

# Coping with New Religious Competition

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According to University of Chicago anthropologist, Irving Zaretsky, about 20 million Americans are involved in fringe religious groups. That number appears to be increasing. Not so many years back a paper on "new religious competition" would probably have centered on such cults as the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Christian Scientists, with perhaps a quick glance at relatively insignificant movements such as Theosophy and Spiritualism. Today one is forced to choose from a huge smorgasbord of growing cults. Some are new movements, others are ancient religious philosophies that are sparking new interest in our times. All are as old as Eden in that they are men's attempts to play God.

The games they play have eternal consequences. William J. Petersen in his highly informative book, "Those Curious New Cults," defines the religion of the cults as "tortured games with the forces of life and death." What the "games" are that they "play," why they appeal to many, and what to do about their appeal is the subject of this paper.

In particular, this paper by its title has a very practical goal -- that of equipping to cope with new religious competition. I would hope that it would help to equip you so you in turn can equip the servicemen among whom you minister so they are enabled to equip those with whom they come into contact. This is in keeping with the purpose of the ministry which is to "equip the saints for service" (Eph. 4:12).

One more point before we begin: In seeking to get a study of this magnitude into manageable size, we had to narrow down the scope a bit. There is a saying, "Of the making of books there is no end." After a little reading about the cults, I could add, "And of the making of religions there is no end." Where to center our attention -- that was the question I decided to ignore in this paper the well-known cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses, etc., since you probably have sufficient material on these. I narrowed it down to the ones that are especially appealing to the young today -- the mind-bending, consciousness-altering beliefs drawn from Eastern religious philosophies.

We won't be talking about spiritualism, witchcraft, Satanism, or about the Children of God and the Jesus Movement, or about Edgar Cayce or Herbert W. Armstrong. We will be talking about the philosophy basic to TM, Hare Krishna, Maharaj Ji and his Divine Light Mission, etc.

Such religions are gradually replacing drugs among the young for the ultimate "turn-on," as an article entitled, "A Preliminary Blueprint for Discernment, '76," published by the Berkeley Christian Coalition, points out:

The vision and energy which coalesced an occult spiritual community was provided, in large part, by the psychedelic revolution. Hallucinogenic drug experience, engaged in by a large number of people in a relatively short span of time (the mid and latter sixties), established a broadly based 'vision of possibilities' which fired the latent idealism of a whole generation.... Early on in the psychedelic movement, Timothy Leary had begun to draw explicit correspondences between drug induced states and those states described in various occult and esoteric religious texts. When people began to realize that the drug state was neither permanent nor reliable enough to be of real use in realizing the potentials they had glimpsed, it was quite easy to leave drugs behind in favor of disciplined systems of spiritual practice. While some people moved directly from drugs into spiritism and witchcraft, most of those who took their 'evolution' seriously were more prone to the 'clean' techniques: physical yoga and yoga meditation, Zen, TM, etc.

It works, at least temporarily. A recent Harvard study (reported in *Christianity Today*) of about 1800 meditators showed that, after twenty-one months of meditating, marijuana use in the group dropped from 80% of the 1800 to 12% and LSD usage from 48% to 3%.

Partly because meditating appears to cut down on the use of drugs, some in the U.S. armed forces (among them former commandant of the U.S. Army War College, Major General Franklin Davis, now retired) have advocated its use in the military, with the Army to pick up the tab and provide the instruction (*Soldiers Magazine*, February, 1972).

We turn now to the philosophic presuppositions that underlie all Eastern religions.

## **PHILOSOPHIC PRESUPPOSITIONS**

Basic to an understanding of Eastern religions is to recognize that there is a big difference between Western and Eastern thought. Western thought centers around objective knowledge; Eastern thought centers around subjective experience.

Only a Westerner would attempt to do what I'm doing here -- to carefully analyze Eastern thought patterns. That's the way we do things. We analyze and we classify, using our powers of reason and logic. We write dogmatics textbooks to systematically present what we have come to know from the Scriptures. In the process it's necessary to separate ourselves as subject (the knower) from the thing we are investigating as object (the known).

