

Convictions of an Indian Disciple

R. C. DAS

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3. *God's Redemptive Acts & Creative Dealings through One who Found Life* Pp. 30, published by R. C. Das.

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— M. M. T.

Convictions of an Indian Disciple

R. C. DAS

Sevak-Pramukh and Acharya Khristpanthi Ashram, Varanasi

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CONVICTIONS OF AN INDIAN DISCIPLE

CHAPTER I

THE UNIQUE CHRIST

Introduction

To the Christian it is a dogma — something given — a truth and doctrine believed and proclaimed. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." St. John 1:18. "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one cometh unto the Father but by me". So claimed Christ himself. John 14:6.

"God . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son". Heb. 1:1-2.

"Christ . . . far above all rule, and authority, and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come". Eph. 1:20-21. "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name. . . . The Father" Phil. 2:9-11.

"And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved". Acts. 4:12.

There are other passages in which the idea of 'only', 'none other', 'unique' is suggested. A study of the New Testament leaves on the mind the clear impression that this idea of the only Lord, the only Saviour, the final and full revelation went deeply into the make-up of the Apostles' faith and contributed not a little to the phenomenal success of the preaching of the Gospel by the early Church.

They wholeheartedly believed in it and acted upon their experience of the wonderful Saviour. It must not be confused with dogmatism or fanaticism or unreasoning zeal. It was the impact of the supreme fact of Christ — a truth that was revealed to their heart and mind and which they could not resist. It was not a mere after-thought or side-reflection but this uniqueness or finality was of the essence of their understanding of the Person of Christ. "The name that is above every other name" was not just a piece of rhetoric. The name was the Person in their direct and immediate personal and collective experience. It was not an appendage to their faith but belonged to the essence of the personality of Jesus Christ and so of their faith and experience of him. That is why and how they were kept by the Name; the sick were healed and devils were cast out by the Name, and by the Name they were baptised and integrated into the Body of Christ; through the Name was given the Holy Ghost to them and through the power of the Name they proclaimed Christ crucified and risen; and the Name went into the very structure of the Apostolic and Catholic Church because the Name was a divine persona! power and not a mere proper name. As the experience the fruit of faith in the Name was unique, so Jesus Christ was declared unique.

It is not just an intellectual notion, a logical conclusion, a formal and professional statement nor an evangelistic slogan. Even when we could not deduce it rationally it would be there in the texture of our faith. Christian faith is not a mere synthesis of some ideas and beliefs. It is the result of the meeting of the soul face to face with God in Christ. So the uniqueness, or the fullness or the finality or supremacy is inherent in Christ in his person." It is not a mere doctrine deducible from his teachings. It is part of a

whole spiritual experience of a whole Divine Fact by an integrated compact collective Body of believers.

But the way and the form in which this truth of the uniqueness of Christianity has been preached or stated has made it appear controversial to many minds both Christian and non-Christian. The Christian may not altogether avoid the controversy but if he is to grow in his spiritual life, convince others and live in peace with them, he cannot leave the matter on the level of controversy but must lift it higher to the plane of realisation. If it is made a subject merely of rational comparison, appraisal and evaluation and not understood as a truth, felt and lived, there will be perpetual warfare between religions, wrangling among intellectuals and bitterness among common folk.

Religions of Semitic origin such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam have claimed and proclaimed that theirs is the only true and final revelation whereas many among Hindus also have with equal force of conviction pronounced that all major religions are true and of equal value to those who follow them. The implied conclusion from the latter position is that there need be no conversion (rather proselytism) and external transfer from one religion to another. This indicates a serious disagreement which must be faced, understood and evaluated. The Semitic mind is logical, moral and discursive while the Aryan mind is mystical, spiritual and synthetic. The Semitic mind has a keen sense of history which Christians and Moslems have imbibed and inherited in a greater or smaller degree, whereas the Aryan (mostly the Hindu) has loved to live in eternity and leave time and space as a secondary affair. In judging the different religious view points and the claim to uniqueness we have to bear in mind this factor in the psychology of the two groups of religions.

