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# The Christian Approach to the Hindu through Literature: Problems of Terminology

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The subject of our Seminar, the Christian Approach to the Hindu, limits our discussion almost entirely to terminology derived from the Sanskrit language. This is obviously true of those languages which bear a direct relation to Sanskrit, such as Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi. It is true also for the most part of the Dravidian languages. Most of the religious terminology of these languages has been borrowed from Sanskrit. The one outstanding exception to this is Tamil, where two streams, Sanskrit and Tamil, have both supplied valuable terminology. Between the two there has been a measure of competition, which has become heightened in recent years. At the moment Sanskrit terminology seems to have fallen into disfavour among writers, but it still has deep roots in the thought and usage of the people. The various aboriginal languages and dialects of India can scarcely be considered a case apart. In so far as those who speak these languages may be classed as Hindus they have already adopted religious terminology from the Sanskrit background. As a medium of religious expression, Urdu stands apart. Most of its terminology is derived from Arabic and Persian. Little of this is used by Hindus in the expression of their religious faith. What is used, e.g. in Hindi and Gujarati, is more a part of everyday language than technical religious terminology. The discussion which follows will be limited to terminology which derives from Sanskrit.

In principle is it right for the Christian to use terms which have become saturated with non-Christian associations? This is not a new question in the history of the Church. It was one of the foremost questions during the earlier centuries of our era, when the Gospel moved out into the world of Hellenistic culture. Some Christians objected to the use of terms which had a past history in Greek philosophy or religion. Their contention, which they thought final, was 'We don't find it in the Bible'. Others maintained that for the propagation and defence of the Christian

faith it was necessary to take up terms from the thought-environment of their time. Perhaps the final word on this was said by Origen. In a letter to his former pupil, Gregory, he urges him to study Greek philosophy that he may use it in the service of the Gospel. In support of his plea, he uses as a parable the incident in which the Israelites before their flight from Egypt were directed to borrow articles of silver and gold from their neighbours. 'Thus', he writes, 'they are to spoil the Egyptians, and to obtain materials for making the things they are told to provide in connection with the worship of God. For out of the things of which the Children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians the furniture of the Holy of Holies was made'. Thought is closely related to language. May we not apply Origen's principle to the use of language in our situation? Perhaps one thing further might be said, which Origen did not say, namely that the things borrowed from the Egyptians had to be melted down and recast before they could be of use in the service of the Tabernacle.

In the matter of terminology Origen knew what he was about. He himself borrowed and sometimes recast terms from Greek philosophy. Although some persons later called him a heretic, he nevertheless supplied the key terms in which the orthodox discussed and defined their faith over a period of more than two centuries. These terms have come down to us in the creeds of the Church.

May we adopt the position here that there are no formal limits set to the terminology which we may legitimately use? Anything which may either directly or by adaptation contribute to the service of the Gospel may be claimed for Christ. The only question is the practical one of serviceability or adaptability.

In dealing with the question of terminology which is available for our use in India, I should like first to make some general observations concerning opportunities, difficulties, and possible dangers which may present themselves. Then I propose going on and examining briefly two concrete examples of the use of terminology in recent Christian writing in India.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

India has an amazing richness of religious vocabulary. This may make possible a flexibility and precision of expression that is quite impossible in other languages, in English for instance. Take the English word 'love', a word at the very heart of the Gospel. Sometimes the complaint is heard that in English usage (where it is used for everything from loving ice-cream to loving God) it has become sentimentalized and degraded to such a degree that it may be difficult for people to understand what it really means in the Christian Gospel. Against this one word in English, the languages of India offer us an amazing variety from which to choose: *chaha*, *lagana*, *raga*; *lobha*, *asakti*; *shraddha*, *bhakti*;

*prema, priti, sneha, vatsalya ; kama, pranaya*. From all of these a choice may be made which will suit almost any context precisely. Similarly, when it comes to a discussion of union with God we have the following terms ready for use: *yoga (viyoga), sanyoga, sahayoga, karmayoga, bhaktiyoga, jnanayoga*—and some Christians would add *premayoga*. Also for any discussion of the state of final union with God we have at hand the terms *salokya, samipya, sarupya, sayujya*. These are but examples of what is true in many areas of thought. This richness of resources opens up fascinating and encouraging possibilities.

