New Age movement - new faith?

dr Urszula Bejma
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego

Axiological atrophy and moral ideals

One of the constitutive elements of any religion is its normative dimension. Because religion is not just a collection of “truths” given to believe, but it also shows a “proper” conduct of life, which is considered good in view of the final “destination” of man. Also ethics which is a part of philosophy with its axiological dimension, seeks answers to the meaning of human life. While the former requires a specific procedure by referring to some kind of revelation, which contains more or less detailed guidance of human behavior, the other using the innate abilities of human mind, tries to justify the need for specific behaviors calling it good, while the opposite behavior calls evil. It is not unusual the situation in which religious moral standards are confirmed and strengthened by the guidance of ethics as a general rule: fides querens intellectum. Thus, the “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves” (FR introduction).

Knowledge of the rules of a proper conduct is a part of human knowledge of all reality ranging from God through cosmos, natural environment, and ending on oneself. Knowledge is almost always complementary, and sometimes one form of knowledge conditions the others. “the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing. This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life” (FR 1).

1 Faith seeking understanding.
Philosophy of the Stoics, of various forms, and in particular Christian philosophy, refers to natural law as binding norms of behavior of all people. Marcus T. Cicero called it a fair law of reason, which is binding every human being and that „there can be neither altered by the other law, or repealed in some of its parts, or abolished completely. Nobody can relieve us from it; no the Senate or the people ... It is not different in Rome and another in Athens, eternal and immutable, includes both all nations and for all times”. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguished two levels of natural law: natural eternal law (per se), and ius gentium which is a logical deduction from the former. H. Grotius emphasized that the natural law is the order of right reason, which shows that in each step, depending on the compatibility or incompatibility with human nature, lies a moral abomination, or a moral imperative, and consequently, God who is the creator of nature, prohibits some deeds or obliges to do some others.

Morality governed by natural law becomes apparent when the opportunity to learn about natural law is based on natural human abilities or on divine revelation. Otherwise, there is no reason for being natural law, accessible to all men.

The doctrine of the New Age does not know the concept of natural law for two reasons. First, because there is no any objective truth that chronologically, or at least logically, would precede the cognitive process; truth does not exist outside the process of cognition. Truth is always created on the ad hoc basis. „Negation of an objective truth leads to a radical challenge of the objective sense. Instead, there is diversity, pluralism or eventually improvised satisfaction. Tolerance acquires features of the Absolute”. Giving the fact that there is not any objective sense, or any objective truth, in consequence, if anybody thinks that he has acquired them, he moves into a world of illusion.

Secondly, as there is no objective truth, there is no objective value. Man does not have an external objective measure of his actions. Good and bad exist only in the mind of the beholder. They are the result of ignorance and lack of understanding and seeing things in their true light. Consequently, „it is absolutely indifferent what action takes place, because anything done, there will be neither better nor worse than that which one has failed to do. A space of human deeds is an axiological void, in which each choice is as right, as it is wrong, as reasonable and appropriate, as ab-

---

According to the doctrine of the New Age, absolute freedom expresses itself in the authenticity of human activities. Man chooses what he thinks is right for him and there is no matter what it is: drugs, homosexuality, marital infidelity, abortion.

For the followers of the New Age there is not any objective moral ideal, which would be obligatory to pursue. Such perfection does not exist, because personality does not have any restrictions except those which she individually accepts. Human moral good is what a man thinks it as good. This means that, „there is no substantial wrong, you can only talk about the bad consequences of actions arising from the undeveloped your true nature, out of ignorance”. In a matter of fact there is no difference between good and evil. Everything is morally relative and it is up to an individual to make his own choices. Consequently, it is useless any effort toward moral improvement, you’re perfect as you are, so you do not have to make any efforts for your personal moral improvement. This means that, although a follower of the New Era „looks” for moral improvements (specifically enlightenment), it is not at the cost of renunciation of the pleasures of the earthly life.

Moral ideal of the New Age is earthly in itself as earthly is the religion itself, about which we can say that is the religion of small things. „In the new Age to the level of sacrum are raised health and environmental concerns, love, partner, sex, subjective sense of happiness, and even success in the business”.

