

# From Enlightenment to Endarkenment

*The New Age Movement represents a widespread and influential worldview and spirituality in the West as well as beyond. May we be challenged to reach the numerous men and women who embrace this "endarkenment." May we reach them with the glorious light of the Good News of Jesus Christ and usher them into true spirituality.*

by Vishal Mangalwadi

A section of Western society has taken a quantum leap from Darwin's enlightenment that "Man is only a beast," to Shirley MacLaine's, "I am God." But how did that happen?

Why did the Hindu guru, Swami Vivekananda, become an instant hit in the Parliament of World Religions in 1993? The founder of the Ramakrishna Mission heralded in Chicago a gospel that man was God, not a sinner. Understanding this immediate acceptance of his message will throw light on the first question.

## **The Dilemma of Secular Humanism**

Vivekananda's gospel seemed to resolve one of the central dilemmas of secular humanism. By the last quarter of the 19th century, the European Enlightenment's inherent problem had become painful for the intellectual elite: if human beings were only another animal species, a part of nature, how could they possibly transcend nature—understand it, rule over it and shape their destiny within it? Humanism was an established fact before the Enlightenment. Centuries earlier Renaissance thinkers had asserted that man was unique. His greatness was qualitatively different. No other animal was culturally creative. No other species had history, let alone the ability to shape history.

Man was like God. The Reformation both balanced and reinforced the legacy of Renaissance humanism by asserting that man was simultaneously both great and depraved. This moralized and liberated Europe from the corruption and fatalism that ruled other cultures. Even after the Enlightenment, the revival of Christianity under John Wesley and others made it very difficult for the European mind to accept the dehumanizing logic of a godless humanism, that man was only an animal without any intrinsic dignity or freedom. Yet, the implication of godlessness was also inescapable. In the absence of God, man could be nothing other than a part of nature, regulated or determined by the forces that govern nature.

The paradox became painful because of two other consequences that flowed from the rejection of a biblical view of God. First, if there is no God, or if he does not give revelation and does not hold man accountable, then man could not be a "sinner." Also, if God does not do anything to save man, then man has no option than to be his own savior. If man is not a sinner, utopia should be possible. It would be immoral to accept anything less than perfection. Man must play the Messiah-God by becoming a social engineer. Thus, the

Enlightenment became trapped in a tension of its own making. For man was a beast who had to "play God"—first to define himself, his morals and his destiny and then to save himself.

## **The Renaissance View of Man**

During most of the twentieth century, the universities around the world have propagated the idea that Christendom was introduced to the high view of man during the Renaissance through the rediscovery of Greek literature. This view had been questioned as early as 1885 by Henry Thode who pointed out that the naturalism of Renaissance art had been derived from Franciscan sources. Since then a century of scholarship has completely demolished the idea that the Renaissance's humanism came from Greek thought. Charles Trinkaus summed up the results of this scholarship in his two-volume work, *In Our Image and Likeness* (1970). He pointed out that far from developing a high view of man, the Greeks developed the doctrine of hubris. Man was great, but gods and the supreme god were greater. Above them all was the cosmos. Even the supreme god could not change the flow of history from the Golden Age down to the Iron Age. If man tried to

rise above his fixed place in the scheme of things, he committed hubris—overweening pride towards gods—which invite their vengeance.

The Hebrews alone of all the ancient peoples experienced a different reality. Their God demonstrated to them that he was not bound by the cosmos: nor by history, its politics, or by nature. Even if the cycle of history was running downwards for all people, he was taking *them* from the Iron Age to a Golden Age, from slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. Neither Pharaoh's army, the Red Sea nor the desert could stop Him from doing what He had purposed. He was free, not bound. Far from desiring to keep men at a humiliating distance, He wanted them to be like Him—free, in His image and in His likeness.