Some terms which India has to offer have an inclusive richness of connotation which may offer special opportunities in the service of the Gospel. Perhaps *dharma* is such a word, with its meanings of (a) inherent nature, (b) conduct which arises spontaneously from that nature, (c) conduct which *should* belong to that nature, (d) religion. In English we often have difficulty with the terms righteousness, justice, justification, in their Biblical meaning. One source of this difficulty is that we have two word-groups in English where there was only one originally in Greek. Can *dharma* and its derivatives perform the entire task for us in India? The possibility is attractive. Furthermore, this is not just an isolated case. Mention has already been made of the definitive use of terminology in the early Church. As one studies that usage, it is often possible to translate the Greek terms of the early Church more accurately into our Indian languages than into English. The English terms 'word' and 'substance', for instance, are poor substitutes indeed for the originals used by the early Church. India has much better than these to offer.

#### DIFFICULTIES

There are certain areas of thought in which it is difficult indeed to find suitable terms in India. One of these is the area of personality, whether in man or in God. The usage in our Indian languages tends to waver between *vyaktitva* and *purushatva* (or *paurushya*). The first of these makes no distinction between personality and individuality; the second sometimes tends to shade off into the meaning of mere 'masculinity'. The second would seem to be clearly preferable when speaking of God as personal. The long usage in a religious context of *purusha, purushottama, paramapurusha, mulapurusha* gives a content which should be definitely helpful here.

A second area of difficulty is in terms that deal with history. It is difficult to find any term for history which means anything more than just 'story'. To express anything of the nature of *Heilsgeschichte*, the unfolding in time of a supreme controlling purpose, is difficult indeed.

A further area of difficulty is that of the relation of God to the created world. Have we in our Indian languages any means of

describing any firm relation between the two? Much has been achieved by Sri Aurobindo in his reinterpretation of *Brahman* and *Maya*, but this is still a long way from the *Logos* of the early Church Fathers. India desperately needs such an idea of *Logos*, of a dependable relation between God and his world which is in keeping with His supreme revelation of Himself in Christ. Among other things it is needed if political and social action are to have any deep roots.

#### POSSIBLE DANGERS

When we adopt terminology that has been used before by Hindus to express their religious faith, are we betraying the Gospel to their understanding of God, man, and the world? This is by no means a necessary consequence. For one thing, most Hindus today live in a kind of penumbra of religious and philosophical thinking rather than in any clear stream of that thought. Further, when we use such terminology we can make clear the sense in which we are using it. This may often be brought out by the context rather than by giving formal definitions. Often in our writing we shall wish to use the Bible as a constant basis of reference. This also will help to make clear the sense in which we use our terms.

Perhaps the chief danger against which we need to be on our guard is that of any tendency to 'philosophize' the Gospel. Indian terminology could lend itself very readily to this. Our message is concerned with a Person and with certain definite acts in history that are connected with that Person. For the Hindu, too often the personal and historical is at best only an illustration of a timeless truth which is above and beyond it. As P. Chenchiah wrote many years ago in the *National Christian Council Review*, 'When we press on the attention of the Hindu Jesus of Nazareth, he is always looking through and behind Him for the idea of which He is the embodiment.' This is a very real danger, but it will remain a danger whatever language or whatever terminology we use. We shall probably deal with it more effectively if we use terminology with which the Hindu already has some acquaintance and if we wrestle in those terms with the issue involved.

