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Hinduism and Christianity: Some Points of Contact and Divergence.

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II.

Among the many tasks which Hinduism at various periods of its long history set itself to accomplish, there are two in regard to which there can be no question but that they are eminently religious tasks. They represent, indeed, from different angles the one sole purpose of every religion—the purpose and aim of Christianity as of its rivals. These tasks are the achievement on the one hand of victory over the world, and on the other of union with God. There are, in fact, three terms that it is the endeavour of religion to bring into their right relations to each other—the individual soul, the world, and God. When these are truly harmonized, religion has accomplished its task; it has shown the way to victory over the world and to union with God. In the likeness and the unlikeness of the solutions that Hinduism and Christianity offer for these two problems, we can observe where the two faiths approach nearest to each other, and where also they are widely at variance.

The ancient Indian sage sought for victory over the world and the world's entanglements; the Jewish saint for deliverance from sin. Perhaps at the very time when the one from among his sheepfolds was praying, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,' the other in his desert solitude was crying no less passionately into the darkness, 'From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to immortality.' The petition in each case issues from a sense, no less profound and real in the Aryan than in the Jew, of man's helplessness and desolation if he cannot obtain deliverance from the enslavement of life, and if, to that end, he cannot win the help of one whom we call God. The shapes of their thoughts, the fashions in which they frame to themselves the universe of their discourse, may differ; the thoughts themselves are alike in substance and fibre, and the aim and purpose of their aspirations do not differ. The way in which the Semite looked at the world seems far apart from the way of the Indian *rishi*. Both seek reality, believing that there they will find liberation from a bondage of which both are aware, but to the one the bond that binds, the poison that corrupts, is sin, a will hostile to God and goodness, while the other cuts the knot of his enslavement at a stroke by denying that the world is real at all. It is a wrong vision, he says, not a rebellious will, that has led the soul astray. That is an old antithesis, and it is not necessary to discuss which of the two points of view pierces deepest into the heart of things. Perhaps we confuse the issue when we set them in antagonism and suggest that the affirmation of each involves a denial of the other. What we have to consider here is not the seriousness of their divergence, but the possibility of their reconciliation. Of the profound and tragic truth of the Jewish testimony to man's alienation in will from God and goodness, the whole history of the human race is a demonstration. We cannot explain away sin. But when Christ came and took over from the Jewish prophets the task of setting men free from this yoke, and when to achieve that end He gave Himself to the Cross, He was not only bringing to men a message of the Divine forgiveness that wins the will of man to God, but also a message of illumination for their souls that brings victory over a world of unreality and sets them free from its bondage. For Christ proclaimed not only the forgiveness of sins, but the Kingdom of God, a new and eternal order with God at its centre, which only a distorted vision fails to perceive as present with us even now.

There is a wide enough difference between Jesus' message, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand,' and the cryptic utterance of the Upanishad sage, 'Thou art that.' And yet if this saying can be understood, not as the formula of a monism within which a moral being cannot live and breathe, but as the affirmation of the ultimate identity of the transcendent, unconditioned Spirit of God, and the immanent spirit that dwells within the universe of things and in the heart of man, then a way to reconcile them may yet be found. Christianity can make no terms with a monistic pantheism; there

must be room in its universe for the spirit of man to live and love, and there must therefore be 'otherness.' But if the central doctrine of Upanishad theology can be so understood as to be compatible with theistic worship and with the moral life, then we can welcome such an exegesis of the text. Professor Radhakrishnan explains the phrase as declaring the existence of 'one central reality, pervading and embracing all,' and he appeals for confirmation of its truth to 'religious mysticism and deep piety.'[1] If it be no more than that then it may be possible to bring this ancient word of Vedic intuition into harmony with the revelation of Christ, and to hear the Upanishad sage saying, 'The Word was God,' and even reaching forward towards that which follows after, 'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.'

It may be that an advance can be made in this direction; it may be that such an advance is even now being made. Professor Radhakrishnan claims, indeed, that there is room for otherness and for ethical values in the monism of the Upanishads, and we wish him every success in making this plain and filling the ethical desert of Advaita with the blossoms and the beauty of a land where love and fellowship are eternal. But to not a few of the saints of India it has appeared that in 'proud Vedant,' as one of them describes the monistic teaching, the heart that desires God can find no content. In 'the Brahmavidyā,' as one of them says, 'which rooteth out all idea of duality,' 'the bliss of affection vanishes away.' But however this may be, there remains, in spite of modern readjustments of the ancient doctrine, what is, perhaps, the most fatal barrier to any real rapprochement—the fact that the Indian system is essentially a philosophy rather than a religion. Professor Radhakrishnan speaks of 'the Hindu faith,' but the word does not fit what Upanishad Hinduism in any of its interpretations gives us. Its aim is to explain the universe and man's place in it—not to provide a way of life for him within that universe. Christianity always resisted stubbornly the attempt to transform itself into a philosophic system. Had Gnosticism prevailed in the early centuries, had the Greek mind conquered more than it has conquered within Christianity, the power to win and hold men's hearts and mould their lives would have passed out of their religion, even as Hope from the jar of Pandora, and left man desolate. And yet, while this is so, and while it is here that the ethos of the Higher Hinduism differs most widely from that of Christianity, yet at the same time it may be that Indian philosophy can do again what Greek philosophy sought so long ago to do, enlarging the Christian outlook beyond its narrow Jewish bounds, teaching it that ignorance, *avidyā*, can blind the eyes of the soul as well as sin.

