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THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM
AND
THE NEW AGE

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From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical traditions’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM AND THE NEW AGE: Abstract

Pope St John Paul II noted that the New Age Movement rejects a ‘rationalistic religiosity’, and for this reason its adherents can find attractive the mystery, ritual, chant, of the Extraordinary Form, and its incarnational character. The Extraordinary Form can in turn help to free those attracted by the New Age from Pelagianism, by its consistent stress on our need for grace; from their spiritual subjectivism, by its objectivity; and from any connections with the Occult, by its evident spiritual power. The potential attraction of the ancient liturgy for New Age adherents is also suggested by the many converts to the Faith from the ‘decadent’ Romanticism of the late 10th century, and from Hermeticism, both precursor movements of the New Age.

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The Challenge

1. The diverse phenomenon popularly known as the ‘New Age’ has become not only a major alternative to ‘organised religion’ for its serious adherents, but in its vaguer and more popular manifestations has, in educated circles in the English-speaking world, an almost ubiquitous influence. Pope St John Paul II described the New Age movement as ‘pseudo-religious’;¹ the purpose of this Paper is to explore the ways in which the Extraordinary Form can play its part in a Catholic response to it.
2. Much of what is said here will also apply to a group of related phenomena: Eastern spiritualities adopted by Westerners,² Yoga,³ Neo-Paganism,⁴ and Occultism.⁵
3. Prominent motifs⁶ of the movement include monism, pantheism, reincarnation, individuation, and a rejection of Original Sin. It draws on Buddhism and Hinduism, Western esotericism (Hermeticism),⁷ and Jungian psychoanalysis. The movement is drawn together by the deep, though usually unacknowledged, debt of many of its leading thinkers, and texts supposedly ‘channelled’ from spirits, to the Theosophy of Alice Bailey, herself the intellectual heir of Madam Blavatsky.⁸
4. The movement rejects rationalism and materialism, and is critical of conventional, binary logic, while clothing some of its claims in abstruse terminology. It does not reject the

¹ Pope St John Paul II: Address to the Bishops of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, 28th May 1993, 2.

² Notably Buddhism, Hinduism, and, though somewhat different in character, the Bahá’í faith. Space does not allow a detailed consideration of these, but as major influences upon the New Age they share certain important features with it.

³ Postural Yoga as it is found today is a modern invention, combining the influences of the Western Physical Culture movement of the first half of the 20th century, and Indian spiritual traditions: see Andrea Jain *Selling Yoga: from Counterculture to Pop Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p37. The Westernised Indian spiritualities found in Western Yoga give the movement a strong affinity with the New Age, and it fits into the New Age as one of many ‘spiritual techniques’ for self-realisation: see §4 below. Some Indian writers who wish to connect Yoga more firmly with Hinduism complain about its contamination, in its popularised Western forms, with the ‘intellectual gobbledook of New Age platitudes’ (quoted by Jain *op. cit.* p147).

⁴ A movement for the most part entirely without historical roots in the pre-Christian religions of Western Europe.

⁵ Where, as will be noted below, the New Age stresses the goal of spiritual and emotional *healing* (or transformation), the precursor movement of Hermeticism focuses on *meaning* (or knowledge), and Neo-Paganism and Occultism on *power*. On the last of these, see Donna Steichen *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 1991) p70-1.

⁶ See the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (2002): *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian reflection on the “New Age”*. Other useful guides to the phenomenon from the Catholic point of view are: Irish Theological Commission, *A New Age of the Spirit? A Catholic Response to the New Age Phenomenon* (Dublin 1994); Stratford Caldicott *Understanding the New Age* (London: Catholic Truth Society: 2006); Mitch Pacwa SJ *Catholics and the New Age. How Good People are being drawn into Jungian Psychology, the Enneagram and the New Age of Aquarius*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1992); Donna Steichen *op. cit.*, and Roger Buck, *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum: From Secularism and the New Age to Christendom Renewed* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016).

⁷ A diffuse movement influenced by Gnosticism, Kabbalism, and various (real or alleged) Western magical texts and traditions of the ancient and medieval periods. It is manifested in Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and Ceremonial Magic, and is linked to Occultism.

