

EDITORIAL

Auguste Comte, the nineteenth century French social philosopher, characterized the development of human society by "the Law of the Three stages". That is, in the progress of history, mankind has passed the *religious* and *metaphysical* stages, and entered the third stage, which is *scientific*. According to this positivistic school of thought the modern scientific man is non-religious, secular and rationalistic. Those who support today the position of a radical secularization of man and his world would think along the same lines, that man has come of age and he can live now without the benevolence of gods, and he is thus entering into a religionless and godless world. But all the empirical evidences today seem to contradict this theory and, in fact, new religions are being born almost every day, especially in the most scientifically and technologically developed western world. Why do we have this mushroom growth of new religions today? What do these 'signs of the times' reveal to us about the needs and situations of contemporary man? What would be the fate of these new religions? Would they wither away in the hot climate of severe criticisms and attacks both from contemporary secularism and from the traditional religions?

The phenomenon of the "new religious movements" or "the new cults" has to be scientifically studied by all branches of the science of religion. Historians and cultural anthropologists have to expose the historical and cultural roots of the new religious movements. Sociologists have to examine the relationship of the new religions and cults with the contemporary social structures and needs. Psychology has to study the moods, temperaments, needs, tensions and aspirations of contemporary man, and to examine how the new religions are an answer to them. Phenomenology of religion has to make every effort to understand the new cults 'from within' and discover their meaning for the believers. Only such a comprehensive and sympathetic study will do justice to the new religious movements and cults, and we are convinced that such a study will be salutary to the whole of mankind.

Here, in this number of the *Journal of Dharma* Yvon Ambroise examines the social context of the new Hindu religious movements. Pre-independent India saw several Hindu revivalist movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Rama Krishna Mission, Hindu Mahasabha, Ananda Marg, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh etc. Their immediate context was the socio-economic, political and cultural changes

that had taken place in India as a result of the colonial rule and the capitalistic ideology which disrupted the traditional structure of the Hindu society. In post-independent India the Hindu renaissance became so triumphant that it assumed a militant and missionary spirit filled with the consciousness that it could contribute to the spiritual awakening of the West which was turning materialistic; hence the birth of several new Hindu religious movements like Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, the Transcendental Meditation, the Rajneesh Movement, the Sai Baba Movement and so on. All these movements are attempts at a cultural transaction between Hinduism and Christian and Western models of thought.

Robert D. Baird's article, "Religious or Non-Religious: TM in American Courts" is a case-study of the new Hindu Religious Movements. The Transcendental Meditation (TM) is presented in the West by its spokesman as a "non-religious" movement, as a technique for physical as well as mental health, and in the United States it is being introduced in Public Schools and Institutions with the support of the Government. After studying the TM and its underlying philosophical and religious principles as expounded by the text-books of TM, and its practice of initiation by *puja* and *mantra*, the American Courts pronounced a clear verdict that the TM is a "religious movement" and its introduction in Public Schools and Institutions is a violation of the American Constitutions. This case-study warns us that the borders of psychology and religion should not be violated.

The strong comeback of Orthodoxy in Judaism in recent times, as described by Rabbi Allen S. Maller, also clearly illustrated the social context of religious movements. The formation of the State of Israel, Israel's triumphant victory in the Six Day War in 1967, the Egyptian President Sadat's peace mission to Jerusalem in 1977 and his recognition of Israel boosted the faith of the Jews, called them back to Orthodoxy, aroused their messianic hopes and thus they began to interpret the anti-semitism and the "Holocaust" of Jews as the birth-pang of a new messianic era.

The new pentecostal and charismatic movements in Christianity which emphasizes "emotional experience", has been studied by Emma Gonsalvez from the point of view of psychology. The observations, investigations, and case-studies she has made indicate a similarity between speaking in tongues and other behaviour of the charismatics

and hysterical behaviour because both types of personalities suffer from emotional deprivation and their behaviour seems to serve as a channel to release their repressed impulses. The author seems to point out the therapeutic function of the modern charismatic movement which tries to reduce the tensions, anxieties, fears and other problems of modern man who is under several stresses and strains. But it should be borne in mind that is only one among several other interpretations of the charismatic movement, and, as the author admits, a comprehensive interpretation of it requires the integration of many other views and interpretations.

The new religious movements are often described today as dangers and threats to society, as "crazy" and "criminal" groups. Since they seem to challenge the present institutions, structures, systems and values. David Chidester invites us to re-examine these popular negative views about 'the new cults', and offers a positive understanding of them by exposing their symbolic orientations. The new religious movements are alternative and, indeed, legitimate constructions of 'human identity' or else they represent other 'religious world-views', and as such they are meaningful constructions of 'being human', although they may be different from our religious world views. But if 'nothing human is foreign to us', the new religious movements could provide us an opportunity for richer and deeper understanding of human identity.

The new religious movements are signs as well as reactions which eloquently proclaim to us that the situation of man today is no more the same as it was yesterday and that our world has become different. If our world and human society are no more the same, our religions too cannot remain the same today. The survival of the traditional religions depends on their openness to the insights, values and lifestyles of the new religious movements and cults.

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