Transcendental Meditation

This statement on transcendental meditation was adopted by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on August 17, 1976.

Among present attempts to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western philosophies are those of Hare Krishna and Transcendental Meditation. Transcendental Meditation, or TM as it is commonly called, in particular has received widespread publicity recently in America. It has gained sufficient attention to arouse the curiosity of many. Men who previously knew nothing of the mystical practices of the East now search for materials on TM.

The Nature of Transcendental Meditation

A surface definition of Transcendental Meditation pictures it as a natural practice of relaxation for two 20-minute periods each day. During the process one repeats a word, known as a mantra, in such a way that its rhythmic repetition aids the relaxation effort. The promoters of TM present it as a "scientific" practice based on biological and psychological laws. They repeatedly declare that it is a nonreligious activity in which men of all faiths may participate with great benefit.

After initiation and careful instruction in TM, for which one pays a fee, faithful use of the technique reportedly produces near-miraculous results in all areas of life -- physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. Advocates of TM present what purports to be research data, and numerous testimonials from politicians, educators, sports and theatrical celebrities, as well as religious leaders, to support their claims.

However, an in-depth study of Transcendental Meditation reveals that not all of its story appears on the surface. Serious examination of TM materials shows it is more than a relaxation tool. It is a religious activity.

Transcendental Meditation has its root in Hinduism. All of its teachings about reality, God, man, and salvation are from the Vedas, the scriptures of the Hindus. The inclusion of the ritualistic initiation ceremony and the use of the secret mantra in TM are in keeping with the mystical practices of the cults of the East. Maharishi, world leader of TM, explains the benefits of the technique in religious rather than scientific language.

Transcendental Meditation, therefore, raises questions in the areas of psychology, theology, and sociology. These questions present the church with a challenge which it cannot ignore.

The Roots of Transcendental Meditation

It is clear that Transcendental Meditation is a religions activity in point of origin. Aspects of it can be traced to Hinduism.

There are seemingly millions of gods in Hindu worship, but three stand out among them as most prominent. The first is Brahma, the creator of all things material. The second is Shiva, the god of destruction, disease, and death, as well as the god of vegetable, animal, and human reproduction. In Indian thought, death is but a prelude to rebirth. Thus, the god of death is also the god of sexuality. The third is Vishnu, the god of love and benevolence. However, above these is the all-pervading, impersonal god-force, the being called Brahman. The literature of TM refers to Brahman as Creative Intelligence.

Hinduism provides various means for worship of the gods. These include ascetic practices, ritualistic devotions, and meditation. Meditation has enjoyed considerable attention as a means of worship through the centuries. The main feature of all Yoga is meditation. In Hindu tradition meditation is necessary even for the gods if they are to be united with the Being and thus escape the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

By definition, then, meditation is emphasized in TM as the best means of "transcending" or experiencing unity with Being. Until recently, the last revival of Transcendental Meditation was during the Middle Ages. Sankara, the most outstanding scholar of medieval Hinduism, was its chief proponent. Modern efforts to restore the Eastern art of meditation received greatest impetus with Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, generally referred to as Guru Dev, one of four major religious leaders in India. The popular leader of TM, however, is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a disciple of Guru Dev.

Reportedly, Maharishi was commissioned by Guru Dev to develop a simple form of meditation. Following a time of seclusion in the Himalayas, he introduced TM in 1955. Failing to attract much attention in India, he exported his teachings to England. Among his most noted converts there were the Beatles. Maharishi began his work in America in 1959. He founded the Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, as the educational arm of TM in 1973.

The Teachings of Transcendental Meditation

It is manifestly evident that Transcendental Meditation is religious in nature because of the ideas upon which the technique is built. Its theological presuppositions are those of Hinduism.

Teachings About God

The Maharishi holds that the Being, or Creative Intelligence, is eternal, infinite, unknowable, sexless, and impersonal, following the tradition of Hindu theology. The Being is without attribute, quality, feature, or form. In Hindu thought a clear distinction is not made between God and His creation.

Teachings About Reality

Maharishi holds that all creation is one with Being. He illustrates this pantheistic view by declaring that Being permeates all that exists, as butter permeates milk, or as sap permeates a tree. Basic reality consists of the relative and the absolute, but they are simply two aspects of one essence. The absolute is that aspect of Being which, in its essential nature, remains unmanifested, while the relative is that aspect in which the Being manifests itself in creation.

In the view of Maharishi, Being indwells everything in creation in a way that It constitutes the only reality there is. The trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit of the tree constantly change, but the sap, which is like Being, remains the same. That which is always changing has no real quality of its own. Thus the world is only an illusion. It just seems to be real.