⁸ Alice Bailey 1880-1949; Helena Petrovna Blavatsky 1831-1891. See Buck *op. cit.* p63.

moral licence of modernity. A frequent teaching of ‘channelled’ texts is that an individual’s situation (of suffering, prosperity, etc.) is a learning experience, which in some sense is caused by the individual, and can be changed by the individual; healing is gained by the use of psychological or spiritual techniques. This establishes in the New Age a form of Pelagianism.

5. One of the most influential of all New Age texts purports to have been dictated by Jesus Christ.⁹ On the other hand, the Catholic Church remains the principal target of New Age hostility to Christianity.¹⁰
6. Pope St John Paul II noted its ‘desire to go beyond a cold, rationalistic religiosity’,¹¹ and it is often the more generous souls who are drawn to it.¹² Nevertheless, St John Paul condemned its influence in Catholic ‘preaching, catechesis, workshops and retreats’¹³

The Extraordinary Form

7. It is necessary both to respond positively to what is correct in the New Age—the demand for the supernatural—as well as to oppose its errors, and indeed to do the latter in such a way that is convincing to those attracted by the New Age.
8. The need for Catholics to make clearer and more lively the Church’s own spirituality is a common theme in Catholic writing on the subject. Pope St John Paul II declared:
Pastors must honestly ask whether they have paid sufficient attention to the thirst of the human heart for the true “living water” which only Christ our Redeemer can give (*Cf.* Jn. 4: 7-13). They should insist on the spiritual dimension of the faith, on the perennial freshness of the Gospel message and its capacity to transform and renew those who accept it.¹⁴
9. Donna Steichen, in her study of the growth of Neo-Pagan and New Age practices in the Catholic Church in America, makes a link with the liturgical reform:

⁹ *A Course in Miracles* by Helen Schucman, first published in full in 1976. Schucman propounds the notion that the message of Jesus was corrupted by his disciples, and especially by St Paul, an idea developed by Alice Bailey (see her *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Pub., 1971, though first published in 1942), 103–04). New Age writers sometimes appropriate historical Christian figures and theological terms, giving them a radically different meaning. Attempts have also been made to reconstruct an authentic Christianity by reference to Gnosticism.

¹⁰ ‘Catholic Christianity, above all, is the natural target of liberal New-Ageism—even if New Agers frequently deny that they target anything at all.’ Buck *op. cit.* p134. Similarly, the Catholic Church is the focus of Occultist attempts to defile Christ, a task taken up by the ‘Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica’ established by the occultist Aleister Crowley in the early 20th century, and Crowley’s ‘Gnostic Mass’.

¹¹ Pope St John Paul II *op. cit.* 2

¹² See Randy England *The Unicorn in the Sanctuary: the impact of the New Age on the Catholic Church* (Manassas VA: Trinity Communications, 1990) p150

¹³ Pope St John Paul II *op. cit.* 2

¹⁴ Pope St John Paul II *op. cit.* 3. See also *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*, Foreword: ‘It should be recognized that the attraction that New Age religiosity has for some Christians may be due in part to the lack of serious attention in their own communities for themes which are actually part of the Catholic synthesis such as the importance of man’s spiritual dimension and its integration with the whole of life, the search for life’s meaning, the link between human beings and the rest of creation, the desire for personal and social transformation, and the rejection of a rationalistic and materialistic view of humanity.’

Are these drawn to idolatry—to false goddesses and false prophets—seeking satisfactions largely lost to post-conciliar iconoclasm...? Do they hunger for the sacred, for the richly symbolic drama of colour, meaning and mystery that has been leached out of contemporary liturgy, for the interior life ..., for a compelling sense of ultimate purpose? The false mysticism of neo-gnostic feminism offers an illusion of these.¹⁵

10. The New Age's core constituency is the secularised Protestant Anglosphere,¹⁶ a cultural milieu in which Christianity does not seem to offer a sense of sacred mystery, through ritual¹⁷ or asceticism,¹⁸ which must therefore be sought elsewhere.¹⁹
11. It harbours a powerful attraction for the profundity and spiritual authenticity of Gregorian chant, so much so that a whole sector of commercial music has developed in response.²⁰
12. Again, the New Age emphasises the goodness of nature, and the possibility of seeking wholeness through contact with natural things. The ancient liturgical tradition is strongly incarnational in its use of both natural things (water, salt, oil, etc.) and artefacts (bread and wine, song, vestments, etc.).
13. In many ways, then, the Extraordinary Form can address directly the New Age's key demand: in the words of the theologian, Stratford Caldicott, 'a *transforming contact* with mystery'.²¹ The parallel between what those attracted to Eastern mysticism and the New Age want, and what the liturgical tradition has to offer, is underlined by Thomas Merton's intense appreciation of chant and of the traditional liturgy.²²

¹⁵ Steichen *op. cit.* p118.