Specifically, the Renaissance view of man developed out of an intense theological debate at the end of the Middle Ages. The issue was—who is greater, man or angels? The Greek and Roman influence on Christendom had ensured that the worship of gods and goddesses continued in the form of angelology. After fierce debate some theologians decided that the angels should not be worshipped because man was greater than the angels. Man was greater because God had become man. God could become man, because man was made in God's image. In his creativity and dominion over nature, man was to mirror God. Political orders had to acknowledge, respect and protect man's evident and God-given dignity. The logic of Darwinism would have destroyed the foundations of Western humanism, as it did under Nazism and Marxism, but thanks to various revivals, the high view of man birthed by the Bible has by and large so far withstood the onslaught of reductionism.

### **Secularization of**

### **Humanism**

Secularism did make a massive attempt to hijack Christian humanism. Shelley's poem "Prometheus Unbound" is a brilliant example. Scholars continue to debate who, in Shelley's mind, was Prometheus. Mary Shelley says, he was "the emblem of the human race". In his study *Biblical Origins of Modern Secular Culture* (1984), Prof. Willis B. Glover outlines for us differences between Shelley's and the Aeschylus' version of the poem. In the original legend Prometheus steals fire from the temple of Zeus and gives it to mankind. Zeus punishes him by binding him for a long time. Prometheus is unbound after he makes his peace with the great god. Shelley gives the legend an Enlightenment twist. Jupiter (or Zeus) is a phantom god created by Prometheus' imagination. This phantom god becomes a tyrant and begins to oppress His creator—mankind! God (religion) becomes the source of all evils. Man (Prometheus) is released, not by appeasing god, but by taking the perfections back from the phantom god to whom he (man) had ascribed them in the first place.

The idea Shelley expressed in poem found its practical expression in the Age of Ideologies. From Feuerbach's thesis that God was only human attributes writ large (man created God in his own image), to the psychoanalysis and therapy begun by Sigmund Freud and messianic movements, such as Fascism and Nazism, ideologies sought to make man his own savior. Some of them retained the high view of man, but instead of deriving it from God, they grounded it in opposition to God. The ultimate outcome of their attempt was not to become visible until after the Second World War and subsequently in the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Yet, the logical problem was evident to Vivekananda's audience in Chicago: How

could a beast play God?

Vivekananda had appeal because he taught that man did not need to play God. He was in reality God and could know his divinity through the route of the mystical. What is more, this affirmation of man's divinity did not require one to discard Darwinism, because even the beasts (like human beings) were God, awaiting the full expansion of their divine consciousness. Hindu philosophy, it seemed, was capable of resolving the paradox of whether man was God or beast. Man could be both an animal as well as God. After Vivekananda inseminated the West with the idea of man's divinity, it took sixty-years' gestation period before reappearing as a full-blown worldview.

### **Towards Man's Divinization**

Two scientists became midwives, clearing the intellectual roadblocks on the way toward a wide acceptance of the idea of man's divinity.

First, was Albert Einstein: when Einstein propounded the equation  $E=MC^2$  he did more than provide the theoretical basis for splitting the atom. He demolished the dichotomy between physics and chemistry. Earlier physics studied energy while chemistry studied matter. Matter in the 19th century was comprised of approximately 100 elements, which in turn were composed of atoms that were indestructible and therefore eternal. Einstein's equation, that  $\text{Energy} = \text{Mass} \times \text{Speed of light squared}$ , seemed to suggest that all matter was, in fact, energy. Energy did exist in various forms: electricity, heat, light, sound, etc., but these forms were inter-convertible, suggesting the possibility that diverse elements could actually be mutations of one energy. The Cartesian dichotomy of body and soul, energy and con-

sciousness, however, continued as another hindrance for a wide acceptance of the divinity of man.