Eastern thought patterns don't work that way. Truth is discovered, not by testing and experimenting, but by experiencing. Nor does Eastern philosophy work with the concept of subject and object ("I" and "Thou"). Hinduism and Taoism, representative Eastern philosophies, consider reality to be non-real, or monist (the doctrine that there is only one ultimate reality in existence, and that all things are parts of or are composed of this reality). The world we see with our eyes, with its various divisions, classifications, etc., isn't the real world at all. What we perceive with our senses is maya, that is, illusion.

This a person comes to know experientially through a sudden flash of metaphysical insight in which he finds release from maya and experiences oneness with the universe. This "eureka experience" is called samadh or satori. It's an experience that cannot be analyzed with words, for words are a part of maya. So if I haven't done a good job of explaining this to you, then I have done a good job because what we're talking about cannot be explained but only experienced.

The ultimate knowledge in Eastern philosophy is to experience that all is one and that man, therefore, is divine. The purpose of life is to attain such self-realization. If one doesn't make it this time around, he'll be re-incarnated again and again until he does.

As you can see, such a philosophy is very close to, if not identical with, pantheism. One of the Beatles, John Lennon, an initiate into Transcendental Meditation, put it this way in his song, "I Am the Walrus": "I am he, as you are he, as you are we, and we are all together." He learned well from his guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who is fond of saying, "I am That, thou art That, and all this is That." Pantheism appeals to natural man. C. S. Lewis, with his gift of discernment, writes in his book, "Miracles":

Pantheism is congenial to our minds not because it is the final stage in a slow process of enlightenment, but because it is almost as old as we are. It may even be the most primitive of all religions .... It is immemorial in India. The Greeks rose above it only at their peak... their successors relapsed into the great Pantheistic system of the Stoics. Modern Europe escaped it only while she remained predominantly Christian; with Giordano Bruno and Spinoza it returned. With Hegel it became almost the agreed philosophy of highly educated people .... So far from being the final religious refinement, Pantheism is in fact the permanent natural bent of the human mind; the permanent ordinary level below which man sometimes sinks, but above which his own unaided efforts can never raise him for very long. It is the attitude into which the human mind automatically falls when left to itself. No wonder we find it congenial. If 'religion' means simply

what man says about God, and not what God does about man, then Pantheism almost is religion. And religion in that sense has, in the long run, only one really formidable opponent -- namely Christianity.

Theologian Nels Ferré in “Christology and Personality” echoes these last words of Lewis when he writes:

The main fight, make no mistake, is between the Christian faith in its inner, classical meaning and the new Orientalized versions whether they come via Neo-Platonism or in modern forms ....The supernatural, personalistic, classical Christian faith is now being undermined by an ultimately non-dualistic, impersonal or transpersonal faith. The winds are blowing gale-strong out of the Orient.

With that by way of a general overview, let’s look now more closely at some of the tenets of Eastern religious thought:

### **Man’s Source**

The god(s) of Eastern religion is a non-personal, non-transcendent being, who does not, in fact, cannot act on behalf of people. (An exception is the god of bhakti yoga, who is described as personal, yet not as savior). Abstract existence (god) is believed to be eternal and beyond all thought and words, pure Being that one can only experience. He is not so much the creator as creation and all being. While the Christian holds that the universe minus God equals zero, the Eastern philosopher would hold that God minus the universe equals zero.

### **Man’s Relation to His Source**

Things, animals, and people all share abstract existence and are thus emanations of the divine Being and themselves divine. The first presupposition of monistic theology is “All is one.” Man is a part of the oneness of the universal soul (the atman).

### **Man’s Need**

Man’s deepest need stems from his lack of consciousness of his own divine Being. Sin is no problem. Since god is not a personal, transcendent Being, he can’t possibly be offended by anything that we do. Sin is simply the ignorance that prevents a man from realizing his oneness with everything else.

Man’s need, then, is to expand his consciousness (a favorite term in Transcendental Meditation). The goal is to rise above the three ordinary states of consciousness (dreamless sleep; consciousness of dreaming; and waking awareness of the self as both mind and body) and attain to four higher states, which, in order, are:

1. a consciousness of self (soul, atman) alone
2. cosmic consciousness - an experience of one’s oneness with the world
3. God-consciousness - the same as 2, except that the world is glorified and takes on a personal quality
4. unity - the complete loss of self-identity, in which a man, in effect, now becomes god. This state is reached by only a few.