The claim of a religion to supremacy in truth and value cannot be accepted simply on scriptural authority, on grounds of personal experience or on collective testimony alone. If and when all these evidences coalesce and converge and also induce our rational faculties, we must pause and consider. Is this true of Christianity? The question deserves investigation. Many Christians — such as the Protestant reformed ministers, Evangelical groups, Pentecostals, and the average missionary to a foreign country — have simply proclaimed the uniqueness, not so much of Christ and the Gospel, but of Christianity as a religion.

On the other hand, the claim of a religion or some adherents of it, that all religions are essentially the same or are more or less equally true, made without adequate scientific and historical research and simply depending on instinct and intuition or mere wishful thinking stand very little chance of carrying conviction with intelligent students of religious history. Hinduism (esp. the Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophy and Brahmo Samaj) has proclaimed (not shown rationally) this so-called "essential unity of all religions" Cf. Dr. Bhagwandas of Varanasi.

As far as Christianity is concerned, its uniqueness, finality, fullness or supremacy, if true, must be based equally and simultaneously on revelation, both general and special, scriptural and personal, on experience, personal and corporate, on reason and intuition and on cumulative evidence of humanity at large. It must be a truth not only worthy of belief and profession but something which makes possible a better, stronger and fuller life — a conviction far surpassing the demands of pure reason or mere dictates of missionary motive but compelling attention and acceptance by its sweet reasonableness, its all-round dynamic and creative value. In a word, this uniqueness must not only be pro-

claimable but liveable. Can we live by it and show forth its power and grace?

Another very important consideration in regard to this matter is whether by nature this uniqueness is absolute and unrelated as Barth and Kraemer have claimed. This is a pertinent question. Is Christ, the Universal Spirit and the eternal Son of God, even when incarnate, devoid of all meaningful relation with time and place, with history, particularly with other cultures and faiths that have arisen among men and developed their destinies? Is this uniqueness to be conceived as mere "otherness" or utter difference or sheer contradiction and negation so far as other faiths are concerned? Does the power and inescapability of the truth of Christianity leave a sensible choice for men as an alternative? Does this uniqueness preclude all gradation of truth and gradualness of revelation and all preparation for its appearance and acceptance? Does the Truth deny "truths", does the Way block "ways" and does the Life exclude its "forms"? Is the 'One' and the 'Only' a relationless 'Absolute', undifferentiated zero, which nobody can understand? On a right answer to this question depend the happiness and peace of mankind. I submit that the Christ stands inextricably related to a real world process and in a significant historical context. He is no unconnected "One" or "Only". He is not the destructive and negative Lord of all he surveys. He is the positive conservative spiritual and moral force integrating all that is true, beautiful, good and just. He is not unique in the sense of being the solitary tower or occupying the solitary throne without a kingdom. In a sense everything in the world is unique because nothing is exactly similar to, or absolutely identical with, anything else. Rather his uniqueness is genuine supremacy positively outgrowing, surpassing but inclusive, compre-

hensive and synthetic — He is the true Real. He does not deny the past. He fulfils it. Nor does he deny the “other”. He perfects it. He has been in it and through it and will judge and rule over it. He is not isolated from the contemporary and the future either. He has a bigger kingdom than we are wont to allot to Him. He enlightens and directs it all by his criterion and energises it by his spirit. Thus he is the Lord of all — the Way and the Truth and the Life.

We must not confuse or obscure the uniqueness of Christ by over-emphasising historical Christianity. The two must be disentangled for the sake of a clearer vision of the Christ, the Unique whom Hindu India will behold, adore, worship and obey. The followers of the Way of Christ within the Church must prove this uniqueness in their daily life, private and public.

To sum up: The uniqueness of Christianity is not merely in the sense of being entirely “other” or different from all other religions. The uniqueness as I can conceive it on the basis of my personal experience and study is related to a historical and spiritual context and universal tradition on the one hand and on the other stretches out in an ever unfolding vista to the infinite and the eternal far surpassing what has been. So this uniqueness is also supremacy and finality. It provides the norm and standard of all human judgement yet it outgrows the temporal. While different, and defying imagination, it is also inclusive, comprehensive, synthetic — the Real.