The Jesuit Paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin cleared this second roadblock. His book, *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), was described by many New Agers as the most decisive factor in the spread of the New Age worldview. De Chardin's book is tedious, but the argument is simple. If carbon (C) and oxygen (O) react in an equation, you could get Carbon Monoxide (CO), or Carbon Di Oxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), or even Carbon Tri Oxide (CO<sub>3</sub>). But you cannot get water (H<sub>2</sub>O). Why? Because the equation lacks hydrogen (H) in the beginning. What is not there in the beginning, argued de Chardin, cannot appear later. The presence of consciousness is a fact in insects, animals, mammals, and in human beings. Since it does appear in the process of evolution, it must have been there from the beginning. If the consciousness is present from the beginning, it is reasonable to assume that it has, in fact, been guiding the whole process of evolution from the start. What exactly is evolving, anyway? De Chardin observes that evolution is that of consciousness itself. Insects have less consciousness, animals have more, mammals have a lot more and human beings are self-conscious. Is there any reason to suppose that evolution has stopped? If not, what would be the next stage in evolution? It would have to be the evolution of self-consciousness into superconsciousness. Earlier evolution may have been guided by chance, but now that consciousness has become self-consciousness in man, we need to assume the responsibility for evolving ourselves consciously.

Fuse the idea that all matter is energy with the idea that the ultimate

form of energy is consciousness and you have replaced the old age worldview with the New Age paradigm. Now there is no distinction between man, monkey and matter; they are but mutations of consciousness. Your salvation lies in manipulating your mind to perceive your oneness with everything—the Ultimate Reality is consciousness and it is already within you. You are God, or at least the

**Modern man was able to trust his reason because he assumed that his creative mind resembled the Creator's mind. This assumption gave birth to modern science and the success of science began to reinforce the assumption that our minds could know the truth.**

cocooned caterpillar that is waiting to fly as a butterfly.

We need not, at this stage, go into a discussion of the logical implications of New Age Monism. How then, for example, are we to understand our uniqueness as individuals? If my experience of myself as a separate individual is somehow a mistake, then should I be accorded any "Fundamental Rights" as an individual? Also, if all is one, what is one to do with the duality of good and evil and right and wrong? Discard them as superstition? We do, however, need to be reminded of the pseudo-scientific assumptions of the New Age worldview.

Einstein himself did not think that matter equals energy. He explicitly rejected mysticism as nonsense. Had he seen the above interpretation of his equation he would have insisted that science was possible only because, at the very least, matter was energy plus laws, laws that are

rational. He definitely kept the possibility open that nature had laws because it had a Lawgiver. De Chardin's logic likewise presumed that consciousness was the ultimate form of physical energy and that evolution was a *priori* fact—which in reality is an increasingly debatable dogma. What if consciousness is something that the Creator injects into His creation? What if He assigns different degrees of consciousness to different species and makes man in His image?

Thoughtful New Agers are well aware of the flimsy "scientific" basis of their belief. Their advantage is that pseudoscience is not the only way to get lost. There is no dearth of ways of getting lost. In their system any claim to "One Way Only" is bigotry. In that light, a brief review of the history of the New Age needs to cover at least two additional ways that lead them into lostness.

### ***The Way of Knowledge***

"How do we know?" is one of the fundamental problems of philosophy known as epistemology. The Pre-modern Age said that we know through the established system of authority. For example, what are you going to do if a black cat crosses your path? You must stop, let someone else go ahead of you. Why? Because, a black cat is a bad omen. How do you know? Well, my grandmother told me so. Again, your grandmother is suffering in purgatory; if you buy the indulgence being sold by the church, her soul will be delivered from purgatory and will go to heaven. How do you know? The Pope says so; you must believe what the socially accepted authority says.

The Modern Age began (as a mass movement) when Martin Luther said,

"No, thank you!" The spirit of the modern age was that I am going to believe only that which is true. But, can you know the truth? Yes, said the early modern age. We can know truth because our Creator is able to speak to us. The possibility did not occur to them that it could be that while they were able to speak, perhaps their Creator was incapable of speaking. Or, while they were able to write books, their Creator couldn't possibly do so. The Modern man was able to trust his reason because he assumed that his creative mind resembled the Creator's mind. This assumption gave birth to modern science and the success of science began to reinforce the assumption that our minds could know the truth. Once the assumption became a conviction it created a new problem.

If the human mind was capable of knowing truth, why do we need revelation? Could it be that human reason is itself sufficient? Rationalism replaced revelation as Descartes began to suggest that reason is sufficient. The Modern Age gradually turned into Modernism. It retained the earlier commitment to truth alone, but insisted that man's reason and empirical experience, not God's revelation, was the means of knowledge. Man was capable of knowing everything, including God.

