

THE NEW AGE WAVE  
PAGAN SURGE IN AMERICA  
by: JOHN F. DeVRIES

My home town is not exactly a bastion of liberal thought. Known as the conservative center of evangelical Christianity in the Midwest, Grand Rapids, Michigan, is the home of three of the largest religious book publishers in the United States. And Grand Rapids is not generally responsive to new trends or fads. It is an excellent test-market area -- if a product sells well to Dutch and Polish groups in Grand Rapids, it probably will sell anywhere in the United States. That's what frightens me.

Something is being sold in this town (and hundreds like it) that is potentially more dangerous than pornography, communism, secular humanism, or any other recognized enemy of Christianity. That something is the mindset of Eastern religions.

I find it all around -- in health-food stores, in newspaper articles promoting the New Age movement, in martial-arts schools, in daily horoscopes, in some chiropractic advertisements, in the new interest in transcendental meditation and yoga. Wherever I turn, I see the many faces of new "American Hindus."

For the past 14 years I have traveled to India annually. I have seen firsthand what the Hindu religion has done to a nation that was once among the richest of the world. I have been repelled by the lack of human compassion, by the stench of animals allowed to roam the streets, by the tragedy of caste, and by the haunting look of despair in the eyes of millions living out what they believe to be their "karma" from some previous existence.

The average per capita yearly income in India today is a little over two hundred dollars. But even that low figure cannot begin to illustrate the hunger and misery that stalk the villages and city streets. Much of the poverty and misery of India arises from its religious mind-set -- from the teachings of Eastern religions. Some of India's political leaders publicly acknowledge that much of India's poverty has a religious cause. NBC-TV did a "white paper" report on poverty in India and concluded that if India would change its religion its food supply would dramatically increase!

"National Geographic," in an article on the prolific rat, estimated that rodents eat approximately 20 percent of India's food supply each year. That's enough grain to fill a train of freight cars extending from Los Angeles to 300 miles beyond New York City into the Atlantic Ocean.

Devout Hindus will not kill rats, for it is contrary to their religious beliefs. They believe that rats, along with all other forms of animal life, are manifestations of the one universal, nameless, unknowable Force. Clearly, one foundation of Hinduism is pantheism: all is God and God is all. Thus all life must be protected and preserved.

While pantheism appears to be a harmless idea, it has come devastating consequences. One Indian Christian leader said, "That view does not elevate the rat to the level of the human being; it degrades the human being to the level of the rat!"

In addition to being terribly degrading, pantheism also results in a denial of morality -- of right and wrong. If everything is God and God is everything, then logically both evil and good emanate from God. Alan Watts, a leading exponent of the New Age movement, said that good and evil are like two actors fighting on a stage. When they get backstage they embrace each other as the best of friends. Killer Charles Manson is not a theologian, but he once made a profound theological statement: "If God is one, then what is bad?"

In addition, pantheism stifles science. The mind-set of scientific research is based upon Genesis 1 and 2 -- upon the concept that man has dominion over nature and is God's appointed "garden keeper." Man is not to worship nature as God, but he is to receive it as God's gift. He is to use nature carefully and to develop it; he is to demonstrate the image of God within himself as he explores nature and restores it. Small wonder that Western science never developed in countries that do not have this Christian mind-set.

Pantheism's teaching that God is all and all is God is being introduced in the United States in subtle ways. But Christians must realize that teachings of Eastern religions rarely come west as "religion." Rather, they come under the guise of science -- a new "spiritual" dimension to science.

A good example is holistic medicine. For many years American has been subjected to a materialistic view of medicine -- the view that a human being is little more than physical body to be treated with drugs and scalpel. Eastern religions answer this abuse by stressing "holistic" healing -- healing based on the principle that a person is part of the Universal Energy Force and respond quickly to any teaching that stresses energy or spirituality. Without knowing it, they are buying into the deadly pantheistic mind-set of Eastern religions.

A second example of the flow of pantheism into the Western world lies in the environmental movement. The Sierra Club is about the third largest environmental action group in the United States; it has some 225,000 members in 50 chapters. I am certain that many committed, concerned Christians can be found in its membership. Most are unaware that its new environmental health source book, "Well Body, Well Earth," is a thinly disguised promotion of the Eastern pantheistic mind-set. This book advises readers to pray to the Spirit of the Living Earth: "When you are done with your conversation with the Spirit of the living Earth, say goodbye to it, just as you would say goodbye upon parting from a friend."

In "The Screwtape Letters," C.S. Lewis, in a dialogue between Screwtape and Wormwood, predicted that this would happen. Screwtape says, "I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and mythologize their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in [God]." This is precisely what has happened in the United States. Satan has imported his religion, Hinduism, under the guise of science.

For years many people have called transcendental meditation a "science" in spite of the fact that its founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, openly acknowledges that it is "religious." He advises followers to call it science when it really is nothing more than Hinduism. He said, "Whenever religion dominates the mass consciousness, transcendental meditation should be taught in terms of religion. Whenever metaphysical thinking [science] dominates, it should be taught in [terms of] metaphysical science." Disciples of transcendental meditation ardently follow their guru's advice, insisting even to this day, in spite of a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling to the contrary, that transcendental meditation is science and not religion!

A greater danger than pantheism and its results is demonic possession or affliction. Eastern religions teach that the road to transformation is through the renewal of spiritual experiences. Paul teaches in Romans 12:2 that we are to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind." Hinduism and all other related Eastern religions, on the other hand, focus on spiritual experience -- on feeling and emotion. Gurus teach that reason is never to be trusted. The only reliable guide to truth is inner feeling. One guru once said that the Christian spends 99 percent of his time talking about God and 1 percent experiencing him, while the Hindu spends 99 percent of his time experiencing God and 1 percent talking about him.

The problem with this is the nature of the "god" the Hindu experiences. One cannot deny that Hinduism, through its yoga and meditation practices, is a religion of "spiritual experience." But the spiritual experience one gets in this religion is of direct contact with the demonic world. Yoga and meditation, if practiced in the context of Eastern religions, are methods of contacting the demonic world and of leaving oneself defenseless before evil spirits.

Truly, Eastern religions present themselves in many ways to Americans -- often disguised as something beneficial to our physical and spiritual health. But these presentations are as false and deceptive as was Satan's temptation in the garden of Eden. Christians must not accept these presentations at face value but, instead, consider their sinister core.

Reprinted from THE BANNER in THE CHRISTIAN READER