This is what man needs -- to lose his own individuality in pure Being, to become indistinguishable from the Absolute. Eastern philosophy tells man that he needs to meditate not on god’s person but into his essence.

This is the Eastern religion's "salvation," a realization of oneness with all things which cannot be verbalized but only experienced.

### **Meeting Man's Need**

The way to such an experience is what is called yoga (lit. - union). Yoga is a physical and/or mental discipline to attain a state of enlightenment through union with the Absolute, or Brahman (Hindu for that which is unchanging while the outer forms of things change).

There are many different yogas:

jnana yoga - intellectual gymnastics (Like Zen Buddhism)

karma yoga - good works

krija yoga - religious rituals

bhakti yoga - devotion and service to a spiritual master, a personal god, one of many incarnations of god (the closest to Christianity, yet "salvation" is still by discipline and effort)

hatha yoga - physical exercise, the process of controlling the gross body which leads to freeing the subtle body

The goal of each is the same -- samadh, satori (oneness with the universe with no sense of your own identity).

As the enlightened one learns to alter his consciousness at will, he there-by learns to alter the structure of creation. Matter (an illusion, maya) can be created or de-created by him. A recent symposium on "Healing and Unorthodox Medicine" at U.C., Santa Cruz, dealt with this subject. The symposium, approved for credit by the AMA and CMA and California Board of Dental Examiners, looked into healing by means of consciousness-altering. Various speakers promised unlimited power for healing to anyone willing to let himself be transformed through various consciousness-altering techniques.

### **The Role of the Spiritual Leader in Meeting Men's Need**

In Eastern religions the spiritual leader is called a yogi. A yogi is the product of a long line of reincarnations of individuals who strove for righteousness. According to the law of karma (Hindu term for justice; what you sow in this existence you reap in the next), the man born from such a series of reincarnations quite easily can achieve God-consciousness, and then, through continued effort, Unity.

The yogi's role is two-fold: 1) He is a transmitter of ancient wisdom; 2) He is a manifestation of abstract Being. He leads and teaches by personal example. Only in that sense is he a "savior." This is true even in bhakti yoga and Mahayana Buddhism which speak of devotion to a personal god, only one of which can be incarnated at any one time. Even this personal god (avatar) is no more than the teacher and example of consciousness expansion.

### **The Need for Holy Writings**

Holy writings are unnecessary since god can only be experienced. Enlightenment can be attained without intellectual knowledge. Yet there is a huge volume of Scriptures, the Hindu Vedas, for example, which are chiefly the records of the achievements of holy men of the past.

## SOME REPRESENTATIVE CULTS

### I Ching

I who? It was only when I asked our youth group, “Who has heard of I Ching?” and saw several hands go up, that I decided to include this group.

“Those Curious New Cults” describes I Ching as the second step into the world of the occult (astrology is the first). It claims up to 600,000 followers in the United States, including folk singers Arlo Guthrie and Bob Dylan. I Ching means “Book of Changes.” It is the “bible” of the cult, for which psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote a lengthy preface in its first English translation.

In I Ching one tosses sticks or coins to find guidance. The heads and tails of the coins stand for the Taoist concept of yin and yang. Everything is supposedly made up of these opposites which complement each other, affect each other, and sometimes change each other (acupuncture is based on the yin/yang concept).

You toss the coins six times to draw a picture of yins and yangs (one represented by a solid line, the other by a broken line). Then you find the page in the Book of Changes that matches your pictograph. What’s on that page helps you to find the “measure of heaven and earth” within yourself. The goal is to release tensions by adapting yourself to the flow of the world. This is what Lao-Tse, the founder of Taoism, sought for his followers -- to lead them to a peaceful, desireless existence, where one simply drifts along with the stream until he ultimately merges into the “primal ground of all being.”

### Transcendental Meditation

This cult claims such celebrities as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Mia Farrow, Shirley MacClaine, Merv Griffin, and Mary Tyler Moore among its converts, along with 500,000 other practitioners.

Its founder, Maharishi (“Great Sage”) Mahesh (his family name) Yogi, was born in 1911 in India. He studied to be a physicist and also studied under one of India’s top four yogis. In 1959, having met with a rather indifferent welcome in India, he traveled to England, the Beatles were “converted,” and the rest is history.

