CONTEMPORARY MILLENIANISM AND THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

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1. Introduction

We are living at the end of a millenium. According to scholarly opinion, a vague feeling comes over people at such a time, and they either anticipate the end of time or the advent of an entirely new age. Is it right to think in such terms? Does the approach of the year 2000 call up similar expectations?

As for the notion of 'end of time', since the beginning of the previous century Christian movements have constantly claimed that Jesus would return shortly. Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Worldwide Church of God, Hal Lindsay are examples — and more such movements could be mentioned. They do not seem to have anything special to do, however, with the end of a millenium or the magical year 2000.

The same holds for the rise of expectations of a new age, something which is by the way not confined to Christian circles alone. A line can be traced from the Renaissance, through the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Marxism to the New Age Movement. In related but nonetheless different forms, all these movements have expected or expect a new age. But again, there is no special relation with the end of a millenium in general or the year 2000. Sometimes the year 2000 forms part of the ideology and has as such a limited function. It has, however, not been the basis for the anticipation of the new age.

In this article I will describe one such movement, namely the New Age

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3 Nostradamus e.g. has the end of the world predicted to take place in 1999; recently this idea is getting more influence in New Age groups. Cf. A.T. Mann, Millennium prophecies. Shaftesbury, 1992, p.66 etc.
Movement. At the moment it is one of the most extensive eschatological movements in the West.

2. This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius

When the moon is in the seventh house
And Jupiter aligns with Mars
Then peace will guide the planets
And love will steer the stars.
This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius
The age of Aquarius

Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
No more falsehoods or derisions
Golden living dreams of visions
Mystic crystal revelation
And the mind's true liberation.

Aquarius. Aquarius.4

In this way the musical Hair begins. It is 1966, but nonetheless, here is New Age thinking in optima forma. Often one has the impression that the New Age Movement dates back only to about 1980, and that since then its ideas have developed very quickly, so that the New Age Movement is in fact a phenomenon of the last part of this century. But, as the quotation from Hair demonstrates, the New Age Movement is older. In these few lines the central themes of New Age thought come already to the fore: a new age is coming, calculated on the basis of astrology; it will be an age of harmony, understanding, spirituality, and unity.

The musical Hair is not an isolated phenomenon. It was part of the sixties, a turbulent time, in which change was in the air, and the younger generation broke with the culture of their parents, in search of different values. "Drop out, turn on, tune in," was the message of Timothy Leary, the LSD high priest of that time. And the generation of the sixties went on. Through psychedelic means, they discovered a broadened and deeper inner self. They went to the East, literally, and studied the writings of Hindus, esotericism and astrology. Sometimes they also rebelled politically, as at the time of the Anti-Vietnam