

Charles Fourier et l'École sociétaire face à la question religieuse

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ABSTRACT

The religious thought of French philosopher, Charles Fourier (1772-1837) caused controversy during his own time and continues to interest historians to this day. However, whilst much critical work has been devoted to Fourier's philosophy, little has been written to date of the collective views of his followers, notably as expressed in the journals of the Fourierist School, *Le Phalanstère*, *La Phalange*, *La Démocratie pacifique*. As a result, it has been difficult to establish the role of religion within the group, and to determine whether religion may have played as divisive a role in the School as the well documented quarrels over the creation of utopian communities.

By explaining that Fourier and his disciples were attempting to strike a balance between their principles, which were "similar to those of Christianity", and their moral sets, which were deeply at odds with those of the Church, Hubert Bourgin, in 1905, was the first to reveal the extent of the Fourierists' religious dilemma. Later historians, such as Henri Desroche, Frank Paul Bowman, Jonathan Beecher and Claude Morilhat, delved into the relationship between Fourierism and Christianity. In the wake of these analyses, Fourierism was widely perceived as deriving from the Christian faith.

However, the view that Fourierism was in and of itself a religion began to gain currency, thanks largely to the work of Gareth Stedman Jones. In the absence of an exhaustive study based on fine-grained analysis of the writings of Fourier and his School, this theory has not, as yet, been fully tested and there remain two important questions to resolve. Firstly, if Fourierism were a religion, to what extent did this challenge the notion that it derived from Christianity? Secondly, how united was the group around the basic tenets that would define such a faith?

In order to answer these questions, we have conducted an analysis of the substantial body of writings of both Fourier and his followers. In the first part of this

thesis, we examine the nature and functions of the Church, and the concepts of God, Christ and Man according to Fourier. In the second part, we conduct a similar analysis of the views of the School. This led us to the conclusion that the religious position of Fourier and his followers was irreconcilable with Christianity, but also that serious religious differences existed within the group. We then proceed, in the third part of the thesis, to reassess the nature of the religious identity of the Fourierist movement. After examining the problems of religious freedom, doctrinal differences with other religions, and the relation of religion to Fourierist social theory, we determined that the Fourierist movement was indeed a singular religion, distinct from Christianity, with its own divinity, prophetic tradition, path to salvation, and orthodoxy. However, despite the adherence to these basic principles, the Fourierist School remained challenged by the strong religious diversity within its ranks. We conclude that religion was as important a factor in the School's eventual demise as were its better known political divisions.

DECLARATION

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