Today there are over 200 TM centers in the United States alone, staffed with 4,400 instructors. The momentum of the movement seems to have slowed somewhat; but there are still 6,000 sign-ups a week in our country. At \$125 tuition per person (\$55 for high school, \$65 for college) that’s still good business. The Maharishi’s goal is one teacher for every one thousand people worldwide.

The Students’ International Meditation Society (SIMS) is the college arm of TM. It has centers in over one thousand colleges in the United States. MIU, Maharishi International University, took over a bankrupt college in Iowa.

The Maharishi stresses that his is an easy religion. (Actually, to get into schools and government, he now insists it isn’t a religion at all). Just meditate two times a day for twenty minutes and you will be happier, which seems to be the key word in TM. TM demands no self-discipline (except for the two twenty-minute periods), no asceticism, no renunciation of one’s past or promise to behave in the future. In TM one can presumably have his cake and eat it too.

The objective of TM is the same as every Eastern religion -- direct experience of the Absolute. The Maharishi says, “The answer to any problem is that there is no problem. Let a man perceive the Truth and then he is without problems.”

Instruction begins with two free introductory lectures. If you take the bait you sign up for the full course. The initiation ceremony revolves around the puja, a Sanskrit hymn of worship invoking the names of Hindu gods, recited by the instructor. The rhythm and sequence of the hymn itself is consciousness altering, putting the initiate in the proper frame of mind for reception of his mantra (a sound without meaning, the vibrations of which ward off reasoning, thinking, and conceptualization, and lead to union with one’s Source).

After he sets an offering before the altar of Guru Dev, who is identified with the three major Hindu deities, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, the initiate is given his mantra to meditate upon. This is followed by three

days of two hours' instruction, then one month of once-a-week sessions, and finally one year of once-a-month "tune-up" sessions.

### **Sun Myung Moon**

The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity claims one million members worldwide, 25,000 of them in the United States, of which 10,000 are in communes.

Sun Myung Moon claims to be a Christian missionary sent from Korea to America to preach brotherhood and rebirth. His message is that the Messiah is on the way and that the salvation of the whole world depends on America's repenting in this decade.

Born in Korea in 1920, he was raised in a Presbyterian home and became a Presbyterian minister (until expelled from the ministry in 1955 for heresy). In 1936 God told him that he was to complete Christ's unfinished work. In 1957 he published his interpretation of the Bible, "Divine Principle," and then in 1972, in obedience to God's command, he came to America to prepare it for the second coming.

He hasn't done too badly since arriving. He has amassed a financial empire with a value of over \$15 million, including an \$850,000 estate in Upper New York.

The "Moon Church" doctrines, although bizarre, are simple. In a theology that mingles elements of Taoism, mysticism, spiritualism, and Christianity, he talks about three Adams:

The first Adam was supposed to have married Eve after they both matured spiritually and then produced perfect children. Instead Eve was seduced by Lucifer, resulting in man's spiritual fall. Then Adam had intercourse with Eve before he was spiritually mature; and that produced man's physical fall.

The second Adam, Jesus, was supposed to marry and have perfect children. His crucifixion destroyed that plan. By His death he produced a spiritual salvation, not a physical one.

A third Adam is needed to produce physical salvation. He will do this by marrying a perfect woman and having perfect children by her, which will purify all humanity. Moon isn't saying who the third Adam is; but he does give one hint: the third Adam was born about 1920 in Korea.

Every "moonie" is an active recruiter. You can't get married until you have brought in at least three new "children"; and you must be married for "salvation." With an ever-present smile, recruiters invite prospective members for dinners, then to a three-day workshop, and finally an intensive period of indoctrination during which everyone not in the movement is shown to be a tool of Satan.

Within the communes spartan rules govern every phase of life -- long hours of work and study, no smoking, marriages arranged by the leaders (you give them a list of five choices), etc.

### **Zen Buddhism**

This is one of the first movements the drug culture turned to. Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg were among its proponents.

In Zen Buddhism there are three key words:

Zazen, sit and meditate, in lotus posture, to try to find union with the Ultimate Reality of the universe. Then you have achieved...

Satori, an immediate experience of truth. It might take years to come, but the experience comes upon you in a flash, as you meditate upon a...

