

The Influence of Eastern Religions

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Introduction:

- A. Western thought and Western culture has been influenced by adherents of Eastern religions.
 - B. Christians must be aware of these religions and their teachings in order to confront them productively and effectively.
 - 1. This lecture will attempt to identify a few prominent leaders and their movements.
 - 2. Suggest some Biblical responses.
- I. **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi**
- A. 1957 - Founded Transcendental Meditation and Worldwide Spiritual Regeneration.
 - 1. 1959 - Came West where TM became popular in the 1960's.
 - 2. Mental repetition of short words/phrases reaches a deeper level of consciousness.
 - B. 1975 - TM-Sidhi and the bubbling bliss of Yogic Flying.
 - 1. Advanced ability to think and act from transcendental consciousness.
 - 2. When practiced as a group, it creates a measurable influence of harmony and progress throughout society.
 - C. 1994 - Discovery of the Veda and Vedic Literature in human physiology (eg. inborn in humans).
 - 1. Established the grand unity of creation, of all sciences, and of all religions.
 - 2. Connects each discipline with the transcendental consciousness.
 - D. Summary of doctrine and goal:
 - 1. Reason for creation and individual life is the expansion of happiness.
 - 2. Jesus is an enlightened one, no greater than others of the same, including the Maharishi.
- II. **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** (aka. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) (1896-1977) born in Calcutta, India.
- A. Background summary:
 - 1. 1922 - Began lifelong work of broadcasting Vedic knowledge through the English language.
 - 2. 1965 - Came to the United States.
 - 3. 1966 - Established International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON).
 - 4. 1968 - Created the New Vrindaban experimental Vedic community near Moundsville, W.Va.

5. 1972 - Founded Gurukula school, Dallas, Texas, introducing his Vedic system of primary and secondary education.
- B. Basic doctrines and goals:
1. Monistic in theology.
 2. Literal interpretation of Hindu scriptures.
 3. Bible is accepted as a scripture and Jesus as a guru.
 4. Salvation comes by chanting Hare Krishna 1,728 times daily.
- III. **Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh** (aka. Osho) (1931-1990) born: Kuchwada, Madya Pradesh, India.
- A. His doctrine and its goals:
1. Meditation techniques which give seekers an avenue to experience the ultimate and to discover the thought-less relaxed state of meditation.
 2. Concerning God: God (thus, Christ) is not a person, but a process... Existence is without cause... In the beginning there is no cause so in the end there can be no purpose. (Archaya Rajneesh: *Beyond and Beyond*).
- B. After coming to America:
1. Started a commune, popular with young people.
 2. Deported after four years.
 3. Teachings are propagated by a worldwide network of *Rajneesh Meditation Centers*.
- IV. **Deepak Chopra** - Guru to the Stars, born: New Delhi, India.
- A. Background summary:
1. Immigrated to United States and established a medical practice.
 2. Became disenchanted with American life and turned to study of Ayurveda.
 3. Self-proclaimed champion of a new science aimed at the overthrow of the superstition of materialism. (Los Angeles Times Home Edition: *Followers Flock to Hear Mind-Body Guru Deepak Chopra*, September 19, 1994).
- B. Student of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and TM.
1. 1986 -Director, Maharishi Ayur-Veda Health Center, Lancaster, Mass.
 2. 1993 - Director, Sharp Institute for Human Potential and Mind-Body Medicine, San Diego.
 3. Celebrity clients include Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Jackson and Michael Milken.
- V. **Nation of Islam** (aka. Black Muslims).
- A. Beliefs (as summarized by Tynetta Muhammad, wife of Elijah (Poole) Muhammad in *The Nation of Islam in America*, a paper presented at the International Symposium on Sufism, San Francisco, Ca., March 29-31, 1996):

1. Founded on the basis of peace in answer to a prayer of Abraham to deliver his people from present servitude in the Western Hemisphere.
 2. To respect the laws of the land, never to carry arms, make war, or be the aggressor.
 3. Teaches the principles of Divine Unity and the Universal Brotherhood of Islam.
 4. Inward and outward cleanliness, good manners and respect to all.
 5. Family is the backbone of society, children to be reared reflecting high morals and training.
 6. To consume the best of foods for longevity; abstain from alcohol, smoking and substance abuse.
 7. To respect and protect our (Muslim) women.
 8. Women are taught a dress code of modesty that will lead to the practice of high morality.
 9. To be an exemplary community expressing the highest spiritual goals for the reform of ourselves and others based on wisdom, knowledge and beauty.
- B. **Wallace D. Fard** (1877-?) (aka. Wallace Fard Muhammad, Walli Farrad).
1. 1930 - Mission initiated: To restore and resurrect his lost and found people, identified as the original members of the Tribe of Shabazz from the lost nation of Asia (Tynetta Muhammad: *The Nation of Islam in America*).
 2. Joined by Elijah Poole, Detroit, Mi.
- C. **Elijah (Poole) Muhammad** (1897-1975) born in Sandersville, Ga.
1. Chosen by Fard Muhammad to be his Divine Representative to his Lost and Found People (Muhammad: *The Nation of Islam in America*).
 2. Leader of the Nation of Islam (later called American Muslim Mission) for 44 years.
 3. Jesus was only a prophet and not the equal of Moses and Muhammad, and his religion was Islam, not the Christianity of the Pope of Rome. (Pittsburgh Courier, 1959).
- D. **Malcom X** (1925-65) born Malcom Little, Omaha, Ne.
1. 1946 - Converted to Nation of Islam while in prison for burglary.
 2. Assisted Elijah Muhammad by starting new Muslim groups throughout the United States.
 3. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, came to believe that whites, like blacks, were victims of a racist society and that Islam would unite all races.
 4. February 21, 1965 - was shot while speaking at a rally in Harlem.

