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Promoting peace

The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, joined Bishop Matthew H. Clark and other religious leaders for a March 27 peace service in Ithaca. Page 3.



Faith or fad? Phenomenon attracts followers seeking alternative spiritual paths

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Depending on a person's perspective, the term "New Age" could encompass the following interpretations: the current dawning of a golden era in human history, the beginning of an age characterized by universal spiritual enlightenment, mental astuteness, and physical health and wholeness.

Then again, maybe it's just the repackaging of old religions and occult beliefs in a slick advertising scheme.

To some observers, however, New Age is a term that followers of one or more anti-Christians use to deceive the sincere, yet ignorant, truth-seeking masses by tricking them into believing in some phony messiah.

Actually, definitions of the New Age may barely exceed in number people who are interested in the phenomenon and those who love, despise or simply dismiss it.

Authors credited with coining the term include any number of astrologers who assert that the world is currently passing from the Piscean Age to the Aquarian Age; a famous 20th century Protestant minister and psychic named Edgar Cayce; and the late French Jesuit author and geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who authored *The Phenomenon of Man*, a book which theorized that humanity was evolving

toward the Omega Point, a universal center of divine convergence.

Indeed, the term New Age itself garners 10 definitions in the 1990 revision of *The New Age Dictionary*, published by Japan Publications, Inc., based in Tokyo and New York City.

Despite the various definitions given for the New Age, it can be safely assumed that those who use the term would agree it represents a search on several planes by people of many faiths — including some Catholics — to find a spiritually richer life.

Among the goals and objectives New Agers — the term many use for adherents of New Age — are looking for is a greater sense of how humans should interact with nature in order to undo the damage wrought by the industrial and technological ages. Proponents of New Age thinking sometimes refer to the planet as "Gaia," an interconnected living organism of which humans are a part.

And some New Agers look to such religions as those practiced by Native Americans to find answers as to how to live in harmony with "Gaia" — a term taken from the Greek name for the goddess of the earth.

Many New Agers are also searching to answer questions on how to interact with the creator.

Finally, a New Ager is often looking for his or her essential self, which — from his or her viewpoint — may be some culmination of various reincarna-

tions of past lives; a potential center of divine power and enlightenment; or a socially conscious person hungering for deeper solutions to the world's many problems than found in traditional political action.

"I think people are looking for wholeness in whatever form they can take," said John DeRosa, an employee of The New Voyage Bookstore, 1712 Monroe Ave., which stocks many books and materials commonly found in New Age catalogs and product listings. The store also carries other goods not defined as New Age.

In interviews with the *Catholic Courier*, DeRosa explained how he became interested in some of the beliefs that have been lumped under the term New Age.

A baptized Catholic and a former volunteer in a Catholic social work organization, DeRosa said his interest in the New Age grew out of an earlier desire to be more involved in the sacramental rituals of the church. As a young man in the 1960s, DeRosa asserted that the path was "pretty well blocked" for a lay person who wanted to participate extensively in the celebration of such sacraments as the Mass.

Dissatisfied with standing on the spiritual sidelines of Catholicism, DeRosa explored various Eastern philosophies and religions. Today he gives private consultations to people on various meditative techniques. He added that he has recently renewed his in-

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