Koan, a problem that can't be answered logically, such as, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" When the mind is exhausted and bewildered, satori can suddenly break through, and you're no longer thinking but experiencing.

## **Hare Krishna**

According to Indian tradition, the worship of Krishna goes back to 3,000 B.C., when Krishna was first incarnated. In the United States its yogi is a man named Prabhupada, who was ordered by his Spiritual Master to bring Krishna-consciousness to the West. The movement in the West is officially called the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). There are thirty-five temples in the United States.

Its followers worship Krishna as a personal god. It's a form of bhakti yoga. They attempt to liberate the soul from the body by devotion to Krishna (George Harrison of the Beatles wrote, "My Sweet Lord" in honor of Krishna) and in particular by Hare Krishna chants which produce a trance-like state of ecstasy. The chant is their mantra.

There aren't many Hare Krishna advocates around, about 3,000. It's surprising to see that many, for they are the strictest of the East-originated cults. You've probably seen their special dress and shaved heads. They are permitted no eggs, meat, fish, stimulants, or intoxicants in their diet. Intercourse is permitted only once a month, and it must be preceded by five to six hours of chanting. They wear a rosary of 108 beads. The Krishna mantra ("Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama") must be chanted sixteen times a day on each bead (1728 times!).

## **Divine Light Mission**

The Guru Maharaj Ji is just a young fellow, now nineteen years old. He claims to have 8 million disciples in the world, 60,000 in the United States, including Rennie Davis, one of the Chicago Seven. His father was considered to be a Satguru (God incarnate). At age 6 Maharaj Ji had that honor passed on to him by his father.

When he was thirteen he dropped out of school to bring peace to the world. He decided that the United States needed him; so he set up a national center in Denver. Things were going well until at age 16 (1974) he married an airline stewardess, brought her to his \$80,000 Denver home, and wouldn't let his mother stay in it. In retaliation she removed him from office in favor of his oldest brother, "the reincarnation of Jesus Christ."

His theology is typical of Eastern thought. Suffering comes when the individual asks too many questions. One of his followers, writer Alan Watts says, "The solution for us is not solution, but only solution via dissolution," that is, "knowledge" through God-consciousness.

God-consciousness ("knowledge") is preceded by an experience of divine light, divine music, and divine nectar. Then you get the divine word which often produces a trance-like state and glazed expression indicating loss of personality. This, of course, is desirable since personality is maya. Its loss is evidence that one has been taken up into God-consciousness.

## **Scientology**

Scientology takes in \$70 million a year. It claims 15 million members worldwide, one of whom is former San Francisco 49er, John Brodie.

Its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, born in 1911, was a science-fiction writer for a while. Then he came up with an idea he called dianetics, a sort of do-it-yourself psychoanalysis stressing prenatal influences. In time he turned it into a religion called scientology.

Man, according to Hubbard, is basically good. It's only his engrams (problems in the mind due to prenatal influences from former existences) that cause him trouble. But you can get rid of engrams through the use of an Emeter, two empty cans connected to a galvanometer. You hold them while your counselor asks you questions.

Then you work your way up through eight grades of clearness until you finally reawaken the primordial deity within (called Thetans, by the way, which are the original gods of the universe who inhabit every human being but forgot their importance). Getting back to ultimate reality is called regaining Total Thetanhood.

Their advertising is enticing. Just recently I received a 200-question personality test in the mail with the invitation to take it and mail it back to the local church of Scientology. The brochure promises: "Upon receipt of the test, we will score it and contact you for an appointment regarding the results. A professional consultant will give you a confidential, in-depth analysis of your personality and how it will affect your future potential."

### **est**

Jack Rosenberg was thumbing through a magazine article on Germany one day and saw the name Werner von Braun and Chancellor Erhard. He changed his name to Werner Erhard. Perhaps he did it because he had just left a wife and four children and didn't want anyone finding him.

After working his way through Dale Carnegie, Scientology, Gestalt therapy, Encounter groups, and Zen, he started his own movement, est, Erhard Sensitivity Training, in 1971. Since then over 75,000 have paid \$250 for two marathon 60 hour weekends of training and graduated from his course. The most famous alumnus, perhaps, is singer John Denver.