We may turn now to a consideration of the two concrete examples mentioned earlier. These are small books, both published recently, both written by Christians, and both widely read by Hindus. The first of these is in Hindi. It is entitled *Gita aur Baibal*, and is written by Mr. James Dayal Christiananda. The second is in Gujarati. The title is *Prema Tattva Darshana*, and the author Professor Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai.

#### *Gita aur Baibal*

In his introduction the author states that our present religious and political situation requires that we understand one another's

religious beliefs. It is commonly assumed that all religious beliefs are basically the same. Are they? This can be determined only by an examination of their actual teachings. Here an attempt is made to view side by side some of the basic statements of the Bible and the Gita. No attempt is made to compare the two religions or to force the ideas of the one into the thought-forms of the other. The purpose is mutual understanding, not apologetic. The author continues his introduction by giving a brief résumé of some of the teachings of each scripture. In the body of the book he cites in parallel columns representative passages from the two books, arranged under such heads as God, Man, God's Self-Revelation, Salvation, etc. In some cases each section is prefaced by a brief introductory statement.

The author's use of terminology in his exposition of Christian belief is found in his introduction to the book and in the prefatory notes to the sections. The following may be noted :

God is personal (*purushagata*). He is Absolute Being (*paramatattva*). As Creator He is *jagat ka karta*, also *srishti ka mula karana*. His relation to His creation is characterized by eternal self-giving (*sanatana yajna*).

Man is *jivatma*. His inner self is *antahkarana*. He has a dual nature (*para prakriti, apara prakriti*). His mental faculty (*buddhi*) operates between these two natures. His nature (*prakritika svabhava*) is characterized by the three qualities, *sattvika, rajasika, and tamasika*. His spiritual understanding is *sattvika buddhi*. His present existence is one clouded by sin (*paparupi andhakara-varana*). He seeks restoration to his proper state (*punahpratishthapana*). Such a seeker after salvation is called *jijnasu*.

God's supreme revelation of Himself is by His Word, which is defined as *gunatmaka purushagata paramatattva* and also as *jagat ka mula karana*. By His coming into the world (*avatara*) he becomes *jagataraka*. God's revelation of Himself is given also in the Bible, of which the Old Testament may be called *purva mimansa* or *karma kanda* and the New Testament *uttara mimansa* or *jnana kanda*.

Salvation is called *ishvara-milana* and *moksha-prapti*. The essence of this is *atmasakshatkara*, which is described as both *sarupya* and *salokya*. The means (*yoga-sadhana*) to this is the sacrifice (*krusa-yajna*) of Christ. This is described as a specific manifestation of the *sanatana yajna* of God. In another context grace is described as *moksha ka upakaran*. The appropriation of salvation is through *shraddha* and *ananyasharana-bhakti*. Faith (*vishvasa*) is described as *jnana ka sadhana* and *tyagi jivana ka adhara*. The basic relation of God and man, as described in the Bible, is called *dvaitavada*. The Atonement changes this into *yajnadvaita*.

This glance at the author's usage would suggest that he has been rather ambitious in his adoption of Hindu technical terminology. Unfortunately many of the terms which he has adopted

are used very loosely. Such lack of accuracy would probably put off a genuine Hindu scholar.

Is he successful from a Christian point of view? This may be doubted. The terms he has used are not woven into any firm texture of Christian exposition. Often the precise Christian meaning he intends is not clear.

Many Hindus apparently read and appreciate the book. How do they understand it? One may suspect that they understand it mainly in terms of ideas that they have brought with them to its reading. Such reading might lead to a sentimental appreciation of the Gospel; it is doubtful whether it would in many cases lead to real understanding and confrontation.

### *Prema Tattva Darshana*

This is quite a brief essay. The author begins the development of his thesis as follows:

Search for truth (*satya*) is the greatest object of life. Real search for truth is search for God. God has been described as *sat-chit-ananda*. Above all these, however, God is love (*premasvarupa*, *premamaya*, *prema*). His very nature (*svarupa*, *svabhava*, *prakriti*) is love.

