

# **The Neoreligious Phenomenon with Oriental Background and its Influence on Christianity**

In our times, it is increasingly difficult to speak of a Christian culture even in those parts of the world where Christianity has been implanted for over a millennium; it is hard to say that today's society is shaped by the Christian values, especially in The Catholic and Protestant western part, and the situation in the Orthodox East is largely the same. The difference lies only in the more limited time of exposure of the Eastern majority Orthodox countries to the influence of new religious movements of different origins.

The time when the Church's representatives were looked at with respect and consulted about the different aspects of man's spiritual life seems to have passed. The institution of the Church is constantly attacked in the media as an expression of the tendencies of a society that is becoming more secularized. The spiritual crisis, which at this beginning of the millennium crosses Christianity, especially in the West, has a double aspect. On the one hand, for many people of our times, Christianity seems to have lost all meaning and therefore any interest: many ignore it altogether and do not care to know it or to make at least an idea about it ; others keep it as belonging to the past, which is not worth worrying about; and others feel absolutely foreign to Christianity as a religious reality that claims to influence man's life, in particular his moral life, and therefore not only refuse such a claim, but also fight against it harshly. All these people are "outside" Christianity: this is "absent" in their lives, this absence not being perceived or not being felt as causing problems.

On this background of religious void left behind by Christianity, there appears an abundant and aggressive new "offer" of religion, this reality having as a substrate a general state of spiritual crisis, a religious void generated by anti-religious, positivist and atheistic education. If we talk about market economy, about the law of offer and demand, it seems that the same reality can be remarked on the religious side as well.

Even if it was thought that the triumph of science and technology would mean the disappearance of the religious feeling, the surprise was the rediscovery of the religious man, and what was believed to be the disappearance of the sacred meant only his occultation, a manifestation on another level, a manifestation of other forms, characteristic, perhaps, to the present moment. This is how one can explain the success that the new religious sessions and oriental, exotic, religious exercises - so interesting for the contemporary man - enjoy in an increasingly desecrated Occident. We are witnessing a permanent and sometimes endless "rush" after new spiritualities and pseudo-spiritualities, some of which are very bizarre for the mentality and religious experience of the common man.

In the context of mutual influences, we notice the existence of two poles representing two distinct types of spirituality: a personalist one, represented by the monotheistic religions, and the other impersonalist-pantheistic, represented by oriental religions, generally speaking. Between these two types of spirituality, there took place multiple contacts over time, starting with the apostolic preaching, and then continuing with the missions of various Christian denominations, rightly or unfairly identified with Western colonialism. We are currently dealing with the adverse reaction, the influence of oriental religiosity on secularized Christian societies, influence manifested by various extreme-orientated religious movements that are beginning to gain ground in the West. Among these we mention: Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, Ananda Marga, Bhagwan, Divine Light Mission, Sathya Sai Baba, Sahaja Yoga or Baha'is.

The invasion of the new oriental religious movements in the Christian West is not quite recent, its beginnings have to be searched a century ago, when in New York, in 1875, was born, the Theosophical Society founded by H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott. We must not neglect the fact that if some groups came as aggressive missionaries of Vedas or Buddhism, the Oriental movements were initially invited to come. This happened in 1893 when a "Parliament of Religions" was held in Chicago, to which Asian beliefs were called to speak. Since then, Vivekananda's Vedic Hinduism, Buddhism with Soyen Shaku, master of D.T. Suzuki, the propagator of Zen spirituality in the West, made their official entry into the religious market of the West, and through exotic spiritual offerings they began to attract Christians tired of what the mercantile society they were living in could offer.

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The thirst for spirituality urged those who until then had declared Christians to leave their old beliefs and embrace Buddhism, Hinduism, Yoga or Zen. But all this could not have happened if the Western Christian, and more recently the Eastern one, had not lost their Christian landmarks in the meantime unless he had entered the process of secularization and despotism. The fascination of the Orient is today one of the prominent features of the new religiosity. This was also highlighted by Alan W. Watts, when he explains the success of Zen's penetration into the West, largely caused by the opening of Western thought.

According to specialists, in the field of neo-religious phenomenon, the new religious movements are concerned with the radical religious changes of the last half millennium produced by the encounter between certain native religions (we mean the Indian religions -India being a colony of the Europeans or China) and the European culture in many parts of the world. The distinction from the sects is self-imposed because the new religious movements are particularized and distinguished themselves from the classical sects in that they are not the result of a sectarian process, but they create a self-identity as a result of a religious creativity.

All these new religious movements, which populate the scene of Western religious preferences, can be divided into two opposite tendencies. The first - which is crystallized in different "integrism" - is characterized by a refusal of modernity, especially the idea that religion can be an "optional subject" and by rigorously restating its own tradition. We include in this category the various groups of monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam - with its integrated groups - but also the main Christian confessions. The second trend, related to the contemporary evolution of modernity, is characterized not only by tolerance towards the plurality of visions on the world and the lifestyles, but also by "choice" structures, by "improvisation" - by syncretism.

These religious phenomena that are so heterogeneous and exclude each other, such as the secularization of the Christian society, the success of the neo-religious phenomenon of Oriental origin, the religious integrisms (especially Islamic), or the syncretism of all kinds represent the religious reality in which we live today and to which we must offer our Christian answer.

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