For these attitudes is of great importance the doctrine of reincarnation and karma - the „debt” accumulated by a soul during the current or previous incarnations. According to that doctrine, a person which accumulates good karma in her life will be reincarnated into a better life. While having bad karma she will be reincarnated into less desired type of existence. The law of karma tries to explain the pain and suffering in the world. Thus, when the suffering is caused by bad karma, it becomes completely useless thing to help the person who is suffering, because she has to work off the bad karma that causes such suffering. If, for example, a woman kills her own child (making abortion), this means that it must allow

---

this action, because of child’s bad karma, which has to be redeemed in this way.\textsuperscript{11}

At the core of the Catholic moral model stands experienced by every human being weakness. It is true especially in the area of morality. There is often observed an interval between what a person sees, applauds and would to do, and what she actually does. This human inner conflict is explained in the Catholic doctrine with the concept of original sin.

The first objective norm of morality is the natural law understood as natural order established by God and inscribed on the human heart. It is the law, “written by the Creator’s hand on the tablet of the heart and which reason, not blinded by sin or passion, can easily read” (MBS 30). Such understanding of natural law contains two elements. The first is the existence of natural law, and the second - the possibility to learn it in the way of reason. The second element - as already emphasized above - is of great importance, because in the case that man was not able to know it, it could not apply. Conversely, as stresses St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans, it is on the basis of natural law, that God shall judge the Gentiles, because knowing the oracles of God, that is, knowing the principles of the natural law, did not act in accordance with those orders. “for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened” (Rom. 1: 21).

The essence of the natural law is its universality both in space and time, constancy and independence of any positive law. As a result, no positive law can stay in conflict with natural law. This was clearly stated by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical Mit brennender Sorge. “Human laws in flagrant contradiction with the natural law are vitiated with a taint which no force, no power can mend” (MBS 30).

Catholic Church’s teaching starts with the fact of the contingency of every human being and his moral weakness. From the nature of the contingency of human existence, man in his being is dependent on God, who not only exists, but his essence is existence - is the „Who Is”. (Ex. 3: 14). God must exist. It is God who sustains the existence of all contingent beings. And the moral weakness of man has its origin in the human will weakened because of original sin and personal sins. But by the grace of God, worn-out by Jesus Christ, the Savior of all people, a person can act morally right, to make progress on the path to holiness, conformed to God to unite with Him. St. Paul highlights it clearly: „I can do all things in him

who strengthens me" (Phil. 4: 13), „who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 8).

Moral improvement is not left to the Catholic ad libitum, but it is his duty. It results from the fact of being a part of the chosen people of God (cf. Rom. 1: 7), which calls Christian not only for a complete break with sin and pagan rites, but to live life. If a Christian is to be like God, he has to be like Him above all else in holiness. Thus, the core of Christian asceticism is sanctity of life. To strengthen a Christian on the way to holiness, Christ sent the Holy Spirit by whose acts he is involved in the holiness of God. Therefore, Christians are saints in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them (Rom. 8: 14-17).

**Self-awareness versus a call to holiness**

One of the main ideas of New Age thinking is a matter of consciousness and its expansion. A holistic view of reality shows far-reaching interdependence of all reality, and more specifically its unity. All beings are interconnected and interdependent, regardless of how big is the range which divides them. The task faced by every human being is to become aware of the characteristics of the universe. „A man should be able to achieve this holistic vision of global reality, thanks to refining and matching self-awareness, which consist of crossing the current opportunities“. Through this concerted effort to transform a man rises to a higher level of grasping reality, eventually merging with the learned object. This process finds its apogee in the confluence of the Great All that is God. It is also the moment to overcome all dualities. Then one realizes that it is filled and moved by the divine, and this gives him opportunity to self-transcendence and penetration into new domains of life. In this situation, three things become apparent to man: „all is one“, „all is god“, „we ourselves are god“.

So, in the process of spiritual growth the sense of individuality is weakening, while the sense of unity with others and the universe is growing. The sense of a separate self disappears, to increase awareness of being one. This is despite the fact that the „separate self, which seems (to be) a major obstacle to consciousness, is always an illusion. (So) you do not have to make any effort to remove the separate self, because it does not exist from the very beginning. All you really need, you looked for, because...
se it can not found. This act of non-finding is in itself a recognition of the unique consciousness."  