The Indian sage—in a fashion that the Christian to-day has perhaps to relearn from Christ—placed every achievement of reality in the hands of God. We cannot give the name of faith to the process by which, according to him, we come to perceive the eternal order and pass by that vision beyond the power of *saṁsara*, the unreal world that is made up of our doings and strivings and ambitions—we cannot call that process faith, and yet it is an element in that faith which Christ tells us is the victory that overcometh the world. Perhaps the emphasis that the Indian thinker places upon the soul's insight may remind the Christian that it is not his efforts that achieve the eternal order, for that order is God's, and it is God's gift when it comes to man. We have to bring ourselves into right relation to this order, and, when we do so, suddenly we perceive it and it is here.

> Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,
> And all is clear from east to west.

But it is not Nature we have to get into tune with, but God's timeless world, where there is neither east nor west. The Hindu preaches passivity and quietism in the face of a world of illusion. It is impossible for the Christian to accept such an attitude of despair, for his is a religion in which faith and not merely vision is central, the will and not merely the mind. But at the same time the Christian may learn anew from Indian thought what Christ was so fully aware of, that the eternal order is the reign of God and that it is 'at hand.' Not man's 'fussy surface energies' can bring it, but only man's acceptance of it as already there, when he lays his will upon God's altar. 'Doing,' the Hindu says, binds us. Perhaps we may learn from him that 'doing'—even, it may be, doing good—sometimes blinds us. There is a surface agreement between *karma* teaching and Methodist theology, and perhaps the agreement goes deeper than the surface:

> Doing is a dreadful thing;
> Doing ends in death.
> Cast your deadly doing down.

[1] *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, 46.

It is God who is the Doer. It may be that Hinduism, while it must not teach us passivity, will teach us how to come to God in a 'wise passiveness.'

The way to victory over the world, and to that 'liberation' (*mokṣa*) which is entrance into the Kingdom of God, is faith in God and self-surrender. These are elements, too, in the Hindu path to release, but each element—God and faith and self-surrender—is a far more shadowy and abstract thing here than it is there; and they lead to a shadowy goal. God (Brahman) is a wraith, and faith is something that has no relation to the heart and will, and the self evaporates in mist and nothingness, constrained by no love, won by no ideal good. These elements have to be enriched. Substance—a richer moral meaning—must be given to them, so that they may not only illuminate the mind, but lay hold upon the heart and will. It is the child heart, says Jesus, that sees and enters into the Kingdom—a heart unloosed from the world's entanglements and from the love of evil. Perhaps to the Hindu the practice of Yoga is thought of as a means to the obtaining of that childlike and disentangled heart, for it is believed to cleanse the distorting mirror of the mind and so to enable it to reflect truth. But, again, how far this is from the moral simplicity and truthfulness of the way of Christ. Thus throughout it is by the moralization of the Indian teaching, the loosening of its *karma* bonds, the bringing of it from the abstract heights down to the level of our human needs, and the bringing of God near to us as the One whom Jesus could call Father—it is by these ways of reconciliation that the Vedantist and the Christian can meet and can one day, we trust, rejoice together in the experience of a world overcome.

These reflections suggest some paths of approach to Christianity by intellectual Hinduism. There are, however, other aspects of that religion which are also powerful and important, and which have points of approximation to the Christian faith. The task of obtaining the victory over a hostile and deceiving world is a great religious task to which the Hindu, as well as the Christian, has directed the powers of his spirit, and has done so with extraordinary insight and resolution. There is at least one other great task as well which both religions seek to accomplish—the bringing together of man and God. Here the kinship of the two faiths appears closer than in the other case, and along much of their journey those in both religions who are seeking this fellowship travel by the same road and utter as they go the same cries of the heart. But here, as before, the differentia of the Christian way to God as over against that of the Hindu saints consists in its ethical nobility and beauty, in the fact, in a word, that it has Christ Jesus and the God whom He reveals as its guide and as its goal. But while in our discussion of Vedantic Hinduism we found that what was needed was the ethicizing of speculations and philosophizings, here, on the other hand, what is urgently demanded of Hinduism by Christianity is the cleansing and sanctifying of the fervour of its desire.