Teachings About Man

Thus, in the view of Maharishi, since Being manifests itself in the many forms of life in creation, It dwells in the heart of every man. In fact, man's soul is one of the great ocean of souls which make up Brahman. Each man needs to know that he is a part of the whole life of the universe. His relationship to universal life is like that of an individual cell to a whole body. Each person must come to experience every being in creation as dear to him as he is to himself.

Teachings About Salvation

According to Maharishi, man's ignorance of the above facts is the sole source of all his problems. He is bound up in a world of illusion and ignorance. Thinking falsely that creation is real, he is unaware of identity with Being. As long as he remains in such ignorance, he is bound to a life of karma or action which

keeps him endlessly in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. His salvation comes with the knowledge of the illusion of life and of man's oneness with Being.

Further, whatever man is in his present state is a result of his karma or actions in his previous life. As long as a soul has not merged itself in knowledge with Creative Intelligence, the individual will continue as an individual and will keep on receiving the fruit of the karma of the past life. All suffering is due to not knowing the way to unfold the divine glory present within the heart of man.

Lack of knowledge of how to "dive" within oneself is the root of all ills in human life. Without such experiences, man is lacking in energy and intelligence. He is tired, worried, and tense. Maharishi's technique for contacting divine consciousness within, of course, is Transcendental Meditation.

The Methods of Transcendental Meditation

It is further evident that Transcendental Meditation is more than just a relaxation technique because not only are its presuppositions religious but so are its methods. Maharishi describes his meditative art itself as that which unfolds the divine in man.

The Art of Meditation

Maharishi carefully places his own definition on the term meditation. It is not to be confused with concentration. That is the reverse of what his technique requires. The mind must be totally passive in meditation. No conscious effort can be exerted. The mind is simply allowed to naturally "dive" into the great ocean of Creative Intelligence. All activity of human thought, the very content of human knowledge, is in the relative sphere of reality, not the absolute. Therefore, in meditation the mind is unconsciously infused with the power of Being. Successful living demands a continuous intake of such power.

That suspension of thought is necessary to achieve the sense of unity with Being is illustrated by Maharishi in his discussion of ethics. He recognizes that each of the religions of the world has its code of ethics. However, these are related to the changing cultures of the times. Thus there is no absolute, written standard of right and wrong. Nothing but a mind which is influenced by Creative Intelligence through TM can possibly determine actions in accordance with unchanging ethics.

The Initiation Ceremony

The initiation ceremony in Transcendental Meditation is distinctly religious in nature. It consists of a traditional Hindu puja or worship ritual. At the rite the TM beginner brings an offering of six flowers, three pieces of fresh fruit, and a white handkerchief. His teacher places these on an altar before a picture of Guru Dev. Aided by candlelight and incense, the teacher chants a song of thanksgiving in Sanskrit to a long line of departed Hindu masters. He worships the Hindu Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as the manifestations of the formless Brahman. The primary focus of attention, however, is on Guru Dev, late master of Maharishi. The presence of his picture suggests the idea of an idol which is indeed worshipped.

The Mantra

As the final act of the initiation ceremony, the TM teacher kneels at the side of the convert and begins to repeat a secret mantra selected especially for him. While TM advocates declare that the mantra is a harmless, meaningless word chosen only for its hypnotic benefits, it is a word taken from the Vedas which has been used traditionally to invoke the assistance of the various Hindu deities. It may seem meaningless to the uninformed, but the mantra has a definite religious meaning in the Hindu context.

The Problems of Transcendental Meditation

A serious consideration of these facts, then, suggests that Transcendental Meditation poses questions in the areas of psychology, theology, and sociology.

Psychological Issues

Possible psychological problems stem from the emphasis on mental passivity in TM. The technique requires that one's mind be left totally undirected during meditation. Ordinary thinking must be transcended altogether. What transpires in TM is supposedly beyond the level of intellectual comprehension.

For the Christian, the methods of TM are but a revival of the quietistic practices which have appeared periodically through history. The technique promotes mystical experiences divorced from either knowledge or reason. Thus TM encourages a passive state of mind which could open the door for demonic activity in the life of an individual. Transcendental Meditation is no less harmful than is idolatry. Demons were involved in idol worship in Bible times (Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:19, 20).

Another psychological difficulty of TM is that it offers quick and easy solutions to anxiety without going to the root of the problem. It ignores the possible causes of psychological stress, offering only temporary relief. Some research by scholars outside the camp of TM indicates that the benefits which appear to come from meditation are short-lived.