This process of increased self-awareness of the unity is to be strengthened and amplified. One way to expand consciousness is practicing sport. Extreme physical effort that makes an athlete, can trigger a mystical state of consciousness similar to that which triggers contemplation, could usher in the development, which will cover all aspects of life. From the observations we know that the in sports lies that great power sufficient to move beyond the normal experience of self, ability to generate abilities generally recognized as mystical, occult or religious beliefs.

Another way to encourage the growth of self-awareness are meetings with extraterrestrials. First, they may be inspired by adoption of the doctrine of the New Age, the element of consolidating and raising awareness. Many proponents of the ideology of the New Age clearly refer to such experiences. For example, S. Mac Laine says that she met such a being named „Mayan”. The result of this meeting was described in the book called The Edge.

The most popular way to extend and make more dynamic the self-awareness are training sessions under the EST, which take place in a specific environment and according to a precise ritual. One of the authors in this way describes the session. Each of sixteen-hour session is run by a coach who ridicules and demeans the audience, making people believe that life that lead does not give them any benefit. The enormous pressure and intensification of such activities makes many vomits, cries and collapses. That is the aim. Along with passing hours of mental torture, tears turn into the ability to look at the interior, and the disease into Enlightenment. Main aim of this training is to come to conviction that we are all gods that create their own worlds.

Christianity, and especially the Catholic faith, preaching the need for interior conversion, stresses at the same time that this is the work of God’s grace rather than a result of human treatments. God’s work is „wanting” and „performance” in accordance with what we read in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians: „for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2: 13), and the main task of man is to open up to God’s action and cooperation with God’s grace.

An outward sign of inner conversion is accepted baptism. Immersion in water during baptism symbolizes death with Christ of the old man, and

---

16 Erhard Seminar Training.
getting out of the water - the resurrection with Christ to new life in Him. 

„So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6: 11), „it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2: 20). The result of this rite is a radical transformation. It involves wasting and death of the old man and clothing oneself in a new man (Rom. 6: 6, Col. 3: 9, Eph. 4: 24). It is a new creation of man in the image of God (Gal. 6: 15)\(^{18}\).

Although Christian is baptized in the name of the whole of the Trinity, and thus participate in her life, it is by this act that in a particular way belongs to Christ, clothes himself with Christ, forming with him and other baptized one Mystical Body (Gal. 3: 28). Baptism by the work of the of the Holy Spirit sanctifies „convert”, making him a new creature, introduces into a community of the People of God and makes an heir of heaven. This state of things does not mean a closed and final state, but rather the beginning of a process of improvement - becoming a „child of God”. The main components of this process is not only a continuous „breaking of sin”, but also, and above all, a close union with God.

In addition to baptism, are there other sacraments, understood as the visible signs of invisible grace of God, in particular, Confirmation and the Eucharist. The first is strengthening of the baptized through active participation in the Church so as to be „the salt of the earth” (Mt. 5, 13), the „light of the world” (Mt. 5: 14). In the Eucharist, baptized receive spiritual nourishment supporting him on the road to holiness. In this way, „converted” man is reborn to a new life through baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation and nourished with spiritual food of the Eucharist.

A special role in the life of a Catholic plays the sacrament of reconciliation. It concerns first of all with the situation whereby a baptized knowingly and voluntarily on important matter betrayed his vocation, resulting from the accepted baptism. It is through the Sacrament of Penance that he is back to the original way of holiness, initiated by baptism. Confessing sins to a priest and expressing sorrow for them he receives remission of those sins. An important element of this sacrament is a compensation for the damage that caused the sin of a believer. A similar role is played by the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick: forgives sins to a believer and strengthens him in the most difficult moment for him - his death.

Christian marriage and family life is a way to make their live holy. Christ raised to the dignity of the sacrament Christian marriage between a man and a woman. It is in this sacrament of love between man and wo-

\(^{18}\) **Słownik Teologii Katolickiej**, op. cit., p. 132.
man that Catholics are sanctified and strengthened, acting in the image of Christ with the Church. The conjugal „communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life project, what they have and what they are: For this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in the Lord Christ God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony” (FC 19).

