practices**

Man always had a weakness for occult knowledge and secret prescriptions for happiness. Mysterious doctrines were created even around the person of Jesus. Gnosticism appeared and spread in the second-third centuries. Gnosticism is the general name for a movement that comprises various writings

for the initiated, which contained secret information about Jesus, not recorded in the Gospels. For this reason those so initiated were considered to be separate from and higher than other Christians. They didn't feel obligated to pay attention to dogmatic or moral rules, they were above the truths of ordinary people, above good and evil. Saint John already, in his first epistle, condemns such views, emphasizing that whoever thinks that he is sinless, that he can love God without loving his neighbor, that he need not keep the Commandments, that he can remove Jesus the Man-God, making Him a distant God or an ordinary human being, that person is creating an illusion, and cannot be a real disciple of Jesus. "They are walking in darkness, not in light". This tendency never vanished completely In the subsequent course of history. It reappeared again after a certain time. Its most notable representative was Joachim of Flora (†1202), who defended the concept of the coming of the Era of the Holy Spirit, following the Era of the Father (the Old Testament) and the Era of the Son (the New Testament). Later appeared the Brethren of the Free Spirit, against whom came out the devotio moderna movement, with Gerard Groote and his spirituality, with the principle "both feet on the ground". Even in Brussels there lived in the 14th century some lady with the name Bloemardinne, who also propagated some mysterious doctrine, and who had great influence in the town, however the Blessed John of Ruysbroeck rejected her completely. Today one may find a similar example of a mysterious doctrines and of occult practices in the book "Return of Jesus" by Alice Bailey. The historic Christ has no significance. Christ is an idea (a group of vibrations) which can be embodied in different persons: Buddha, Hermes, Zarathustra, Jesus, Mani and so forth. Soon there should appear the next incarnation, to show people in what manner they should be saved. While the author shows a whole series of initiation and meditation methods, to achieve this salvation. She believes above all in the power of the Common Day of Prayer, when all its followers will unite in prayer and at that moment will be able, owing to the highest general concentration, change the speed of light.

### **The restless heart of contemporary man**

How great the suffering, how great the anxiety must rule the hearts of our contemporaries, who look for salvation in this medley? But millions of people are doing this. These proposed means of salvation are expressed vaguely, an objective observer feels uneasy, but the more of these proposals exist, the more we become immersed in them. What is this hunger, which makes one yearn for such dreams? It seems understandable why that which is being offered by New Age is close to contemporary man. He can observe his negative portrait, as in a mirror. Like Narcissus gazing into the water, contemporary man sees his own person depicted in the new religions. In the age of technology, man remains a "metaphysical being", and more than at anytime desires a global idea of relativity, with which he could bring order to his views and feelings. Today's man maintains an appearance of unity without divisions, dreams of a world without conflicts, of world unification and brotherhood, of that messianic world about which Isaiah spoke already: "The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair." (Isaiah 11, 7-8). Everything should have the opportunity to live in harmony: body and soul, past, present and future, intellect and feeling, I and you, God and man. Contemporary man wants life without difficulties and opposition, without stress, without illnesses and the absence of money, a life from which all obstacles will be removed: a euphoric existence. He likes that "cosmic

feeling", which carries him on waves of mysterious energy, as on a solar chariot. New Age praises thoughts and actions that are strongly concentrated on the good of the person, which are very egocentric. "I am a creator together with God. Christ, that is I. The happiness of the world is in my hands, in my powers". An inflated, an over expanded "I" is without doubt one of the chief characteristic traits of thought and action in our time. The age of the " yuppie" is still fresh in our minds.

### **Syncretism: to feed from all troughs**

The syncretism of New Age is obvious: one can eat all that is most tasty, choosing the best morsels from all feeding-troughs, choosing dishes from the menu according to one's own discretion. It's not important what you believe, as long as it feels good. You can even belong to several religions with complete equanimity, and there will be no contradiction in this. As a movement New Age is open to all religions. It is something like a super-religion, rising high above all dogma, authority, clergy and sacred books. It is a triumph of ecumenism. What then is truth? Whatever is good for you, that is truth! Hence the principle: "Calmly stay in the tent in which you find what you are looking for". Feeling dominates intellect, and mystique dominates morality. New Age is a case of experience. The revelation of the logic of the heart, thinking "in a rocking chair", a morality based on happiness, on "bubble baths". Nothing is really good or bad, and it will be possible to correct all errors in the next life. Or rather they will be corrected automatically in subsequent reincarnations. We have lived by the intellect for a very long time, now has come the time for feelings, for love and action. Love and do what your heart desires. All the ethical tensions of the Christian religion have only brought suffering and falling into the trap of guilt feelings, with the accompanying weakness and loss of taste. The age of law should now end, yielding its place to the voice of love and of joy. Now begins a kingdom of consciousness, a time of development of all of our potential. We can do anything, owing to the intense cooperation of all consciousnesses; they are a force that will make it possible to raise the world. New Age uses a vocabulary which corresponds to its nature: a terminology of harmony and peace (unity, love, light, peace, calm), of energy (waves, vibrations, radiation), individualism (realizing oneself, awareness of oneself, creativity here and now), surprises (rebirth, mutations, leap, emerging, apocalypse). This terminology is subtle, simultaneously energetic and full of hope. Everything however corresponds to the image of man in our time.