Of the intensity of that fervour there is no question. In all ages of the history of Hinduism the cry to the distant God to draw near and make Himself known has rung out from every region of the land. Such symbols as those of the dusty, wayworn traveller, the voyager across the dark sea of life, the blind man tapping along the road with his stick, the child that has lost his mother, the wild swan winging its way home across the hills and plains—these and a hundred other pictures, full of deep human feeling, testify in every language of India to the sense of man's homelessness and to the instinct that his home is God. The passion and the longing are deep and intense, but their depth and intensity constitute, if they are uncontrolled, a very serious moral danger. It is not necessary that I should elaborate this point or that I should illustrate it. The peril of an uncontrolled emotionalism is manifest in the history of Christianity; it is immensely more manifest in the history of Hinduism. This is so much the case that a learned student of Hinduism, to whom reference has already been made, Babu Govinda Das, apparently considers the results from *bhakti*, which is the name given in India to the endeavour to reach God by love and faith, to be inevitably disastrous. The body, he says, 'is suddenly deprived of its guiding star'; it 'wanders into the jungle of passions.' 'Headlong, unguided *bhakti* makes for horrible degeneracy.'[1] But if it is not unguided, if it has a 'guiding star,' if it possesses at its centre a personality as lofty, as fitted not only to constrain the heart, but to convince and illuminate the reason, as is that of Jesus Christ, then there is no such danger. No one can be moved by too passionate a love for ideal beauty and ideal goodness, and these are the

[1] *Hinduism*, 171 f.

garments in which Jesus Christ seems to us Christians to be arrayed. 'Love, and do as you please,' the Christian Father said. It is a dangerous precept unless it be the case that love here means love set upon Christ. There is nothing in aim and attitude that is amiss with the *bhakti* aspect of Hindu religion; it is the expression in a race, deeply skilled in the heart and the heart's needs, of the universal longing, the quest of the home desideriorum. All that it requires is to have its longings directed by and towards Christ Jesus, one who not only wins man's love but satisfies his deepest reason. He is the one who alone, when such passions are abroad, can 'ride in the whirlwind and command the storm,' and who can bring the pilgrim of eternity into port to God.

Thus here, as in the case of the search for a way to victory over the world, it is the ethical power and enrichment that proceed from Christ which differentiate the Christian from the Hindu system. Every other difference is insignificant compared with this. If the Hindu system will open its gates to Him who is the truth, then release from bondage and the victory that India so long has sought can come to her, and God's reign will begin. If the Hindu heart likewise will open its gates to Him who is the way to the Father, then this age-long traveller will find his Inn, this lost child his Mother's breast. Christianity is the religion of Jesus. When He finds His way to the centre of any system, then that system becomes His. He is able to subdue it to Himself and to cast out the defilers of His temple. The religion of which He is the centre will be, not speculation or dream, but a truth to live by. The God to whom He leads those who trust Him will be a God whom the heart can love, to whom the will can give complete obedience, whom the reason and the conscience can recognize as the Source of the knowledge of the truth. If Hinduism will let Christ enter within its ancient walls, then it will be found that He is no stranger, but one who has sojourned there before and who will find within it those who will recognize His Lordship and set Him upon its throne.

Recent Foreign Theology.

German Theology.

THE Deuteronomic question is again very much alive. Hölscher, emphasizing Deuteronomy's 'impracticable idealism,' assigns it to the post-exilic period, somewhere about 500 B.C.; and now comes Professor W. Staerk,[1] who, following in the wake of Oestreicher's 'Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz,' reaches a conclusion similar to that of Professor Welch in 'The Code of Deuteronomy' (James Clarke), published last year—that the aim of Deuteronomy was not the unity, through centralization, of the Jahweh worship, but its purification; or, as it is more epigrammatically expressed in the German, not the *Einheit* but the *Reinheit*. Deuteronomy frankly recognizes the legitimacy of the many sanctuaries throughout the land, but works, through legislation, for the purity of their worship and for the elimination from it of features distasteful to Jahwism. Dt $12^{13f.}$ is not an advance upon, but essentially identical with, Ex 20^{24}, and that Dt 12^{14} does not necessarily involve centralization is held to be proved by the use of the similar phrase in $23^{16f.}$, where, it is maintained, this idea is excluded. If the argument of Oestreicher and Staerk were correct, it would, as they claim, demand an entire revision of the whole Old Testament problem, to which the date of Deuteronomy is pivotal. But in two able articles in the last number of the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*,[2] Gressman, writing on 'Josia und das Deuteronomium,' and König, dealing with the linguistic and historical points raised by Ex 20^{24} and Dt $12^{13f.}$, have argued powerfully in favour of the current critical view of the date of the publication of Deuteronomy and of its intimate relation to the reform of Josiah, as against Hölscher on the one hand and Oestreicher on the other. This number of *Z.A.W.* contains, further, an important article by Schmidt on 'The Marriage of Hosea,' and a skilful plea by Gressman for the pre-exilic origin of much in the Book of Proverbs—a plea which involves an instructive comparison of Proverbs with the recently discovered Egyptian 'Teaching of

[1] *Das Problem des Deuteronomiums* (Bertelsmann, Gütersloh; M.2).

[2] *Z.A.W.* (Töpelmann, Giessen, 1924, Heft 3–4).