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**THE RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL
THOUGHT OF
ANTONIO MACHADO**

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INTRODUCTION

Antonio Machado and the “New Consciousness”

In the speech he planned to give upon his acceptance into the Spanish Academy, Antonio Machado defines the first part of the 20th century as a revolutionary period in which there has been a profound transformation in human consciousness: “Everywhere things have seemed to change abruptly, as if the whole tree is being refreshed by its hidden roots. Powerful forces are now working against those things we have considered to be the most certain and the most objective; the postulates of science, art and morality have been unexpectedly changed by new conceptions of space, matter, the economy, the government, and the family... One might think, without undue exaggeration, that we are moving toward a new *enlightenment*, toward a new *awakening*.”

As I read these words, I ask myself if, in each moment of history, men have had the feeling of being on the verge of a fundamental change in reality. Or is it really true, as many have thought, that we are about to enter a New Age? Is the cause of this feeling the fact that we will soon arrive at the end of a millennium, or that, as the astrologers say, we are about to enter the Age of Aquarius? Whatever answer we give to these questions, there is no denying—Machado is not the only one to observe it—that something has produced a fundamental change in the way in which reality is perceived.

Karl Jaspers has called this phenomenon “the new consciousness of the world”; he sees it as the result of the development of science and technology during the past century that has produced, for the first time in history, the necessity to look at the world as a totality. In his book, *The New Consciousness in Science and Religion*, Harold K. Schilling affirms that human consciousness has not only been enlarged in spatial terms, but has also acquired a new psychic depth. Science has successfully explored the external world of nature, but many recent discoveries have also transformed our knowledge of the interior dimension of man's existence. As Schilling describes it,

Not only are his mental equipment and abilities being modified and extended, but sensibilities that have been lost or atrophied are being restored or renewed, and fresh ones are emerging. The human imagination is being amplified. Men's minds and hearts are being liberated from inhibiting attitudes and conceptions to which they had fallen prey in the modern era, so they are now able to explore realms and dimensions of reality from which they had been blocked until recently. Intuition, properly safeguarded against excesses, has been admitted to scientific respectability. Novel conceptions and symbols are becoming available for investigating the reality and significance of the nonrational and transrational in human experience.

We are dealing with a new "integral consciousness" that is more open and more inclusive which, as Machado says, has resulted from the failure to explain the world according to a system of rational concepts. Rationalism is now being replaced by a new view of the world which rejects the concept of an absolute reality and conceives of life as a grand mixture of relative forces. The man who possesses this "new consciousness" no longer accepts the narrow perspective of a world known only by the senses, and is now open to the possibility of exploring the dimensions of a richer, more complex reality than what he has imagined in the past.

One of the results of this new perspective is a "non-rational" view of existence that has become increasingly evident in many aspects of contemporary thought. The tendency to adopt a broader, more open view of reality has appeared in many different fields, including medicine, psychology, and even modern physics. The result is that many religious and philosophical thinkers have abandoned their traditional dualism, in favor of a monistic conception of the universe.

The new consciousness has therefore produced a growing interest in certain ideas whose importance had been rejected by rational thought. In spite of the predominance of a rational materialism which is increasingly futile and unproductive, one notes the presence of a new "spiritual current" that is flowing beneath the surface of the established institutions.

The progressive spiritualization of consciousness has produced a profound change in our attitude toward religion. Unsatisfied with the arid dogmas of orthodox doctrine, Western man has begun to feel the attraction of mysticism and oriental religions. As Jacob Needleman has shown in his book, *The New Religions*, during the last few decades we have observed a "spiritual revolution" that has affected millions of people. Driven by the interest in Eastern religions, especially in the areas of mysticism and meditation, many Western religious thinkers have begun to examine their own traditions to find spiritual disciplines which had been abandoned or forgotten. And along with the studies which document the popularity of mysticism and Eastern religions, C. G. Jung has also found an increased interest in esoteric thought which has no parallel in Western thought. "I am a physician—Jung declares in a speech given after the death of Richard Wilhelm—and I deal with ordinary people, and therefore I know that universities have ceased to act as disseminators of light. People have become weary of scientific specialization and rationalistic intellectualism. They want to hear truths which do not make them narrower but broader, which do not obscure but enlighten, which do not run off them like water, but pierce them to the marrow."

This explains why, in many countries, both in America and in Europe, books have been appearing which deal with esoteric topics including efforts to study and to transform consciousness. Books from the beginning of the century have been rediscovered—Richard Maurice Bucke, Aldous Huxley, William James, C. G. Jung, Edouard Schuré, Rudolph Steiner—and new authors are appearing, some of whom have achieved enormous popularity—Richard Bach, Fritjof Capra, Carlos Castaneda, John C. Lilly, and Jane Roberts. And, in spite of the lack of faith which Jung expressed regarding modern

education, in many universities courses are being taught which deal with topics such as Extrasensory Perception, States of Consciousness, Parapsychology, Oriental Philosophy and Mysticism.

This fundamental change in human consciousness brings about the inevitable comparison of our epoch to other crucial periods of history. Karl Jaspers compares the modern period to the six centuries between 800 BC and 200 BC, which is the time of Buddha, Confucius, Lao-Tse, Zarathustra, the Hebrew prophets and the first Greek philosophers. Schilling compares the effect of the new scientific discoveries to the revolution produced by the theory of Copernicus in the 16th century. Teilhard de Chardin speaks of a new psychic transformation that will have as much importance as the emergence of self-consciousness.

The words of Antonio Machado which were quoted in the beginning of this Introduction show that he saw very clearly the importance of the changes affecting human consciousness in the 20th century, and his faith in the concept of a spiritual enlightenment, together with his rejection of rational materialism, shows that he was one of those who have contributed to this new mental environment. For someone who is familiar with the ideas of those who possess the new consciousness, their relation to the thought of Antonio Machado will be quite clear. Nevertheless, the majority of those who have studied the work of the Spanish poet and philosopher have done so from a strictly rational point of view. And this is not surprising, since Machado undoubtedly has had a great deal to say to those who think in this way. But he has even more to say to those who possess the new mentality which has appeared during the past few decades.

Therefore, in this book I intend to study the work of Antonio Machado from the point of view of this “new consciousness,” giving special attention to certain religious and philosophical themes. As I write, I am guided by a purpose which is both intellectual and religious. It is my wish to write a book which is optimistic and which gives hope to those who believe, like Machado, and like myself in the evolution of consciousness. In this way I pay my debt—“you are indebted to me for what I have written,” Machado has said—to one of the most important thinkers of our century.

Since many of the readers of Machado’s work will not be familiar with the concepts produced by the new consciousness, I have tried to include some of these ideas in the pages that follow. And so that English speaking readers can understand what is discussed in this book, I have translated the entire text, including Machado's poetry, from Spanish into English. Some of the ideas discussed in Chapters III and IV have already appeared in my article, “Antonio Machado y las galerías del alma,” *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 304-307 (octubre-diciembre 1975; enero 1976), pp. 647-678); but here they have been expanded and, I hope, clarified.

As a basis for the present study I have used the following Spanish editions of Machado’s work: *Obras: poesía y prosa*, 2^a Edición, reunida por Aurora de Albornoz y Guillermo de Torre (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1973); *Antonio Machado: Antología de su prosa*, edición preparada por Aurora de Albornoz (Madrid: Edicusa, 1970); *Los complementarios*, edición de Manuel Alvar (Madrid: Cátedra, 1980).

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When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom... And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom... But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this... Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God... For who has known the mind of the lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. **I CORINTHIANS II, 1-16**