### **A challenge to Christians**

New Age is a great challenge to Christians. Not only because it is spreading with such energy, but mostly because it is openly attacking Christianity, and also because it is appropriating for itself whole layers of Christian heritage, beginning with the Bible. New Age is growing more and more into a new, universal religion on a planetary scale, which could replace all preceding ones, having brought them to perfection. New Age knows perfectly what is needed to flatter the dreams of contemporary man. We will say, however, that New Age also offers some good things: the feeling of world brotherhood, peace and harmony, the awareness of a better world, a general mobilization for good, and so forth.

### **Only what is true is truly good**

Here certain differences come to mind: not all good that is done is necessarily sound, and not all that is pleasant must be true. In this lies a problem also for Christians: they also don't like to set boundaries, in

order to distinguish, and if the need arises, to separate. If someone emphasizes the final and unique nature of the Christian faith, he is immediately accused of self-confidence, of pride, lack of a feeling of ecumenism. Because good is truly everywhere, one may boldly combine from different elements. Unfortunately, this is not so: a sum of half-truths leads only to another half-truth. Another thought which we hear frequently is: what is the difference whether a theory is true, if it shows good results in practice! But then, what is truth? A tree is recognized by its fruits; look at the fruits: if they are good, then so is the tree. Nothing is more false. Nowhere is it written that a false faith cannot bring good fruit. Origen might have been a holy man, but in certain points of doctrine he was not orthodox. Deformation of the truth is indeed the biggest error. It can lead to large moral distortions. For Paul the matter is clear: "They replaced God's truth with a lie, they rendered honor and worship more to the created than to the Creator, who is everlastingly blessed! Amen. For this God subjected them to ignoble passions" (Romans 1, 25). It is indispensable to define what the Christian faith contains, and what contradicts it. There is no sameness: one must choose.

### **God, who creates freely, a free man**

God is not like the world. The Lord is not the immanent soul of the world (pantheism). The world didn't come from God by means of emanation, without the act of free will by God; no, God created the world freely, from love. It is also a lie that God merges with man. Of course He is present in man, but this doesn't prevent Him from standing face to face with man, as his Creator, Lord and Savior. Between God and man arises a relationship of dissimilarities. God is someone else; the Lord stands before man just as "I" before "you", as free partners in love, without fusion and mixing. As a matter of fact, love never was a pretext for fusion, on the contrary it is a basis for dissimilarities. One of the basic theses of New Age sounds like this: everything is in everything, God merges with man; or all light is divine, or God merges with the cosmos. We can find these same principles in some other form in most Oriental religions. New Age isn't able to combine its principles with the Christian faith.

### **Prayer**

Prayer never merged with my deep "I". Prayer prefers duality. We freely stand before the other in adoration, thanksgiving, petition, faith and obedience. Christian prayer is not introspective, it is a humble entrance into the will of another: "Father. Not my, but your will be done" (Luke 22, 42). Therefore expressions like "God is my deepest "I" are very inaccurate. It is true that God is in me, but he remains Someone else; it is better to say that He dwells in me. Besides that, Christian prayer is always Christological. It unites with the very structure of the Christian faiths. The Holy Scriptures show us the path in this matter. Christian prayer is not only words, it is first of all a reply to God's word, which is primary. If this were not so then we wouldn't even know what we could say, for what we could ask. The Book of Psalms teaches us to see all kinds of God's benevolence, fulfilled in the Creation and Redemption. The New Testament reveals to us how the Spirit leads us into the mystery of Christ. It is in the Spirit that we understand the words and gestures of Christ. The structure of Christian prayer, besides all else, is Trinitarian: it turns to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Finally, prayer is ecclesiastical: we pray in church or together with it, whether it concerns the official liturgy, or only prayer "in the quiet of our home".