The goal of est is "getting it." What's "it"? What you discover after 60 hours is that there is nothing at all to get. "What is, is; what ain't, ain't," is Erhard's deep contribution to philosophy.

This is nothing but Eastern religion in a purely secularized form. It's an emphasis on complete detachment from the things of life. Don't let them bother you, since before you can analyze them they're already gone. Only the experience of the moment is valid, and whatever is, is and whatever ain't, ain't. There's nothing you can do about it; so you might as well enjoy it.

### **THEIR APPEAL**

Why should such distorted religious ideas appeal to young people, and old as well, today? It's the devil's doing, of course, who is actively working to keep man worshipping the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). But the devil disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He makes wicked people think that darkness is better than light (John 3:19), using such appeals as the following:

#### **Boredom**

Dave Breese, in "Know the Marks of the Cults," writes: "The prevailing emotion of this civilization is not love or hate or anything so activist; it is boredom. We demand new fascinations to feed our ever-shortening spans of interest." People today, young people included, want "to have their ears tickled." The Apostle Paul predicted that time would come (2 Tim. 4:3). One might be destroyed -- health, mind, body, soul -- by bouncing from one cult to another; but he won't be bored.

#### **Disillusionment with Materialism**

A young Japanese astrologer says, "Young people have found the material things failing them, and they're trying to find their souls." They see, with obviously biased opinion, what a materialistic philosophy has done to Western civilization -- how man's technology has triggered an ecology crisis, dirtying the water and air and sapping our natural resources. They've discovered something many of their parents could learn, that money doesn't purchase happiness. They hear Christians saying, "Money doesn't count," but see them living in a way that shows it does count -- to them. So they look for something else, for something that can offer contentment independent of material things. Hinduism, with its doctrine of maya (all material things are illusion), seems to be the answer.



## **Dehumanization by Science**

William J. Petersen, in "Those Curious New Cults," makes the observation, "The more man worked with computers, the more he seemed like a robot himself." We're living in an age of depersonalization, of numbers. Everything's computerized. You can even find your future mate by computer. Does the universe care? Yes, is the answer of Eastern religions. The real world isn't the world of knowledge gained by scientific inquiry. The real world is within and we can put you in touch with it.

## **Need for Community**

What replaces the family when family structures break down? From what source does a person get the close, intimate fellowship he instinctively needs? Come to us, invites Moon or the followers of Krishna Consciousness. We'll make you a part of the family. We'll give you the feeling of unity with others you long for.

## **Fear of the Future**

Nuclear warfare, the population explosion, the pollution crisis, energy shortages -- young people today are constantly bombarded with the threat of global extinction of all life as we now know it. Some choose to close their minds to this fearful prospect and drop out, the ultimate protest. A Zen Buddhist poem expresses this attitude: "We eat, excrete, sleep, and get up; This is our world. All we have to do after that -- Is to die." As one author put it, "The new cults don't offer much hope. Rather they assist you in becoming reconciled to despair."

## **Influence of Popular Culture**

We shouldn't underestimate what popular culture, especially music, is doing to the minds of young Christians. The references to drugs, astrology, TM, Zen, est, etc., abound in these songs. When the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and the current "hero," John Denver, publicly praise their newly-found freedom and happiness, many a gullible young person is moved to turn to the same direction.

## **Decline of the Influence of the Church**

In "Those Curious New Cults," Petersen writes: "In the 1960's the major denominations didn't go anywhere. They ...built some beautiful vehicles with power steering and power brakes, but the motor had dropped out." What was lacking? He supplies an answer to this question later in the book:

The Christian Church has complicated the picture by accommodating itself to its materialistic milieu. Miracles are explained away; everything is explained rationalistically. Even the churches that have retained the miracles have lost the wonder and mystical side of original Christianity. The Bible has often become a document to be studied coldly, scientifically, logically, rather than a revelation to be enjoyed. Christianity has turned into a religion that can be outlined on a three-by-five card, rather than being an experience with the living God. Christians have become engrossed with their roots when young people are enamored with flowers. Granted, a flower can't live long unless its roots are solidly implanted in soil. But the trouble is that all many young people see in Christianity is a very fancy root system. And very few flowers.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to us that the churches to which young people are flocking today in growing numbers are those that say, "Thus saith the Lord," and present what the Lord says in a warm, loving, and joyous manner.