After having considered briefly the nature and implication of Christian uniqueness in abstract terms, I shall now consider briefly again, some important aspects of this uniqueness in concrete terms as it is based on Scripture (Word of God) and manifested historically in the Church, the Body of Christ, in its impact upon the life of the world

in general, as also upon personal and group life with Christ as the centre.

The Life, Character and Personality of Christ

Hinduism may claim to have practically all good teachings, moral and spiritual, for man's enlightenment but not one all round, perfect and divinely authoritative Teacher, the Guru. The qualifications of Satguru in Hinduism are perfectly described; but where and who is he? Except Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified and risen?

The Cross, the Resurrection, the Pentecost

These events are central to the Christian Faith and the Church. These three eventful truths and doctrines provide peace, hope and power to the Christian. They have no parallels in Hinduism. The idea of a suffering God is practically alien to it though there are some crude ideas and stories of God suffering and giving himself for man's salvation and peace, such as (1) the Vedic sacrificial system and (2) the great sacrifice of Purusha, Rigveda. X. Xc. 12. They may be regarded as precursors of the true and historical self-immolation of God in Jesus on the Cross.

Effectiveness of Christianity in Personal Life

The Bible, as the Word of God with inherent power, declares unequivocally that man is a sinner, warns and convicts him producing sincere repentance in the heart. At the same time it offers forgiveness and salvation, converts and regenerates a man — Rebirth, Second Birth, New Birth, New Life is the result. This forgiveness is offered and accepted on the assurance of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer, based on the self-giving of God on the Cross.

This salvation which is both moral and spiritual and even physical — whole, total, comprehensive salvation from sin, from the world and the power of the Devil — is a fact in life here and now. It consummates and reaches the climax in a joyous and victorious life in this world full of sin, misery, danger and evil. Christianity is a practical experimental religion.

Earlier Vedic religion acknowledged the sinfulness of man but slowly due to the prevalence of the pantheistic notions, the sense of sin and responsibility became feebler until in some quarters its reality was denied. Hinduism offers release from the bonds of Karma which are mainly physical and cosmic, but Christianity promises salvation from sin, mainly spiritual and moral, which is a reality in personal life and in society. Hence Christianity has a unique appeal to the human heart which longs for the peace of forgiveness and the joy of victory.

The Kingdom of God on Earth

This is the distinctive offer and promise of God for man through the Church — which is the divine instrument to bring about the Rule of God among the nations, states and peoples. "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" declared both Jesus and his forerunner, John.

Man naturally and instinctively hankers after a state of society in which the eternal verities of love and justice shall prevail. He is frustrated by selfishness, hatred, cruelty, misery and war. Statesmen and reformers have talked about, and experimented with, "utopias" without success. Far back in the past Plato wrote his "Republic". In India long ago we experimented with a Ram Rajya. In the modern age the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization are good examples of the failure of the high ideal.

Does one's religion inspire and transform man in the spirit and the heart? If so, then it can spread out to society and governments. A religion that offers a distant and future heaven is not much good except as an opiate for the present life. Man must have a foretaste of heaven here and now. Christ brought the Kingdom of heaven in his own life to the earth and here he exhibited it through his own personal conduct and communicated its spirit and power to his immediate disciples who were gradually transformed into children of God. These constituted the Church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Church has always, against heavy odds, both internal and external, been trying to realise the values of the Kingdom within its religious and secular life. It is the best institution so far evolved among men and gives us an earnest and a practical demonstration, under severe limits, of the Kingdom.