¹⁶ Buck *op. cit.* p56, 62, and *passim*. Esoteric movements in France and other countries of Catholic heritage have taken a different turn, with notably less hostility to Christianity: an influential example is the Austrian, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), whose rejection of the Catholic Church was tempered by his conviction of the Crucifixion as the turning-point of history: see Buck *op. cit.* p158.

¹⁷ New Age practices often involve free-wheeling 'do it yourself' rituals, but when influenced by Eastern religions can also incorporate (for example) Hindu rituals with a higher degree of formalism. Neo-Paganism has developed rituals (carried out for example at Stonehenge in England) of great complexity, exceeding the sometimes complex rituals of one of the New Age's precursor movements, Freemasonry. (Foster Bailey, Alice Bailey's husband, was a senior Freemason.) Yoga gives another example of the use of spiritually-charged ritual by post-Christian Westerners.

¹⁸ The influence of Eastern mysticism has led to the promotion of ascetical practices and self-discipline to detaching the individual from worldly things and as an aid to meditation. See Buck *op. cit.* pp144-6.

¹⁹ Cf. Walton Hannah *Darkness Visible: a Christian Appraisal of Freemasonry* (London: Baronius Press, 2008), a classic study of British Freemasonry first published in 1952, pp257-8: 'In general, Freemasonry in Scotland is more popular and relatively far more numerous than in England, partly because it tends to be cheaper, and because austere Presbyterianism has eliminated most of the colour, glamour, and ceremonial from Christian worship. When the soul is starved of these elements in religion, it will naturally tend to compensate for them itself in less desirable ways. It is not only the hostility of Rome that has left Masonry weak in Catholic countries.'

²⁰ The commercial success of recordings of Gregorian Chant is an indication of its potential in this regard. New Age music has adopted Gregorian Chant as an element in seeking forms of music which facilitate relaxation and meditation.

²¹ Stratford Caldicott *op. cit.* p51: '[the New Age] seeks a *transforming contact* with mystery (that which transcends us) and with the supernatural—a hunger for true love, for beauty, for healing, for saints and miracles: for poetry not prose.' Of the related phenomena of Paganism and Occultism, the former is potentially most open to the incarnational aspect of the liturgical tradition, and the latter more to the ritual, vestments, and chant.

²² The enthusiasm for Eastern mysticism shown towards the end of his life by Fr Thoman Merton (1915-1968), the popular author and Trappist monk, was an important influence for the New Age movement within the Catholic Church. He wrote in 1967: 'Our great danger is to throw away things that are excellent,

14. The Church's ancient liturgical tradition is able to present Catholic spirituality in a form which will not only satisfy the genuine hunger of the New Age for the supernatural, but will also gently draw the worshipper from the New Age's key errors, in four areas.
15. First, the Extraordinary Form can be of assistance in the Church's response to the New Age, by its insistent connection between the spiritual life and grace and sin, in the ceremonies (notably the two *Confiteors*) as well as the texts of the Mass. In its frequent references to our need for grace, it is an effective antidote to Pelagianism; in its concern for forgiveness, it opposes both the sense of moral superiority and the libertinism associated with the New Age. It is essential in this context that the need for grace is not just an abstract teaching, but made an integral part of the spiritual, and liturgical, life.
16. Second, the ancient liturgy emphasises the objective nature of spiritual realities. The Rites of the Extraordinary Form are objective both in the sense that they are not subject to arbitrary change,²³ and also in the sense that they emphasise their objective efficacy.²⁴ This is important in drawing those attracted to the New Age out of the spiritual subjectivism of the movement. It will also be helpful to any caught up in cult-like New Age groups, ruled by the arbitrary whims of the guru or cult leader, and to the attitude of magical manipulation found in the Occult.
17. Third, the ancient liturgy connects the spiritual and the intellectual life, demonstrating that it is possible to reject materialism without rejecting the entirety of the Western intellectual tradition. The Patristic theological roots of the Extraordinary Form, found for example in its Orations and the Roman Canon, and its Scholastic elements, remind us of the great intellectual resources of the Faith, while also underlining its concern for the transcendent. In the Church's liturgical traditions the West has not, as the New Age narrative suggests,²⁵ forgotten or neglected wisdom preserved only in the East, as a result of Rationalism and Materialism.²⁶
18. Fourth, the Extraordinary Form's acknowledgement of the reality of evil, of angels both blessed and fallen, and its sense of the powerful holiness of the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament, as well as the Church's traditional sacramentals, blessings, and exorcisms, are