## OVERCOMING THEIR APPEAL

Young people “come with hungry hearts and groping minds for something or Someone to reconcile their alienation and to make sense out of chaos” (“Those Curious New Cults”). What can we give them?

We might acknowledge first of all with young people today that a mechanistic view of the universe (technology can do all things) is an unrealistic and unbiblical world-view. But then we should point out that to turn to introspective mysticism as the answer is just as unreasonable and unbiblical. In fact, both stem from the same source: they are humanistic attempts to solve problems beyond human grasp. It’s neither what man can do, with his Western empiricist pursuit of knowledge, nor what man is, as, Eastern-style, he turns inward to unite with his Source, that will give man meaning and salvation. What is needed is a third way, “a cross between the yogi and the commissar,” as Os Guinness put it in an article entitled “New Boundaries of Human Consciousness” (taken from the newspaper “Right On”).

That way is Jesus Christ. He’s the Answer. He ties East and West together; for the height of knowledge and experience comes from a personal relationship with Him.

While both mechanistic and mystic views rob man of his individuality, Christianity accentuates the importance of individuality. Each individual is of vital importance to Jesus. He came to seek and to save Zacchaeus and each of the lost (Luke 19:11). And those whom He has redeemed He calls to follow Him in discipleship, not to lose their individuality, but to cause their unique individuality to blossom out with the fruits and gifts of the Spirit.

Then, having established that truth from the Scriptures, we might proceed to demolish point by point the appeal of other world-views:

*Boredom* - “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Who can get bored with that kind of life!

*Disillusionment with Materialism* - Jesus is anti-materialistic too. He counsels us, “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33).

*Dehumanization by Science* - A computer might know a person only as a number; but our God and Savior knows us so well as individuals that He’s counted all the hairs of our head (Matt. 10:30).

*The Need for Community* - Christ has gathered us together into the closest family unit there is -- the communion of saints, where we, although many (we retain our individuality), are one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5).

*Fear of the Future* - Need one fear? Not when he knows who holds the future and that “all power has been given” to Him (Matt. 28:19).

*Influence of Popular Culture* - Does it make sense to look to the pop heroes of the day for inspiration and direction? Not when one has “the Way” as Savior and Lord (John 14:6).

*Decline of the Church’s Influence* - That need not happen. We have the wherewithal to combat the tantalizing promise of experience-centered Eastern theology.

Let’s preach and teach Christ, and let’s live Christ. Let’s show by our teaching and our actions that Christianity isn’t merely a set of doctrines to assent to but above all a meaningful, joyous faith to be lived -- now and forever.

## SUGGESTED READING

*Those Curious New Cults*, William J. Petersen, Pivot Books, Keats Publishing, Inc., 1975 (paperback, \$1.95) The most complete of the very few books I could find on the newest cultic influences in our country. It would be a good one to recommend to a serviceman. It's not too technical, and is well written.

*Know the Marks of the Cults*, Dave Breese, Victor Books, Scripture Press, 1976 (paperback, \$1.50) Another excellent book to put into the hands of servicemen. The author devotes one chapter to each of twelve commonly-found errors of false religions. Helpful for "testing the spirits."

*God of the Gurus*, R. D. Clements, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1975 (paperback, c. \$1.50) - Three helpful chapters on mysticism and basic Eastern thought, and one each on the Divine Light Mission, TM, and Hare Krishna. Also a helpful appendix on how to deal with followers of Eastern mystical groups.

*Transcendental Meditation*, Gordon R. Lewis, Regal Books, Gospel Light, 1975 (paperback, \$1.45) The best short study of TM that I ran across. Has a helpful 12-page glossary.

Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Box 4308, Berkeley, California 94704 - This organization, formerly known as the Christian World Liberation Front, states a three-fold purpose: "1) to equip Christians to understand the psychological, philosophical and spiritual dimensions of the contemporary psycho/spiritual explosion; to thereby de-mystify the mystical; 2) to suggest, on that basis, a Christian response which wields the sword of His truth as a life-saving scalpel; 3) to extend a hand of rescue to the psychically and spiritually molested." A sampler pack of all of their literature may be purchased for \$6.00 plus \$.90 postage.