Christ fulfils the spiritual aspirations of all men

He is the Desire of all nations. Nearer at home he fulfils Israel's expectation of the Messiah — He is the Christ of the Jews. He is the Maitreyi of Buddhism, the concrete realisation of its Dhamma. He is the full historical manifestation of the Rita (moral order and cosmic law) of the Vedas, the perfect Incarnation satisfying the fundamental longing of the Vaishnava Hindu as expressed in the Gita. (4:7-8). He is the true Kalki of popular Hinduism satisfying the demands for final justice, and the true Hari who takes away the sin and sorrow of the world. He is the Sat-guru of the ignorant and sinful, the Jeevanmukta of popular idealism, the Perfect man of the Unitarian and the Brahmo, the Purushottam of the Gita, the Purusha or Prajapati of the Rigveda. Thus Christ is the meeting point of the diverse spiritual ideals of mankind. He is the goal to

which all spiritual movements lead — the Gauri Shankar (Mt. Everest) of the Himalayan heights of mankind's spiritual upsurges. In Him all roads and streams of search and pilgrimage for truth, reality, bliss, converge and end, find the Kingdom of God. All others are at best only partial truths and dim manifestations of the ultimate. He sums them up in his unique whole personality.

PRESENTING CHRIST TO THE HINDU

In an article which was published in the *World Dominion, London*, in 1943 I said, "Let us lay hold of great and central Hindu ideas and beliefs, practices and institutions — the very foundation and essence of Hinduism — and definitely build Christian philosophy and life with and from them." "Laying hold" in my mind and for my purpose does not mean "using" "adopting", "believing" or "accepting" for our own sake. It simply means understanding intelligently, and seriously grappling with and grasping and gripping. There is a good deal of careless study and facile understanding of Hinduism which, like little knowledge, is dangerous. What seems "great" to the Hindu mind in the "Hindu ideas and beliefs practices and institutions" are not necessarily so in Christian estimation. We must recognise their greatness and vitality for the Hindu if we are to be effective transmitters of Christian truth. The ideas and institutions I named are formidable, dynamic and real — too great and important for Christians to ignore, belittle or cheaply criticise. It would be unworthy and fatal for Christian thinkers or evangelists to by-pass them. I may kindly be pardoned to make a little personal reference about my conversion. I became a Christian not because I found Hinduism all weak, or false or bad but because I found its strength, its truth and its goodness not strong, true and good *enough* as my soul in utter need demanded. I do not try to kill half-dead Hinduism; my consistent effort has been to confront the strength of Hinduism with the strength of Jesus Christ. Again in my personal experience I have

found that Christ succeeds and wins in the battle. I did not easily or willingly give up Sri Krishna. Christ in his captivating beauty and in his unique moral grandeur and with his superlative truth and distinctive divine personality attacked the citadel of my heart and had the throne. The wrench was real but it has been more than healed by His grace. Again, when I say that we should definitely build Christian philosophy and life "with and from them" (the Hindu ideas and beliefs) it does not mean "with them as the basis or content". The only basis or content of Christianity is Christ himself together with the Word of God in the scriptures. What I mean is that in the light of these great Hindu ideas and practices, Christian thinking and Christian living ought to be so moulded and developed that it may constructively and successfully meet the moral and spiritual needs of Hinduism. Hindus who have so far been content with their own philosophy and way of life will have created in their hearts a divine discontent and will wistfully look into the face of Christ and find in Him not only a happier, but the only permanently happy, abode of peace and truth for their souls. The life and thinking of the Christians must be able to satisfy fully the longings of their hearts partially appeased by these great ideas and truths. In Christian apologetic literature these vital Hindu terms should be analysed and their meanings brought out for use by the Christian evangelist to lead the Hindu further on the pilgrim way. My language emphatically does not mean advocacy of the use or adoption of "incongruous falsities of idolatry, maya, varnashram; etc." The writer of these reflections, even as a Hindu, before his baptism 57 years ago, definitely rejected idolatry, caste, etc. as wrong and unhealthy under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj. For years since his conversion he has been trying under

divine guidance to lead men from dumb idols to the living God and with distinctive success in the case of not less than a hundred individuals of different types who have accepted through baptism the way of Christ. For years he has been moving up and down the long tortuous lanes of Varanasi and around its temples and bathing places in order to wean away men from idolatry and caste in this stronghold of Hinduism and again with success under the grace of God. He will stand for his method as it has proved effective and has been blessed by God.

