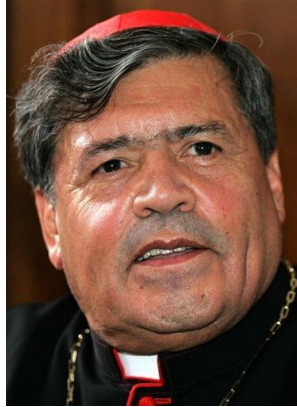


Non-Christian Meditation

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Source : [A call to vigilance, Pastoral Instruction on New Age](#)

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.>](#)