This is important for the knowledge of God. Man's intellect leads him only to uncertainty here. On the basis of intellect alone, all that man can say is *neti, neti*. But because God is love He may be known with certainty in direct experience (*anubhava*). By such direct experience we know Him indeed as *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda*—but all this enfolded in His comprehending love.

God's love is the key also to understanding the mystery of creation. This is not explained by philosophy, which reaches only to an understanding of it as ignorance (*ajnana*), illusion (*bhramanti*), or sport (*lila-krira*). Creation is an extension of the Divine Being (*Paramprema Parabrahma*). It is not a declination (*patana*) from some pure state. As an extension of God's love it is good and pure.

God's love is pervasive (*sarvavyapaka*) through all creation. Hence we are not just God's making (*sarjana*), but His sons. His love is the bond (*sanyojana*, *yoga*) which unites us to Him.

This relation (*yoga*) has become a broken relation (*viyoga*), through man's perverted will and wrong action. Hence evil (*anishta*) in the world, and the resultant disorder (*vikshepa*). Salvation (*moksha*) is restoration of the love-union (*premayoga*) with God.

God's love for all men is the basis of right social relations (*bandhutva*). Right social relations are required also for our relation with God. There is a full cycle of love (*premachakra*) which embraces all divine and human relations. By wrong ethical relations this is destroyed (*bhanga*); by right social relations it is completed (*purna*).

Action (*kriya, karma*) and its result are inseparably joined (*samyukta*). The result accrues, however, not just to the doer but to all those about him. God also is not apart or neutral (*tatastha*) in all this. He has joined Himself to us by the bond of love (*prema-bandhana*). All that we do affects Him, and what He does affects us.

God's love is not just a proposition of philosophy (*tattva-jnana*). It has taken active form (*karyarupa*) in history. He has come down (*utari ave*) to take part in this world. This is the incarnation of love (*prema-avatarana*). God does not so come down for any slight cause. His coming was for nothing less than the freeing of men from the bondage of their deeds (*karma na bandhana*) and re-establishing them in the union of love (*premayoga*) with Himself.

No great result is ever achieved without labour and suffering (*kashta*). This is true in relations between men. Especially where evil has come in, suffering is inevitable for its atonement (*prayaschita*). God's greatest of all actions for men was accompanied by the greatest suffering, the supreme self-sacrifice (*balidana*). Because of the bond of love which God has created between Himself and men, this was an efficacious act (*phalaprada punyakarma*) on behalf of all men. Its result is the annulling of the consequences of men's corrupt deeds (*dushkarma-phala-nivarana*).

This much of the author's thesis should be enough to show his method in the use of terminology. The following points may be noted:

Most of the key terms used are not specifically technical terms of philosophy or theology. They lie rather on the borderline between technical usage and everyday language. Certainly they have religious tones and awaken religious echoes, but at the same time they are not altogether removed from the common experience of men. These terms he weaves into a texture of thought that is clearly Christian, and he sometimes bends their usage a little to bring out the specific point in the Christian message that he wishes to make.

Where the author introduces specifically technical terms he does so only after careful preparation, so that the reader may perceive the exact sense in which he wishes them to be understood. Then, when he does bring them in, they are apt and forceful. For instance, he points out at the beginning that the supreme Reality is God, and that God's very constitution or nature is love. Then, dramatically and effectively, he sums up and clinches his point by referring boldly to God as *Paramaprema Parabrahma*. Again, he uses a specifically technical term when he refers to the law of action (*karma*). But he shows very clearly how such action is to be understood when he points out that the results of actions can never be understood in individualistic terms, but only in a social nexus. Here he penetrates to the basic weakness of the traditional



understanding of *karma*, and at the same time prepares the way for his next point—how God's supreme act in Christ can be efficacious for us.

From beginning to end all of the terms used are woven into the firm texture of a clear thesis which is unmistakably Christian.

The method of using terminology which is exemplified in this second book is one that may be heartily commended.

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