My approach has been criticised as an attempt to "pander to Hindus". Of all persons I am the last to do so. Neither do I slander them. I believe in intellectual honesty when face to face with the truth wherever found. I cannot hold that God left my forefathers in darkness. But all the broken rays of truth and all the divine suggestions and aspirations of men down the ages in all countries find their converging point and consummation in Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, the complete and final revelation of God, who is much more than a mere sum total of all the good in the past. What I suggest is nothing new in the history of Christianity. The early Greek fathers did similar work. The needs and conditions of India demand the same attitude and method on the part of Christian leaders with much more cogency and justification.

Let us now consider a few specific doctrines, ideas, beliefs, practices and institutions of Hinduism and see how best in the face of these the evangelist could help an enquirer find his Master in Christ.

1. Vision of God and Idolatry

In spite of many gods and goddesses and in spite of endless temples and images installed therein the Hindu

acknowledges and believes that there is a supreme God Who is Spirit. In an early Bengali school textbook of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar the first sentence runs thus: "God is one intelligent and spiritual entity". Instead of trying to cleanse his mind of these other gods it would be helpful to teach him by example the worship of God in spirit and in truth. Prayer along with study and personal fellowship is a potent weapon. The reality of God of an ethical nature brought home to one's mind through constant reference to Christ will slowly grow into a single loyalty. Plural loyalty is not easy to melt away. In Hinduism itself there are criticisms that have done good work. e.g. The Brahmo and Arya Samajas and Theosophy as well as the Upanishads. The Christian need not do this negative work which may appear as biased and unsympathetic. The important point is to fix one's gaze on the *One* behind the many by cultivation of a prayerful spirit and meditation.

Idolatry has sometimes been severely criticised and even condemned by Hinduism itself as a low form of religion. The Vedas did not prescribe images or temples. The ancient Rishis sought and realised the one Brahman -- the Atman. The more modern movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy, Sat Sangh, Nanakpanth, and Kvirpanth have all condemned idolatry. But the real difficulty has been the lack of an effective substitute for idolatry.

Idolatry has sprung from a deep human need. This need is that man cannot for ever remain satisfied with a distant, invisible, inexpressible, unapproachable God.

He cannot permanently accept an agnosticism that declares a Divine Being who is "Abangmanasagocharah" (un-reachable by mind and unspeakable by word). He wants

to know Him more intimately and serve Him more gladly. In the growth of the religious nature of man towards this more perfect life, a false step was taken, a mistake was made, owing to man's original liability to error under *maya* (nescience or ignorance), and so a full-fledged idolatrous system of worship and theology was evolved. Hinduism, like many other non-Christian religions, has suffered from the absence of a clear revelation from God. We cannot despise this need or else the result will be rationalism, which is farther from Christianity than idolatry is. We must be able to win the idolater to the supreme Idol. 'The Word became flesh and we beheld his glory.' John 1:14. 'the express image of the divine person'. Heb. 1:3. Consider the passion of the Hindu pilgrim in going from shrine to shrine to 'see' God and to feel His presence near. God is here and among you, 'look' and be satisfied. You cannot deny all this spiritual longing and condemn it as so much sentimentalism and yet hope to make the Hindu convert a keen Christian overflowing with abundant life and missionary zeal.

Union with God is the supreme thing in higher mystical Hinduism. It is not heaven or even *mukti* that is wanted. A rapturous union between God and man as between the lover and the beloved is the end and the consummation. Or it is an eternal absorption of the human soul into the divine ocean through an intuitive realisation of the unity or identity of the two. Whatever different interpretations of this union there may be, it is a precious heritage in Hinduism, which the Christian must utilize. In music, song, philosophy, Christ must be presented as One in Whom and with Whom the longing of the heart for union is satisfied. It will be the contribution of Christianity not simply in theory but in practice to get this metaphysical

identity of Hinduism reinforced and surcharged with the moral (ethical) union of God (the father) with his children or of Christ, the Master, with his disciples and make this union issue in practical fellowship, service and worship. Hinduism waits for this consummation through Christ.