The Age of Reason should have repented of its hubris when David Hume demonstrated that our reason was not capable of proving God. Human reason may be incapable of proving God, but can it prove that God does not exist? If reason cannot prove God, does it necessarily follow that God does not exist? Could it be that reason is a limited faculty and needs some *a priori* assumptions to work with? The Enlightenment refused to see the limits of reason and stepped toward a conclusion: if reason could not prove God we must stop believing in Him.

Other consequences followed quickly. Philosophers soon discovered that without pre-supposing God, reason could not prove that a real moral law existed either. Should faith in morality then be discarded? Intellectual integrity demanded an abandonment of moral absolutes, however difficult that may be socially.

Okay, so we cannot know God and we cannot know morality, but can we know ourselves? Freud indicated that our conscious, rational mind was only the tip of the iceberg. A much larger part of our mind was the subconscious mind and it was anything but rational. Rationality, Freud suggested, was often only rationalization of our instincts, lusts and fears. None of us really knows himself. Should we adhere to Rationalism as a source of knowledge when it cannot enable us to know even ourselves? People persisted nonetheless in their faith in reason because it seemed to be a fit tool for unraveling the mysteries of the physical universe. Then came Heisenberg. He demonstrated that when you enter the subatomic world of quantum mechanics, rationality hits a dead end at some points. His Uncertainty Principle implied that either the fundamental nature of reality is non-determinate, or its rationality differs from the structure accessible to human rationality. Modernism's faith in reason died when it became clear that human reason, by itself, is not sufficient to lead us to a knowledge of God, morals, ourselves, or even of the external world. Modernism gave way to post-modernism.

Mainstream post-modernism in the academic world has, after a fashion, remained loyally wedded to rationalism. The main difference between the modernists and the post-modernists is that the latter species knows that her husband is impotent. Post-modernist professors are proud that they know that they do not know and that they cannot know truth. They are comforted by their knowl-

edge that every one of them is blind, leading equally blind students throughout the abyss of darkness. The only fact they are sure of is that anyone who claims that he knows is not one of them, is epistemologically incorrect and suspicious beyond toleration. Rationality's sole privileged use is to destroy all truth claims. Many, however, have found the impotent rationalism of post-modernism utterly dissatisfying. They, therefore, began flirting with mysticism. If you know that you are never going to know via Rationalism, why not try killing your mind through drugs, sex, yoga, or other psycho-technologies? Perhaps your mind is your problem, "the chief villain" (Osho Rajneesh). Who knows if the enlightenment would not dawn upon you if you got rid of your rational consciousness?

However, after discarding rationality, how could it be known whether one is experiencing enlightenment or endarkenment?

### **Stars, Spirits, Saucers and Sex**

Tom is eating a mango. What is a mango? We know the mango because we can relate it to a class of objects called "fruit". What is Tom? Tom is a boy. What is a boy? A boy is a young male human being. In philosophy, Tom and the mango are "Particulars", 'boy' and 'fruit' are "Universals". We know particulars only if we can relate them to universals. If a universal is finite, it, in turn, becomes a particular and needs a universal to be understood. So, 'boy' is a universal in relation to Tom, but it is a universal only relatively. To be understood, it itself needs a universal, 'human being'. But a human being is also finite, therefore, only relatively a universal. What is a human being?

The Renaissance and the Reformation said that the human being is the image of God—the ultimate, infinite universal. John Calvin wrote that it is certain that man cannot know himself

unless he has first looked upon the face of God. The Enlightenment accepted Hume's argument that on the basis of our reason we cannot know God and had no option but to revolt against the Reformation's ultimate universal. Alexander Pope, the great humanist poet, summed up their creed in his famous couplet:

Know then thyself,  
Presume not God to scan.  
The proper study of mankind is man.

A practical consequence of this creed was that Humanities replaced Theology as the central department of European universities. Theology, which had been the queen of all sciences, became, at first, a marginal department. Gradually, as theologians admitted that they did not know God, they changed their divinity schools into departments of study of religions.

