

New Age and Old Rome

By Byron Snapp

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Authored by a charismatic Jesuit, a professor at Loyola University in Chicago, this book sets forth the author's concern for Catholics who are involved in the New Age Movement. I must hasten to add that this book is helpful, at points, to Protestants as they face New Age involvement by members of their denominations.

This book is more than an academic treatment of its subject. The author during his seminary years was a follower of Jungian psychology and was involved in various occult practices. Because of his own participation he realizes the ease by which others can be drawn into a similar involvement. His book is a forthright presentation of a variety of elements that make up the New Age Movement. He follows this with his analysis of the unbiblical doctrine involved in New Age instruction.

He freely shares with the reader the opportunities he had as a Jesuit seminary student to take a variety of classes that taught the basic philosophy of what is now called the New Age Movement. The reader is given a knowledgeable overview of C. G. Jung's philosophy. Like all false philosophies, it is built on a denial of God's Word and a recreation of God as defined by man (Ps. 50:21). Jung's interest in the occult opened the door for Pacwa to begin to explore the viability of astrology. Pacwa writes, "When people reject the spiritual life offered by God, they opt for a bogus spirituality." (p. 75) When the infallibility of Scripture is denied men will proclaim something else as infallible. Pacwa looked to that which could be examined by scientific methods. Later he learned that the claims attributed to scientific research by people he respected were pseudo-scientific. The author provides a history of astrology accompanied by a critique of it based on Scripture. His quest for truth and guidance extended to the use of an enneagram to learn more about his own personality. An enneagram is a "diagram composed of a circle with nine points on the rim, connected inside the circle by a triangle. Originally used for divination, it has become the symbol of a nine personality-typing system." (p. 219) Following a critique of the enneagram he explains how he finally saw Jesus as the answer to spiritual needs. He closes the book by pointing out some current inroads the New Age Movement is making

into the Catholic church throughout the United States and what Catholics can do to stem the New Age tide.

At the book's end he includes a list of Catholic and non-Catholic groups that offer information regarding the New Age Movement. A glossary of common terms is provided for the reader who is unfamiliar with terminology. A helpful bibliography, arranged topically, and his footnotes are also included.

Denominations that deny the sufficiency of Scripture for all areas of life are providing an open door for the entrance of New Age thinking and teaching among its membership. In today's religiously correct climate (Scriptural teaching is to be defined by man not God) many denominations must beware. He also provides some guidelines regarding how New Agers are to be confronted.

The book has some drawbacks. As one would expect, he interprets Scripture from a Catholic framework. He believes the Virgin Mary was sinless (p. 29) and that sins are forgiven in baptism (p. 123). He writes, "God gives the faith and grace to respond to the call of faith in Jesus, making salvation possible." (p. 137) The reader is left in an unclear posture regarding man's part in salvation. At another place, he writes, "God chooses to give us the gifts of saving faith, hope for eternal life, and love of God and neighbor. We have the free will to accept these graces and cooperate with them." (p. 123) Scriptural teaching is clear that man is totally depraved and has no ability, nor can anyone perform any work to save himself. Salvation and its application to the sinner's heart is all of God. Other misinterpretations could be mentioned such as the usefulness of the Rosary in one's prayer life (p. 194) and a wrong view of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (p. 192).

Also the author suggests that enneagram teachers should be licensed. He writes: "People do not go to doctors and psychologists unless that practitioner is tested and licensed. Should not some similar requirement be made of enneagram teachers, who not only explain what your personality is like but make recommendations about what you should be like?" (p. 117) Shortly thereafter he critiques enneagrams from a theological perspective. One could easily ask, "If enneagrams are wrong Scripturally, why push for practitioners to be licensed by the State? Does this make the practice any more legitimate?"

The author at times places the voice of the Church on the level of Scripture. For example he writes, "The Church is as definite as Deuteronomy in order to protect the flock of Christ from seduction by the Spiritists and the spirits." (p. 77) Scriptural teaching is totally authoritative. Whatever the Church says must take second place to Scripture and must be judged in light of the Bible. Paul's hearers in Berea judged his teaching in light of Scripture (Acts 17:11). If Church pronouncements are on the level of Scripture, then Scripture is insufficient. If Scripture is insufficient for daily life, the door is open for members to look elsewhere for teachings that will fill the void. However, we must remember Paul's words that Scripture has "thoroughly equipped (man) for every good work." (II Tim. 3:16b)

The author does not counsel Catholics to leave the Catholic church, yet he does advise them to attend Catholic churches that are not involved in the New Age Movement. The fact that a denomination countenances this teaching and advises seminarians to take courses that teach New Age doctrine points out that the denomination has serious problems.

I must stress that the issue can be summed up in one statement: “Is Scripture sufficient to deal with the problems that confront society and the church today?” All denominations must be careful to note the sufficiency of Scripture. This book clearly shows the danger of involvement in a denomination that does not rest in Scripture's sufficiency. This book is informative but must be read with discernment.