Incarnations — Avatars: The Hindu, particularly of the Bhakti school of thought (and not the one who follows the Vedic ideas more strictly,) believes that God intervenes whenever there is any disturbance in the moral or social order. "Whenever there is decline of righteousness or rise of unrighteousness I create myself. To save the good and for the destruction of the wicked, I take birth from age to age", so says Shri Krishna as God. (Gita IV. 7-8). Whether Incarnation and Avatar are the same or not, whether there must be only one incarnation or many avatars or whether the incarnation should destroy the wicked are legitimate questions for scholars to debate. But it is futile for the evangelist to argue with the Hindu on such questions. The central and important fact is that the Hindu accepts the need of incarnation and he does not care for any metaphysical difficulty or scientific objection. In its emotional aspects the motive also of avatar is analogous to that of the Christian incarnation — which is that of God's concern for His creatures. The Hindu has no difficulty in accepting Christ as an Incarnation of God's love and a revelation of His nature. As one progresses and deepens in one's knowledge of the character of Jesus Christ one is bound to be drawn to Him. The final choice between Krishna and Christ to a sincere seeker after truth and goodness will be made on the level of the ethical nature of the incarnate one. Is the incarnation a worthy adequate representation of a true, pure, loving God — not simply a

God of power and cosmic glory? The realisation will come as an experience of the moral qualities of the character of Christ. So it is to these and not so much to any metaphysical aspects of Christ's personality that special attention should be drawn.

II. Karma, Sin and Salvation

Christian ideas of Sin and Salvation cannot be grasped by the Hindu in a day with all their depth of Christian meaning. But he has his own ideas about these which though not the same are similar and enough to start with.

Reincarnation or Rebirth is an essential Hindu belief that souls after death adopt bodies or take births unless they have been released through true Jnan and Bhakti. It is so ingrained in him that it is not possible to argue the Hindu out of this position. Some Hindu groups and individuals have attacked the truth or the usefulness of the theory. But the doctrine contains a precious truth in it viz., the continuity of life and karma—As a man soweth so shall he reap. (St. Paul.) There is no doubt that this belief is responsible for much of the fatalism and spiritual indolence in the country. It believes in the possibility of deferred salvation. None need despair. There is hope and opportunity for Moksha sometime, somewhere and somehow. While there is comfort in this belief there is also lack of definiteness and urgency. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. So on the whole the Hindu soul, unless depraved and engrossed, is tired and would respond to a more practical plan of immediate salvation. Christ calls men to the urgency of this life. Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth. Some of His parables emphasise the importance of salvation here and

now. This is not absent in popular Hinduism. The village bard, the Sadhu and the mystic constantly draw men's attention to the preciousness of this life's opportunity and call them to God and need of salvation here and now. Life emancipated by the grace of Jesus Christ will be a standing proof of the reality of salvation and an invitation to make the best use of this life. Though Karma represents the ethical truth teaching personal responsibility, the law of divine love and forgiveness in Christ on the basis of sincere repentance is a higher law superseding the law of Karma and as such it has a tremendous appeal to a despairing but longing heart giving promise of immediate relief. The Gita ideal of "Jivan mukt", the emancipated man here and now, may lead to the realisation of the need for salvation in Christ.

The great idea of **Maya** in Hinduism. Maya is not merely the philosophical theory of illusion or relativity of the Advaita Vedanta. In the Hindu mind and heart, maya is believed and experienced to be "the great power of darkness" the dynamic of all evil thinking and doing. She is believed to be a personal force over which men have little control. She seduces and leads astray, envelops the soul with mist and darkness. In this sense, it is analogous to the Biblical conceptions of the devil and original sin, as it is analogous to *mar* in Buddhism and *Ahriman* in Zenda-vesta.