## **Grace, which is given to us for free and is so indispensable to us**

In the opinion of New Age, man is good by his nature, and by his powers he strives for what is good. But to tell the truth, man is not free, and this is not a matter of good and evil. Man is self-sufficient, he is "self-supporting"; he needs neither revelation nor redemption, nor any other outside help. Christianity speaks another language. Man is good in the depths of his soul, but vulnerable. By his own powers he is unable to either want or do good. He needs Salvation. Without God's grace he cannot do anything. "For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work" (Philippians 2, 13). It is also false that man is sinless, and that he is incapable of sinning. He is free, but can do nothing without grace. Morality exists, and the Commandments are indispensable for enlightening man, so that he might find the road which leads to life. Man is not above the law, for this he doesn't have enough light and strength. No esoteric concept of salvation can save man, no associations of psychic concentration, no massive efforts of millions of consciousnesses. Our only road to salvation is our faith in Jesus Christ, who came and entered into our history for our sake and for our salvation. In our times the teaching about God's grace is, undoubtedly, a very entangled region of theology, and in the practical life of Christians. For many, a millstone around the neck is the fact that man cannot save himself, even partially, but will be saved completely by God's grace, which is bestowed on us. It's not understood why grace doesn't destroy man's freedom and autonomy but, on the contrary, is their foundation. The dream about a self-sufficient man will never disappear. Therefore, to accept the idea of our dependence on God means one thing: to believe.

## **Jesus Christ –Son of man and Son of God**

In the opinion of New Age, Jesus wasn't a historic person. He is only an idea. Christ is the idea, the spirit (or the soul), which penetrates everything and which appears different in each case, in great individualities, such as Buddha, Zarathustra and others. One of them was Jesus of Nazareth. This is the principal difference between the Christian faith and New Age. The Christian faith can be expressed in one sentence: God came into history in Jesus Christ, His own Son, Who is simultaneously God and Man. Jesus Christ is a human person, a historic one, a particular one, born of Mary in Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Augustus, at the time when Quirinius was governor of Syria and proclaimed a population census " (cf. Luke 2). He died under Pontius Pilate, near Jerusalem, before the feast of the Jewish Passover. This man was God's Son and rose from the dead. In this consists the difference between the Christian faith and the New Age movement: "And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1, 14). Throughout all of history this was a "log thrown underfoot" for certain "mystics". How can God act in a person who rubs dirt into the eyes of a blind man, in order that he might see! That would mean that God comes to us with earthly and material help! All varieties of Gnosticism and all spiritualistic movements within the frameworks of Christianity always were tempted to make God more believable, preserving Him from earthly dust. Christ's body was only imaginary, and his suffering an illusion, because God cannot suffer. Or Christ was only an ordinary human being. Glorifying Him as God's Son was only a way to distinguish Him. In this way the Christian faith would become easier to accept, more pleasing, and its difficult points would be diffused. But if we assert this, then this is not Christianity, but Gnosticism or New Age.

### **There is no place for suffering and death**

Of course there is no place in New Age for suffering: suffering is absurd and nonproductive. "When in danger of suffering and death, I keep to the spirituality of the world of senses and of life", says a follower of New Age. It looks even less likely that Christ saved the world precisely through suffering on the cross. Salvation comes from saving practices, which expand consciousness, from rebirth, from traveling to the gates of death, from various means which aid relaxation and accessibility, or from increasing and raising the human energy potential. Naturally the Christian also fights against suffering, but when it comes he doesn't call it absurd. Suffering leads to unification with the cross of Christ, and is saving. Suffering, a phenomenon per se rather nonsensical and incomprehensible, and the cross, a tool that causes suffering, were chosen by God's wisdom as a means of revealing His love for mankind. Saint Paul is right when he says that an idea like that couldn't come into anyone's head: "God's wisdom (...), which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him!" (I Corinthians 2, 8-9). For a Christian death is not an access to a new incarnation, after which will ensue another, until man reaches a happy nirvana. Death is a one-time event: the only passage to a final life. Death is prepared by earthly life, where every free act has a value in eternity. Man does not spin around in circles, does not sit anxiously on a Raft of the Medusa, or on the road to some Kitezsh. Man is a responsible helmsman, who should steer so as to reach a safe haven, where God is awaiting him.

### **Faith is a free act**

Really, faith has something in common with experience. This phenomenon is so internal, partially belonging to the area which concerns the psychology of religion. Nonetheless faith is and always will be above all a free choice. We achieve it under the influence of God's grace, and give ourselves to God, who reveals Himself to us. Faith is not simply an agreement with one's deepest "I". Faith always assumes a transcendence which surpasses man, and is before him, above him, and outside him. Faith means to receive Another and to freely give oneself to Him. For New Age faith is one of the forms of testing oneself. In this sense, no matter what horizons open before man, he remains inside, bouncing off the glass walls of one's own "I", like a bird off the bars of a cage. Even a maximum expansion of the "I" will not free him from this prison.