Theological Issues

The theological problems which TM presents are manifold. Maharishi has termed his theological teachings as the Science of Creative Intelligence or SCI. All that SCI teaches about God, reality, man, and salvation stands opposed to the teachings of the Bible. It denies the existence of a personal God. The Bible shows that God is personal. He knows (Matthew 6:8, 32), loves (John 3:16), wills (Matthew 6:10), and acts (Genesis 1:1).

Further, SCI denies the Creator-creature distinction fundamental to Biblical revelation. Contrary to the pantheistic premise of SCI that God is all and all is God, He is distinct from His creation. Creation is but the handiwork of God (Psalm 19:1). In confusing God with creation SCI repeats the sin of early man (Romans 1:23, 25).

SCI says that God is an unmanifested Being. The Bible makes clear that He has revealed himself in nature, conscience, history, miracles, prophecy, Scripture, and finally through His Son Jesus.

Maharishi views man, not as a sinner helpless to save himself from God's judgments, but as a being capable of experiencing his own divinity. The doctrine of SCI presents no concept of man's need of a mediator. He becomes his own savior through merely practicing TM.

There is no talk in SCI of repentance. Punishment follows sin inevitably according to the law of karma. There is no room for mercy and grace. One's present is dictated by his karma or action of the past. Thus he accepts the present fatalistically.

In spite of teachings so different from those of Christianity, Maharishi claims that Christians, or followers of any religion, may practice TM without conflict. But this is because he operates from a Hindu base which has a myriad of gods, both good and evil, in its theology. To accept one more creates no problem. He says it matters little what name one gives his religion or what ritual he follows in his church, temple, mosque, or pagoda.

It is the Maharishi's view that Hinduism covers the world's religions by its giant umbrella. Accordingly, the Hindu is the most religiously tolerant of all men on earth. To him the Vedas are the oldest of the scriptures. Whatever truth the sacred books of the world contain appeared first in the Vedas. Thus the basic truth of one religion is the basic truth of all other religions.

Sociological Issues

Due to Maharishi's bold plans for the propagation of the Science of Creative Intelligence, there are sociological problems associated with Transcendental Meditation. He presents his doctrine as a cure for all the world's ills, physical, psychological, spiritual, economic, political, social, and even environmental.

In 1972 Maharishi inaugurated a World Plan to make SCI and the TM program available to everyone on earth. He estimates that one teacher for SCI for every 1,000 people will be sufficient to accomplish the task. A program is now under way to establish 3,600 World Plan Centers for the project. Maharishi International University, video-tape programs, and television stations owned by TM will also serve to further the plan.

Besides the university, four other organizations have been formed as arms of the World Plan. The Students' International Society works with youth. The International Meditation Society appeals to the general population of adults. The Spiritual Regeneration Movement is for those interested in a spiritual approach to life, but especially retired persons. The Foundation for the Science of Creative Intelligence is designed for the business and professional community.

The advocates of TM declare an interest in more than merely the health and happiness of individuals. Their ambitions reach to no less heights than that of changing social institutions. To achieve such purposes, Maharishi proposes to use whatever is in vogue in a society at a given time. This may be religion, education, or politics.

What is more suited as a tool for promoting TM in this generation? According to Maharishi, it is politics. Thus his energies are devoted to making TM available through the agencies of government. Already the teaching of TM on an experimental basis is available in some schools of the United States at federal expense. Classes in SCI and TM have been legalized for use in the public schools of Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, Florida, and California. In some areas concerned citizens have raised legal questions regarding the propriety of government support for such projects.

The Challenge of Transcendental Meditation

Thus Transcendental Meditation presents a challenge to the Church on three fronts. The first is to a new emphasis on correctness of doctrine. Those who know that doctrine and practice cannot be separated will avoid the temptation to use the TM technique in regard to its theological moorings.

The Church must also emphasize anew the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Biblically based experiences in the Holy Spirit provide the genuine of what TM is but a treacherous substitute.

Likewise, the Church must proclaim again the great principle of sabbath rest taught from the beginning in the Bible. The madness of modern man at work and play increasingly violates the sabbath principle. God offers man the correct tool for physical, mental, and spiritual renewal by providing one day in seven for rest and worship. The research of some outside the TM camp has shown that the technique offers no physical benefits which cannot be achieved equally well by the simple act of rest. By following God's original plan for the rejuvenation of man, the Christian has no need for the method of Transcendental Meditation.

Psalm 1:2 enjoins the believer to meditate upon the Word of God. Herein is the true content of genuine meditation. And the benefits of such meditation are not transitory but eternal!