

A Checklist for Catholic use of “New Age” and Spiritual Practices

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The questions which follow should help you to discover whether any particular spiritual technique, therapy, or “New Age practice” can be used appropriately by a Christian. The “CCC” references are to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

1. Does the practitioner explicitly ask for God’s help in carrying out the practice, or explain that the “spiritual energy” of the practice comes from God?

If so, first ask whether the “god” called upon is God as Christians understand Him, the God who exists as three persons: the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To seek the help of any other “god” is the sin of idolatry. (See CCC 2113.) *

Next, does the practitioner claim that God’s help is guaranteed, or is God humbly asked to help without any promise of what He will do? Only in the case of the seven sacraments, or where there is a clear promise in the Bible, or a genuine God-given gift of prophecy, can we guarantee God’s action. Otherwise, anyone who makes an absolute promise of God’s help acts falsely, and sins.

2. Does the practitioner claim to be helped by intelligent spirits – for example, angels, demons, dead persons’ souls, or “spirit guides” – or speak of *channelling*?

The only legitimate recourse to angels, saints and holy souls is to ask them to pray for us, or to help us in ways which accord with God’s will. Any other attempt to use the power of spiritual beings, especially requesting them to contact us, is a sin of idolatry. *

3. Does the practitioner claim to manipulate or depend upon any kind of unintelligent “spiritual energies”?

Doing so is technically called the sin of sorcery (CCC 2117), and is forbidden, even in the case of “healing therapies”. *

4. Is it likely, or possible, that the therapy in general, or the method of an individual practitioner, has recourse to spirits *secretly*? Note that secret elements may include, for example, the use of a dowsing pendulum over the ingredients used in homeopathy or aromatherapy.

To participate unknowingly in such practices is not technically a sin, but may have negative spiritual effects. *

5. Is the practice compatible with Christian teaching about Jesus and the nature of human beings?

Here it would be very useful to refer to the criteria in the recent Vatican document, *Jesus Christ, Bearer of the Water of Life*, by the Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue.

- Is God a **being with whom we have a relationship** or something to be used or a force to be harnessed?
- Is there just **one Jesus Christ**, or are there thousands of christs?
- The human being: is there one universal being or **are there many individuals**?
- Do we save ourselves or **is salvation a free gift from God**?
- Do we invent truth or do we **embrace it**?
- Prayer and meditation: are we talking to ourselves or **to God**?
- Are we tempted to deny sin or do we **accept that there is such a thing**?
- Are we encouraged to reject or **accept suffering and death**?
- Is social commitment something shirked or **positively sought after**?
- Is our future in the stars or do we **help to construct it**?

The truth acknowledged by Catholics in each case is highlighted in bold. The most likely alternatives to be suggested in New Age practices are suggestions that you “are god”, are already one with God, can become or get closer to God purely by virtue of your own exercises; and teaching that Jesus is one of many “christs”.

To knowingly take part in any practice based on a teaching which contradicts God’s truth is a sin which rejects His kingdom.

6. Are there good reasons, based either on experimental evidence, or the theory of how the therapy works, to believe it is truly effective?

If there are no good grounds, based either on reason (including scientific research), or on the truths of the Christian faith, then the practice is superstitious (CCC 2110-2111).

7. Am I being sincere, and founding my teaching on good evidence, if I am promoting or offering a particular technique?

Promoting or providing a practice involves you in moral responsibility for others as well as for yourself. Doing so based only on anecdotal evidence could be a sin against truth.

8. Am I using this practice in a way which is under the Lordship of Christ, and totally trusts Him with my future?

Do we *trust* Jesus? If we use any kind of fortune teller to peer into our future, we are implicitly saying that we don't trust Him, and that is a sin.

9. Will my participation in this practice give others a false impression of Christianity, or lead Christians into sin? *(To answer this question, you will need to consider the practice's "spiritual significance" in its culture of origin, and in your local culture.)*

All Christians are responsible for encouraging every person in the world to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour from sin, even if Catholics do approach this duty differently from evangelical Christians. It is a serious matter to lead anyone to believe that it is good to turn to spiritual powers other than Jesus Christ. Therefore we must consider the impression we will give to others by using a practice which has passed all the tests above.

If you have not ruled out a New Age practice by any of these nine tests, it would be a good idea to ask in prayer for Jesus to guide and protect you as you make use of it, and to pray that no-one is led astray by your example.

If you have already been involved in New Age practices...

What if you have already been involved in a New Age practice and you now realise that it is not appropriate for Christians?

First of all, be assured that although you might have done something **wrong** in God's eyes, you have only **sinned** insofar as you knew it was something wrong. The more nagging doubts you had about being involved – and only *you* can judge that – then the more responsible you are.

In any case, it is appropriate to acknowledge your wrongdoing before God by making a confession to a priest. Even if you prefer to “say sorry to Jesus privately”, remember that it is to the priests that He has given the formal power to pronounce our sins forgiven. After the priest gives you absolution, ask him to make a simple prayer for Jesus to protect you from all the consequences of the New Age practice.

The church also recognises the reality of evil spirits (sometimes called demons, or fallen angels). Such spirits have the power to cause weariness, discouragement, distractions in prayer, and habitual temptation (though of course, all of these things can be due to ordinary human and psychological factors, too). Where some of the tests above are marked with a *, these are the danger areas where you may have made yourself vulnerable to evil spirits, especially if you have wilfully chosen to call upon a spiritual power other than God the Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. In this case, you should seek the help of Christians experienced in “deliverance” ministry – and do note that many priests are not experienced or trained in this area, so you may need to ask around to find someone able to help.



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