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## epilogue

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*Robert J. Miller*  
*University of Wisconsin*

"A wise man may seek here, there, and everywhere  
Whence it has come, and whither it has gone,  
Through every region in all directions,  
But he cannot find it in its essential nature. . . ."  
—*Lalitavistara*<sup>1</sup>

This volume constitutes a search for the essential nature of religious ferment in Asia. It has been an attempt to describe and analyze specific cases that may lead to understanding the processes of readjustment, reassessment, and either renewal or reaffirmation characteristic of all major religions in the world today. If we are, in fact, dealing with a world-wide phenomenon, then perhaps *it* is too complex to understand as a whole. As noted in the Editor's Foreword, simplification may destroy the messiness, the complexity, of the system under analysis. Analysis without simplification often seems to add to the complexity. Thus, the concentration on religious ferment in Asia (or, rather, only in parts of that area!) paradoxically raises another question of ferment—the *intellectual ferment* in academic disciplines concerned with analyses of various aspects of human behavior. *Do* we all share the perspective of the "scientific tradition," a "secular" approach to our subject? Are we really able to comprehend social orders in which religion equates with day-to-day activity?

Byron Earhart's final essay in this volume proposes a phenomenology of new religious movements. Earhart argues that what we have discussed elsewhere as reappraisal, readjustment, renewal and/or reaffirmation has as its end product a restructured ideology-cum-organization. "There is no need to look for new religious content, because what is important is not the

relative balance of old and 'new' elements, but the *resulting new socioreligious movement*" (my italics).

Let us underline the emphasis on restructuring ideas and the attempt to realize them through a socioreligious movement. Earhart's refusal to adopt a category which eliminates the messiness of hyphenation is significant. Analytically, for any real system it is only theoretically possible to separate religion from the social and political spheres. We seem to be returning to the concept that, in many societies, religion permeates *all* aspects of life—in fact, that *it* is the source of most of the world's "models" for living. It is this traditional totality—as a system of ideas-cum-action—that forces development of an organizational form through which to remodel the "world." Remodeling occurs either through reaffirming the traditional "verities" or through selectively receiving and incorporating the "new" and the "old." Those organizations stemming from the nonscientific traditions and proposing a model based outside existing society we term *religious*. Conversely, *movements* that stress a particular way of life, even though based in religious values and models of the ideal world, we tend to call nationalistic, or communalistic, or simply political.

Religious ferment may indeed reflect the perception of attacks on a total way of life. Such ferment leads the organization or movement to contend for power to direct the life of the whole society or at least the total life of the particular group adhering to the organization. In contemporary societies, such power most often has a political base. Religion, either as organization or as the source of values for a movement, enters into the generalized ferment of politics. It struggles for men's allegiance to specific ideas and for loyalty to the ideas' interpreters. It contends with the state for personnel, for funds, for media—for sources of power. It may become the mechanism through which a group can participate *in* a society but, ideologically, not acknowledge themselves as *part* of that society.<sup>3</sup>

For any modern society that takes as its ideal the harmonious and integrated state, such an attitude poses many problems. It complicates the assimilation and absorption of divergent "subcultures" into a greater whole, a goal to which many developing nations are committed. Modernizing states and modernized political elites, espousing a new, secular world model, attempt to relegate religion to a personal, socially insignificant sphere of activity. The State as the representative of Society—the secular

all-inclusive whole—takes over channels through which religious ideas traditionally became part of the "way of life." Education, taxation, social services, arbitration of morals, control of offenders, sanctioning of marriage, legitimization of rights and duties—areas in which formerly the religious leaders held control—all have fallen to the State. Small wonder then that even "new" religions and "new" religious movements seek their continuity in past traditions, to give legitimacy and attraction to their claim for power. And small wonder, also, that even "secular" leaders attempt to justify their new model of the world in similar fashion, or to contend that "religion should stay out of politics"!

If we look back on our essays and remember Sam Jordan, we may ask, Is it ever possible to divorce religion from politics, from economics, from social life? Jordan was *acting* some portion of religion by advocating a new perspective on work and interpersonal relations. A community—such as the Lamaists of Darjeeling District—*act* their religion by maintaining the relationship between Sangha and layman, monastery and community. An organization—like the Jana Sangh—translates religion into action by pressing for a ban on cow-slaughter in India—a ban that would apply not only to its adherents, but to *all* Indians regardless of *their* religious affiliation.

In short, unless religion is relegated to the realm of purely personal *thought*, or unless a religion provides *no* imperatives to behavior, it must encroach on politics. It must contend with the state or with "secular" governing personnel for the right to define the bounds of proper social behavior. Though we are dealing here only with "major" religions, the statement is applicable to organized religions in general. To paraphrase Clausewitz's statement about war and diplomacy: Politics is Religion continued by other means.

Contemporary politics paradoxically continues religion by means of "secularization." It strips traditions of their "sacred" aspects and uses them to link innovations with past practices. Certainly in most "modernizing" and "underdeveloped" nations, contemporary politics overtly accepts the scientific view of rationalism, natural processes, and the human ability to control one's own destiny. Faith in some power outside of man—indeed, in many cases outside of the nation or state—is considered to be a deterrent to the growth of analytical capacity. Yet, in translating the new world view into action, contemporary politicians (often inadvertently) lay the basis for religious ferment.

The advocates of faith, of forces outside Man, of a different perspective on nature, are slowly excluded from power and fight back. In the process, they in turn must adapt to or present alternatives to the new view of the "real world."

In this volume we have presented many illustrations of the ways in which such adaptations occur. Our emphasis has been on those who fight back, on the guardians of tradition, rather than on the "secularizers." Yet, if traditional religious certainties are under attack, the process we have described here suggests that Kees Bolle is correct when he says: "Secularization is a necessary process that makes room for what is newly felt to be the real world. This simply means that a full-scale religious renewal is not possible except through secularization."<sup>3</sup>

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### NOTES

1. Quoted in Wm. Theodore De Bary, ed., *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China & Japan* (New York, 1969).

2. Robert J. Miller, "They Will Not Die Hindus," *Asian Survey*, 7.9:637-44 (Sept. 1967).

3. Kees W. Bolle, "Secularization As a Problem for the History of Religions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12.3:251 (July 1970).