Pope was a great poet but a poor

philosopher. Had he listened to his Greek predecessors, they would have told him that his attempt to know a particular (mankind) with reference to itself (man), without a universal (God) was plain futility. The question 'what is man?' simply cannot be answered without supplying or accepting a universal. It was not a "scientific" necessity," but a simple philosophic compulsion that drove the secular humanists to substitute "animal" in place of "Image of God" to explain themselves. "We are animals" they proclaimed.

What is an animal? An animal then had to be explained as a biological machine. A machine? Everything from an atom, to a solar system, to the universe is a machine—an organized system. Machine is the ultimate universal. Thus was born the mechanistic worldview of modernism. The simple problem with this world-

view was that we knew ourselves better than its reductionistic explanation of who we were. If a person seriously believed himself to be a machine we would send him to a psychiatric asylum. If he treated us as machines he would be sent to jail.

It was natural that those who did not want to be treated as cogs in the machine would revolt against this dehumanizing worldview of an old age. A new age was inevitable. It was humiliating enough to see ourselves as monkeys (a human being is an animal) but at least we were defining ourselves. If we went back to the idea that we were God's image it will require a greater humility, because then we would have to surrender to Him the right to define us. It was not possible for the humanistic pride to tolerate this. So, the New Age began to invent new universals to explain the human being.

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You are made, the New Age said, in the image, not of monkeys, but of your stars. Your horoscope tells you who you are. When you are angry, it is because of your Mars, and when you are frustrated, it is because of your Saturn.

Unfortunately, the astrologers err far too often when they become as specific as we want them to be. So, many in the New Age began to look beyond the stars to flying saucers to help supply the needed universal. You are made not in the image of your stars, they said, but in the image and likeness of the ETs (Extra-Terrestrials). Your ancestors came here ages ago, in a UFO (Unidentified Flying Object). We will find them, if we seek them with all our heart and purse. So SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) became a religious experience for the serious and resourceful, while others had to be content with being abducted and raped by the ETs in the UFOs. The study of Humanities was rapidly replaced by UFOlogy as the central pre-occupation of those who wanted to know what man really was.

Many sincere New Agers were unwilling to keep waiting indefinitely for the ETs to appear and define who we are. How do we really know that they are going to come in our lifetime, if ever? These found an easier solution to the problem of the missing universal via spirit channelers. They said, you are not a monkey, but a spirit. You can know what a spirit is by talking with them through a channeler, or by being possessed by them yourself. The spirit entities dwell in a superior multi-dimensional realm, where they can see our past, present and future and answer our deepest questions. It is also cheaper to connect with the spirits than with saucers. The New Age spirits have indeed been generous in the abundance of revelation they have given. Whether these revelations have made our generation any wiser is an altogether dif-

ferent question. No channeler has yet been awarded a Nobel Prize for adding anything significant to our knowledge concerning the mysteries of reality.

Those who think that all reality is basically one naturally find sexual dualism of male and female embarrassing. Many of them, therefore, seek to transcend this dualism by becoming one with the opposite sex. Others, who take seriously the view that both maleness-femaleness is already within each of us, prefer to have homosexual encounters. These encounters are better suited for bringing out the male in women and female in men. Those who pursue this variation of the sexual path to salvation seriously tend to reject marriage, as it necessarily reinforces dualism: the wife, as marriage assumes, is a woman while the husband is a male.

None of the above options solve the problem of finding the ultimate universal. Stars, saucers, spirits, and sex remain finite. A person lost in the maze of the New Age, therefore, keeps going back to the assertion, "I am God"—even if I have demonstrably made a mess of my life. The New Age movement represents a widespread and influential worldview and spirituality in the West and beyond. May we be challenged to reach the numerous men and women who embrace this "endarkenment" with the true enlightenment of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Vishal Mangalwadi is an evangelical philosopher living in India and the author of numerous books including The World of Gurus, and When the New Age Gets Old: Looking for a Greater Spirituality.*

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