

## Sects and Cults in Europe

An eighteenth century European writer predicted that there would come a time when man would no longer believe in the existence of God, but only in the existence of ghosts. Has his prophecy been fulfilled in our time? Philosophers have gone so far in their secularization that the God of the Bible is denied; they now bow before the products of their own imagination.

In Norway an "Association of Heathens" has been founded. It teaches man's sole responsibility for good and evil; there is no life after death, and it has an utopian conviction "that man alone can realize his dreams of paradise."

In secular Europe, belief in charms, spiritualism, ghosts, witchcraft, and other systems have contrived to exercise a fatal attraction even among educated people. The followers of astrology are on the increase. A modern writer, Geoffrey Grigson, estimates that today, in Britain, "about a quarter of the population . . . holds a view of the universe which can most properly be designated as magical." Cults and sects, from England to communist countries, are mushrooming.

In 1907, there were only 7 cults in Germany, totaling about 35,000 members. By 1965 the picture had changed dramatically. There were 90 different cults with a combined membership of 800,000. Until recently, the West German public and government hadn't paid too much attention to the excesses of the cults.

But they are now showing concern. Parents, who have witnessed radical personality change in their children captivated by radical cults, are joining organizations like Action Group for Spiritual and Psychic Freedom and church protest movements.

In Holland, a subcommittee of the parliamentary committee on national health was appointed to investigate the harmful activities of the cults. *Reformatorsch Dagblad* remarked that the ongoing deChristianization process in Holland has led to a religious vacuum. This is especially true for the younger generation, for whom traditional Christendom has little meaning. They look for security in life. Many find it in political ideologies such as Marxism; others in bizarre sects, ranging from Eastern to vague Christian origin. "New", says *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, "are the manipulative techniques and therapies used to gain members".

The practices of the eastern mystical cult of Yogi Mararishi Mahesh's Transcendental Meditation Society are appealing to many European youth, bored with life and affluence. The society claims 60,000 followers, taking courses costing from \$200 to \$5,000. The cult promises release from anxiety and offers bliss. The Maharishi said: "We do not go by what the world has been. We go by what the world should be. We are planning today for the happiness of every man on earth."

Manipulation, brainwashing and absolute obedience to the leaders are the marks of the modern cults and sects. They alienate young people from the Christian faith, their

parents and family. What has led to the success of the sects and cults? In his book, *The Changing Church in Europe*, Wayne A. Detzler gives four basic reasons. First, the sects and cults capitalize on the ignorance of nominal Christians. Many Europeans who are nominal Christians have no idea what their church teaches. Second, the representatives of the cults are well-trained for their task of winning converts. Third, members of the cults exhibit a zeal that is unknown in traditional churches. Fourth, the pseudo Christian name of many cults confuses the uninformed. "Who can tell," says Detzler, "that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is not within the framework of Christianity? Is not the name of Jesus Christ enshrined in the church's official name?"

I have only touched upon the subject to demonstrate that the spiritual void in Europe is being filled by isms. What has the church done to fill Europe's spiritual void caused by revolution, secularism and wars? We shall look at the influence of modern theology, which thoroughly weakened the message of the Church.

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February, 1981