### **Christ or Aquarius?**

The Christian answer to New Age and to the "new religions" is fully contained in the solemnity of God's Nativity: the answer is God's Son, born of the Virgin Mary for our salvation. It is precisely this fact which is a thorn in the hearts of our contemporaries, and doesn't yield to any remedies. That is why there is such a wealth of actual proposals in the area of occult knowledge and of means to happiness, which help avoid suffering. And the approach of the year 2000 produces an upsurge of this fever.

**"This will be a sign for you" (Luke 2, 12)**

Contemporary people search for signs. They look at the stars. God's Nativity gives man a sign. But it is not the star of the magi. That one shines only from afar, freeing a space where the real sign will appear. And it is meant not for the wise men, but for the shepherds: " And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger" (Luke 2, 12.16,). This sign was not some abstract sign in the sky, it is a concrete and historic man: Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem. Christian signs are precisely of this nature: embodied in conventional historic events, concealed in the nooks of day-to-day life. Jesus -as a sign –is not some convenient arrangement of stars, but a small child crying in the manger. God is so great that He can become small, so omnipresent that He is able to become concrete, so powerful that can stoop down before the history of humanity, in order to enter it. New Age dreams about a future appearance of a Teacher, of Maitreya , high in heaven, so accessible in order that all might see Him.

### **God becomes man: a real mystique of unity**

New Age dreams about a mystique of unity: all in unity, everything related to everything else. This refers both to God and to man. But in such a way that the dissimilarities between them are already erased. God's Nativity is a feast of unity between God and man. God becomes man in order for man to become divine. This occurs precisely in the Incarnation. The child in the mangers simultaneously the Son of God and the Son of Mary: we worship Him although he is wrapped in diapers. But this never reaches a fusion between man and God: they remain separated, like "I" and "you". God and man remain separate persons. If this were not so, then how could we love? Two chemical elements, united in an alloy, cannot love: they are simply fused. The dream of New Age about unity refers more likely to the mineral kingdom rather than to the human world, and even less to God's world.

### **Christ a cosmic energy?**

Christians who incline toward New Age sometimes cite Teilhard de Chardin. Indeed, he saw in Christ a heart which moves the entire material reality. Owing to energy of His incarnation, the Universe is in a certain field of God's magnetism. In Jesus God wanted to become the "heart" of matter, in order to raise it to a divine state. To that extent de Chardin's ideas are acceptable in the logic of the Incarnation: Christ remains a concrete and a historic person, and becomes the universal soul of the world. As the center of the cosmos, He attracts toward Himself all material reality, similar to what a man in love does regarding his beloved. But this loving man remains in Bethlehem and on Calvary. Jesus keeps His wounds. God's Nativity and Passover are never forgotten. Energy keeps emanating from the manger and the cross.

### **Hope**

The feverish searches of many of our contemporaries, who want to find new sources of satisfaction and joy, have much in common with the darkness of melancholy, which encompasses our epoch. We are sad, but smiling. Is this an unwillingness and disillusionment because our earth has experienced so little happiness, despite its enormous possibilities and means? Or is it a matter of tenacity in sufferings and in the failed history of mankind, through an escape according to cosmic rules, which will automatically make us free when we find the key to their secrets? In that case we actually will be able search for

happiness in the stars. God's Nativity teaches us, that on the road to happiness there are no secret shortcuts which could free us from daily efforts. God Himself didn't know any secret path, in order to save us. He became man and he lived like us, together with all joys and pains, of which normal human life consists. Jesus lived without any shortcuts through a normal human existence to the end, and to what an end! But God's Nativity is also hope: "for today in the city of David a Savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord " (Luke 2, 11).

### **Saved through the Other**

New Age places the personality of man in the center. They say: "Save yourselves, even if you use cosmic powers for this". Notwithstanding the unity of all constellations, all religions, all Oriental gurus, all prescriptions for happiness, of the endless repertoire of psychological practices and of more or less scientific concepts, New Age leaves us in total solitude. We must cope for ourselves: be our own saviors. As a result, after lengthy searches, man in the New Age returns exactly to the place from which he wanted to leave: to the obstruction of his achievements, which he so fears. And he must save himself again. The blessed message of God's Nativity is different: we are saved through the gift of salvation by Him who came down from heaven for us, for man, and for our salvation (Credo). The Other came to save us.

### **Come, bow down to the Lord.**

† Godfried, Cardinal Danneels, Archbishop of Brussels

Christmas, 1990