Catholic enters into relationship of love with God above all through mediation of the One and High Priest, Jesus Christ. As God-Man he is the high priest; He has this dignity also because of the work of redemption, while sacrificing his own life on the wood of the cross, and now is in heaven „to intercede for us before God” (Heb. 9: 24). All baptized, because of baptism, share in the priesthood of Christ, so they can offer up spiritual sacrifices of what their life is filled: with „prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne” (LG 34).

However, apart from the common priesthood, arising from the sacrament of baptism, there is the ministerial priesthood of the Catholic Church, the ordained ministry, which is participating in the priesthood of Christ, who is the only one High Priest. Through this sacrament a priest conforms to Christ the Priest, and at the same time becomes a sign of Christ’s presence in the community of God’s people. In addition, the priest by the virtue of his ordination, acts as an intermediary between God and man. His role in this regard is: to procure grace in the celebrated sacraments, to communicate and explain God’s message, to from the people of God in the image of God himself through prayers and sacrifices, because „The aim of any service in the Church, whether the service is apostolic, pastoral, priestly or episcopal, is to keep up this dynamic link between the mystery of the Redemption and every man” (RH 22).

The above analysis points to the fundamental differences that exist between the process of improvement in the New Age praxis, and the quest for holiness in the Catholic Church. In the first case, it is purely natural procedure of an adept. Awaken powers, give life to a person through training, in purpose to unite him with one all. In the teaching of the Catholic Church Christian sanctification takes place through saving work of God, it is first and foremost a gift of God, and only then a result of cooperation with God’s grace. In addition, sanctification as understood in the praxis of the Church is a moral perfection, while the praxis of the New Era is a multiplication of consciousness, in the context of the monistic view of the world. Finally, even the most „sacred” follower of Christ will never beco-
me God. Being with him in personal relationships he will always remain non-God, only an imperfect image of God.

**Narcissism and charity**

The central concept of the ideology of the New Age is holism. The followers of this movement are convinced that all reality, no matter how far would juxtaposed, is a unity: heaven and earth, spirit and matter, and an uncommon everyday ... are closely related. That reality as a whole should be the subject of study, not individual elements in isolation. Only a whole has its own meaning, because reality is not a simple sum of the parts that compose it, but a new, sui generis reality. No whole can be reproduced with their parts.  

This holistic policy applies to everyone and everything. Applies to both „respect for nature (ecology), lifestyle and diet, as well as the place of residence (home-harmony) and development of human environment. The question is – as the proponents of New Ages say - that reigned external and artificial beauty, but the internal and spiritual one”.

With this in mind, it would seem that the followers of the New Age will make the principle of opening up to another human being the center of their doctrine, and the „love of neighbor” a central moral standard. This is not the case. On the contrary, the ideology of the New Age is par excellence, self-centered and even narcissistic. The first dimension of the egocentrism is the concept of self-absorption I (selfness) that should transform to the point to be identified with a cosmic self. The way to achieve this is meditation, concentration, ecstasy ... Indeed, everything comes from selfness, everything melts into it, everything is permeated by selfness, and selfness can see themselves only myself.

As a result, focusing on himself, becomes the first principle of all references. Not surprisingly, since he is god or at least he will become god! So everyone can have everything he wants - he deserves it. Hence it is not surprising a recommendation of one guru, Swami Muktananda: Kneel before yourself, worship and praise your own existence. God dwells within

---

19 This idea is not a new one in the social sciences. It was, and is still discussed in the context of the dispute between nominalism and realism in sociology. The first draws attention to the fact that society is composed of individuals, so items logical rule: nothing is social, which is not psychical, and consequently that the society is the sum of individuals. According to the social realists, regardless of the fact that society develops on the basis of units, it is not only their sum, but it is a new reality. E. Durkheim emphasized this dialectical interaction between individual and society. DURKEIM, E.: *Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris, 1960, p. 495-496.

20 FRANCK, B.: op. cit., p. 86.

21 Ibid., p. 200.

you as you.\textsuperscript{23} In the light of this finding raises a specific vision of the world with millions of small „gods” forming little heaven, sitting on their „divine” thrones selfishly oriented, because there is no one to adore them - yet all are gods!