which we do not understand, and replace them with mediocre forms which seem to us to be more meaningful and which in fact are only trite. I am very much afraid that when all the dust clears we will be left with no better than we deserve, a rather silly, flashy, seemingly up-to-date series of liturgical forms that have lost the dignity and the meaning of the old ones.' On chant, he wrote in 1965: 'The monks cannot understand the treasure they possess, and they throw it out to look for something else, when seculars, who for the most part are not even Christians, are able to love this incomparable art.' Quoted in 'Communion of Love: Thomas Merton and Liturgical Reform' by Gregory K. Hillis, ABC Religion and Ethics 14 Sep 2016 (<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/09/14/4538413.htm> accessed 31st May 2017).

²³ In contrast to the 'arbitrary deformations' noted by Pope Benedict in the Letter to Bishops accompanying the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*.

²⁴ In the sense of 'ritual efficacy' noted by the sociologist Anthony Archer (Anthony Archer *The Two Catholic Churches: a study in oppression* (London: SCM Press, 1986) p142. Thus, for example, the Canon does not need to be said aloud to have its effect: it does not depend on the subjective responses of members of the congregation.

²⁵ New Age writers sometimes attempt to create a Western historical narrative from thinkers and movements opposed to orthodox Christianity, even if they have little else in common: thus they often have sympathy for (but not necessarily much comprehension of) the Cathars. The work of Philip Carr-Gomm exemplifies this tendency.

²⁶ See Positio 21: *The Extraordinary Form and the Eastern Churches*.

of particular value to those in the New Age who have, consciously or not, taken a turn towards the Occult.²⁷

The Church's attraction for the New Age

19. The potential attraction felt by those associated with the New Age today is suggested by that felt by two of its precursor movements: 'decadent' Romanticism,²⁸ and Western Hermeticism.
20. A remarkable number of the 'decadent' Romantics of the late 19th century became Catholics. The most famous of these was J.K. Huysmans, whose descent into libertinism and the Occult has furnished modern Satanists with their standard liturgical reference book,²⁹ but who died a Catholic, after some years as a Benedictine oblate.³⁰ His example was followed by many others, in France and in England.³¹ To these writers, concerned with the sensual and the mysterious, the Church's ancient liturgy had a particular fascination, as noted in Oscar Wilde's treatment of his fictional, decadent, character, Dorian Gray.³² In the case of many of Gray's real-life counterparts, the Catholic liturgy was able, with other factors, to draw great sinners to conversion.
21. The Hermeticist Valentin Tomberg also became a Catholic, and notes the sympathy for the Church found in key Hermetic writers, including the Kabbalist Eliphas Levi,³³ and many others.³⁴ Tomberg noted in his major work as a Catholic:

Has not the time finally arrived when we Hermeticists shall take account of the incontestable fact that it is thanks to the Church that we have air to breathe and that we have a place of shelter and refuge in this world of materialism,

²⁷ See in particular the Irish Theological Commission *op. cit.* p32: 'There are various methods [in the New Age Movement] of acquiring familiar spirits, disguised as 'counsellors', or friends to advise people in their decision-making. They can be acquired through mind control techniques ...

'These councillors can be anybody, including the dead or demonic spirits. From the time these spirits are engaged, one is told to pray to them and ask their advice on everything. This opens the soul to demonic influences as we have no control over the forces involved, because the person has been put into a relaxed state in which they are ready to receive any influence without using the filter of intelligence or rational thinking. The process also makes the faculty of the will supple and compliant, and ready to receive any stimulus.'

²⁸ Whereas the Romantic movement emphasises nature, the emotions, and authenticity, the decadents or 'dark Romantics' sought more intense experiences through luxury, libertinism, and the Occult.

²⁹ Joris-Karl Huysmans 1848-1907. His novel *Là-Bas*, first published in 1891, describes Satanic rites.

³⁰ He had been an oblate at the monastery of Ligugé, near Poitiers.

