Just 20 years ago the young people of the 68-protests disclosed in their rejection of the traditional "establishment" a fundamental gap between the generations, and marked the emergence of a new consciousness and a changed set of values in all fields of life. The Church still has to find an answer to this challenge, all the more so since it cannot be denied that even in the Church there is a serious breakdown in the transmission of faith which surpasses the usual problems of tradition within a relatively homogeneous culture. After years of frustration, skepticism and "no-future" slogans, today a more positive vision is propagated which might be vaguely called a religious enchantment of the future, a belief in a New Age. This spirituality finds its expression in the emergence of many alternative religious and therapeutic movements and in a new awareness of religiosity even in political, economic and social considerations. The promising awakening of the homo religiosus towards the end of our century, however, constitutes an ambiguous challenge for theologians, in so far as the critique of religion is today not only raised from outside, but in the name of a "perennial religiosity" from within the core of religion itself.

Focusing on the problem of alternative religious movements demands a complementary and multidimensional approach. One might either describe the new movements phenomenologically or attempt to shed light on the underlying "consciousness revolution" (Bellah) which stimulates the rise of these groups. The label "NEW AGE," which cannot be identified with a particular cult, covers exactly this emerging consciousness of modern man, which has therefore rightly been called a "vagabond spirituality," manifested in a generic religious feeling and attempting totally to supersede the traditional worldview. Far from being able comprehensively to approach the movement and to evaluate the incalculable number of publications by or about this modern consumer religion, and without entering into a discussion of its scientific theories, I shall trace out a few guiding ideas of theological importance which may be summarily characterized as the four tendencies towards millenarianism, syncretism, holistic ecology, and evolutionism.
A further element in what follows is a particular emphasis on the transatlantic aspects of this new worldview, which is generally believed to have originated from North America, like many other contemporary movements. It is my observation, however, that most of the ideas, although fused into their present shape in the melting pot of American experimental religiosity, derive from European roots and have developed in a constant interaction between both sides of the Atlantic, mainly due to "transatlantic missionaries" in the past and present. The characteristic features of New Age syncretism disclose the peculiar European way of responding to the challenges of an alternative culture in a continent which so far has had little experience in peacefully dealing with religious pluralism. While America may appear as its formative "laboratory" due to its greater intellectual and religious liberty, the main ideas of New Age can be neatly situated in the history of the European mind. They appear as a late and developed form of the utopian and romantic nostalgia, characteristic of the nineteenth century, rather than as totally innovative.

To avoid repetition of widely discussed sociological research, this survey will, therefore, in its first part inquire into the European roots of the New Age, and offer a brief description of its main features. A second part intends to express a few preliminary considerations for a theological encounter with this religious pluralism in the European context.

**The European Roots of New Age**

New Age draws its roots mainly from four components as illustrated by the following diagram:

Elements of the new paradigm:

- **a)** Jewish-Christian Religion
- **b)** Secularization, Science
- **c)** "Shadow": Gnosis, Heresies, Esotericism
- **d)** Oriental Religions

Inter-Generational Conflict (c.1968)

NEW AGE