In everyday life, the followers of the New Age are involved with passion in creating a divine personality traits. First, they need to make affirmation of their own desires often mundane, but growing to the rank of god’s desires. In the process of such self affirmation a person recalls her previous incarnations, personal interactions with different personalities and tries to see at her new perspective.

The New Age practices are not free; everything has its price: enlightenment, healing, love for all you pay money. In the narcissistically oriented traffic there is no place for altruism. There is not the question of how to deal with the needs of others: poor, hungry, those in need of spiritual support ... „Gods” are so preoccupied with themselves that they do not have time for others!

Moreover, in the religious doctrine of reincarnation host and bad karma, altruism is the attitude of the least desirable. Helping others one would distract himself from the process of deepening self-awareness, and above all would work even against those whom he would intend to help, because they would loose chance to overcome their bad karma to be able to reborn in a higher form of existence in the reincarnation process. In the light of the doctrine of bad karma, while accepting the claim that there is no difference between good and evil, altruistic attitudes do not exist. Moreover, everything is easily justified: „deviances” and even crimes. No deed is good in itself, because there are not objective standards of morality. Thing becomes „good”, when a person accepts it. In this way, a follower of New Age creates morality on his own, according to his needs, egocentric and narcissistic ... This is confirmed by the words of S. MacLaine saying emphatically: Free will means to do everything you can or can potentially do. We all create our own reality.\textsuperscript{24}

Such egocentric and relativistic morality opposes to Church’s objective morality, set by moral standards. Human acts in accordance with them are good contrary to them - bad.

The first rule is the principle of natural law: „do good and avoid evil”. From this general standard result directly following conclusions: the duty to worship God, to avoid evil, which no one would like to experience from others, moderation ... The content of the original rule, and brought out of the direct applications, becomes a clear moral imperative. Individu-

\textsuperscript{23} GROOTHUIS, D.: op. cit., p. 23.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 29.
are able to explore the rule by using one's own reason. A slightly more complex cognitive operations requires to reach further conclusions, brought out the general principles - the Ten Commandments. They are in the range of cognitive, natural human capacity.

New Testament morality is based in particular on the commandment of love: God and neighbor. In the Old Testament the commandment of love was binding Jews. It is written in the Book of Leviticus: „You shall love your neighbor as yourself“ (Lev. 19: 18). Initially, the neighbors were understood only fellow Jews. Over time, and at the time of the birth of Christ was already widespread teaching the idea of neighbor as embracing not only non-Jews, but the enemies - pagans. A new commandment of Christ leaves no doubt who is in its meaning a neighbor - every man including foreigners and even enemies. The last category of neighbors – is indicated separately as an object of love of Christ’s disciples, „For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?“ (Mt. 5: 46).

Although it is possible to speak about two commandments, given two different objects of love, in reality it is one commandment, because one is the virtue of charity: God as Father and neighbor as a brother. This is pointed out by St. John. He wrote: „If any one says, „I love God“, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen“ (1 Jn 4: 20). Elsewhere, the Apostle asks the question: „But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?“ (1 Jn 3: 17). In the teaching of Christ, the love of God and love of neighbor not only go hand in hand, but the latter is a measure of the former.

Man in his earthly life is to be like God. John the Evangelist wrote: "God is love" (1 Jn, 4, 8), the Christian is to be like God above all in love, the love Christ has for his Father and for the people; Jesus Christ, though he was rich, he became a servant of all. Currently his work of love expresses in deeds of His disciples, who act out of love. It is also a sign by which his followers will be recognized: „By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another“ (Jn 13: 35). And Saint. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians lists the characteristics of love. Love is: patient, without envy, humble, forgiving, fair, straightforward, durable and kind ... (1 Cor. 13: 4-8). For this reason, love in the Christian life cannot be replaced by anything: neither the gift of tongues, or the gift of prophecy, nor knowledge, nor even a simple dedication to his neighbor ... (1 Cor. 13: 1-4).

Given the above, one can without doubt say that the center of Christian doctrine is the idea of an universal solidarity of all men, which originate from the fact that all people are children of God, made in His image
and likeness, redeemed by the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who humbled himself, became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

References