³¹ Joseph Pearce, in his study of Oscar Wilde, lists the English poets Francis Thompson and John Gray, the English artist Audrey Beardsley, the French poets Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Marc-André Raffalovich, Wilde's friend Robert Ross, the English writers Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, 'and a host of others' following this path, as well as, ultimately, Wilde himself. Joseph Pearce *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2000) p386. An example from Italy would be Bl. Bartolo Longo (1841-1926), the founder of the shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii, who had been a Satanic priest before his conversion in 1865.

³² See Appendix

³³ Eliphas Levi (Alphonse Louis Constant) 1810-1875; see Appendix

³⁴ Other adepts of ceremonial magic and Hermeticism drawn towards, and sometimes into, the Church, noted by Tomberg are Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, Paul Sédir (Yvon de Loup), and Gérard Anacleto Vincent Encausse (Papus), as well as Tomberg himself. See Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg) *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism* trans. Robert Powell (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002) pp597-9

imperialism, nationalism, technologism, biologism and psychologism? It is in so far that the Church lives that we live.³⁵

22. Tomberg has particular significance since his work continues to be read in New Age circles. In it they find, among elements foreign to the Catholic tradition, not only a respect for the Church but an acute critique of important elements of New Age thinking, above all of the tension between the detachment of Eastern-inspired spirituality and compassion.³⁶

23. Today, few members of the New Age movement have a clear idea of Catholicism, but some have discovered and embraced it, such as Roger Buck, a former New Age activist.³⁷ It is evident that, while coming to appreciate the deficiencies of their former beliefs, it is necessary for them to be able to recognise in the Church, and in her liturgy, the reality which they had long been seeking: not the affirmation of secular values found in 'rationalistic religiosity', but the supernatural. It is then that they will be able to appreciate the insight of G.K. Chesterton, who himself had experience of spiritualism:

Real mystics don't hide mysteries, they reveal them. They set a thing up in broad daylight, and when you've seen it it's still a mystery. But the mystagogues hide a thing in darkness and secrecy, and when you find it, it's a platitude.³⁸

³⁵ Valentin Tomberg 1900-1973. See Anonymous (Valentin Tomberg) *Meditations on the Tarot* pp189–190

³⁶ *Ibid.* p36

³⁷ Buck describes his conversion in the book cited in this paper, pp161-190. Conversions of Westerners formerly attached to Eastern spiritualities are also notable: See for example Paul Williams *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002). The late Stratford Caldicot, one of whose works is quoted in this paper, was a convert from the Bahá'í faith.

³⁸ G.K. Chesterton *Father Brown Stories* (London: The Folio Society, 1959) p123 (From 'The Arrow of Heaven', first published in *The Incredulity of Fr Brown* in 1926.) Chesterton's use of the term 'mystagogue' is not, of course, accurate; it is simply a traditional term for catechist.

Appendix: Hermeticists and Decadents on the Extraordinary Form

As noted in the paper, Western Hermeticism and decadent Romanticism are among the precursor movements of the New Age, and their attitude to the ancient Catholic liturgy illustrates the possibilities it retains with respect to the New Age movement itself.

The Hermeticist and Catholic convert Valentin Tomberg quotes the French Kabbalist writer, and sometime seminarian, Eliphas Levi:

The ancient rites have lost their effectiveness since Christianity appeared in the world. The Christian and Catholic religion, in fact, is the legitimate daughter of Jesus, king of the Magi. A simple scapular worn by a truly Christian person is a more invincible talisman than the ring and pentacle of Solomon. The Mass is the most prodigious of evocations. Necromancers evoke the dead, the sorcerer evokes the devil and he shakes, but the Catholic Priest does not tremble in evoking the living God.³⁹

Oscar Wilde, who eventually converted to Catholicism himself, writes of his fictional, decadent Romantic character, Dorian Gray:

It was rumoured of him once that he was about to join the Roman Catholic communion; and certainly the Roman ritual had always a great attraction for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its elements and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy that it sought to symbolize.⁴⁰

These passages were composed before the reform of the Roman liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. It is evident that what these authors found interesting and attractive about the Mass is most clearly displayed today in the Extraordinary Form.

³⁹ Quoted in Tomberg *op. cit.* pp139-40

⁴⁰ Oscar Wilde *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London, Folio Society, 2009) p128. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in a magazine 1890, revised and extended, it appeared as a book in 1891.