- E. **Louis Farrakhan** (1934-) born Louis Eugene Walcott, Boston, Mass.
 - 1. 1955 - joined Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (aka. American Muslim Mission).
 - 2. Taught that the Nation of Islam was the dead from which Jesus was resurrected (*Farrakhan: Jesus Saves*, from Savior's Day address, Chicago, February 26, 1995).
 - 3. Identifies himself as a servant of Fard and Elijah Muhammad.

- VI. Other movements of note:
 - A. **Transcendentalism** (noted because of similarities to Hindu philosophy).
 - 1. Mostly active between 1830 and 1855.
 - 2. Developed in part to rebellion against the *Age of Reason* (17th and 18th centuries).
 - a. Rebelled against science, authority, order and discipline.
 - b. Notable adherents: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Orestes Augustus Brownson, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Bronson Alcott, George Ripley.
 - 3. Common beliefs of Transcendentalists:
 - a. The essential unity of creation.
 - b. The goodness of humanity.
 - c. The supremacy of insight over logic and reason.
 - d. The renunciation of authority, whether religion, scientific or political.

 - B. **Theosophical Society** (noted because of similarities to Hinduism and Transcendentalism)
 - 1. 1875 - Founded in New York by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (Russian, 1831-91) and Henry Steel Olcott (U.S.A., 1832-1907).
 - 2. Principles as defined by Blavatsky:
 - a. There is an eternal, unchangeable principle about which there is no knowledge, nor is any speculation possible.
 - b. Universe is an eternity in which smaller universes appear and disappear.
 - c. All souls are ultimately identified with an over-soul.
 - d. All souls go through series of rebirths.
 - 3. Goals as defined by Blavatsky:
 - a. Form a nucleus of universal brotherhood.
 - b. Study comparative religion, philosophy and science.
 - c. Investigate the mysterious laws of nature and the unknown power of mankind.

4. View of Jesus Christ: Christ took the body of Jesus, a man, to become a teacher. Eventually all souls become Christ.
- VII. The Bible's answer to the influence of Eastern religions:
- A. Christians must understand, believe and teach the biblical explanations for creation and the reason for life (Ecc. 12:13).
 1. Uphold and defend the doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19-20).
 2. Uphold and defend Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:17):
 - a. Who he is (Jn. 1:1-18).
 - b. Why he came incarnate (Mat. 1:21).
 - c. The nature of his work (1 Pet.1:18-19).
 3. Understand and teach concerning sin, resurrection, judgment and eternal life.
 - B. The Bible supplies the instruction and the means for what multitudes seek:
 1. Comfort and security.
 2. Harmony, equality and justice.
 3. Humility, service, responsible citizenship.
 4. Morality and the value of every human.
 5. Love, peace and compassion.
 6. Communion with God.

Conclusion:

- A. No one can doubt the fact that Eastern religions, namely Hinduism and Islam, have had a profound impact upon Western thought and culture, and will continue to do so.
 1. Disenchanted popular culture is receptive.
 2. Propagated by those in high profile professions, such as the entertainment industry.
 3. Has found fertile fields in industry, technology and academia.
 4. Is appealing to many who feel disfranchised, and those who believe Christianity is a white, European religion.
- B. How can Christianity respond?
 1. We must know the Bible.
 2. We must believe what we know.
 3. We must consistently and tirelessly do what we believe.
 4. We must understand somewhat of the people and philosophies we encounter (as Paul used his knowledge to teach those of Acts 17:22ff, esp. v. 28).
 5. Understand, uphold and teach the true, universal nature of Christianity.

- a. Denominationalism, and Roman Catholicism have formed many prejudices in the minds of non-white, non-Europeans.
- b. True Christianity is neither white, European, nor Roman Catholic.
- c. Christ is for the world.

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