Bathing in Sacred Waters: Sin is like dirt — removable. Sin is an accident. The idea of physical cleansing and healing has developed into spiritual and moral purification. Through Sadhana or as a gift of divine grace the two ideas go together; separate the two in thought and your sense of purity will be weak. You cannot deny the one without affecting the other. This is so in a normal, natural mind.

When one rises in the scale of spirituality and morality one may ignore the question of external cleanliness. Compare Jesus' dealing with the question of unwashed hands! But certainly the reference is to *ceremonial* washing. We cannot neglect the purity of the body too much to be morally safe. Was 'the washing unto repentance' in the river Jordan essentially different from bathing in the Ganga? Did not John direct his baptized disciples to the Lamb of God (slain once for all) who taketh away the sin of the world? In the Cross of Christ an eternal fountain is made available where the repentant sinner can sink into the crimson flood to wash away his sins. This is the simple, original, Biblical Christianity that has made men anew in all ages. Rationalise it and you lose its power. There is a certain sacramental mystery in all this external bathing that somehow inevitably leads on to the stream of blood 'which cleanseth us from all sin'. Call the millions of men and women who come and bathe in the Ganga superstitious people, and you efface from their minds the belief, naive and crude, in the washing away of sins, and they become unfit to appreciate the vital truth of Christ's sacrificial atonement. A medical practitioner in Varanasi, a friend and an enquirer, was one day found absorbed in meditation standing against a railing in front of the river. Accidentally touched and awakened he at once said in great joy "Mr. Das, I have now understood the deep meaning of the blood flowing from the Cross on which you have been preaching. Just as Mother Ganga in her great mercy carries away all dirt and filth and transforms it, so the blood of Christ destroys our moral and spiritual filth". The lesson is obvious.

Sacrifices. India in the past has striven hard to put a stop to animal and other material sacrifices in and outside

temples, and the fight continues today. But the practices have persisted all along with tenacity; while on the other hand sacrifices automatically dropped out since Calvary within the Christian Church. The real reason is that the supreme truth of the sacrifice and atonement made by Christ on a spiritual plane possessed the heart and mind of men. Without blood is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). Make the Hindu believe that his idea of sacrifice is altogether wrong, and he will not understand the truth of the atonement; rather the death of Christ will be either a stumbling block or foolishness to him. Note the attitude of the Brahmo Samajist towards these deep Christian truths. His mind and heart have been cleansed, by a process of self-reform, from all these ideas of bloody sacrifice or of sin, which he has been taught to regard as so much rubbish. His mind is stiff and hard, and cannot understand how Christ can suffer for us or how His death can have anything to do with our forgiveness or restoration. Anyone who has studied Brahmo religious literature or has contact with orthodox Brahmos, will understand my contention. The Sanatani Hindu on the other hand comes to the Cross with a preparedness and a receptivity which are of inestimable value.

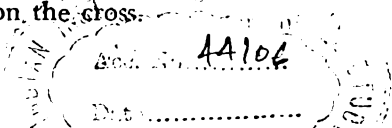
III. The Divine Order

We may mention a few points at which the truth about life in Christ in this world may be woven round Hindu ideas.

Varna, the Divine social order. The Vedic name and prototype for modern caste is Varna. Inside the Hindu social system man enjoys security and fellowship however limited it may be. It has to be demonstrated to the Hindu

that in the Christian Church fellowship can be not only larger in area but real. The Hindu needs the warmth and intimacy of fellowship, otherwise it is next to impossible for him to get out of caste. The fellowship made real around Christ, primarily spiritual but social too in its practical implications, will satisfy and draw him. He has had too much of painful experience of organised unity. A fellowship, of which Christ is the Guru, the Rishi, the living Master and Centre, the Friend, Philosopher and Guide, may attract him. Observances, rites and ceremonies he has had many. He is sick but hungry for spiritual companionship and heart-fellowship.

Ahimsa: The idea of Ahimsa in Hinduism is a dynamic one and can be used by the evangelist for creative purposes. Though in practice among the masses of the people Ahimsa has degenerated into an overemphasis on the virtue of vegetarian diet, non-injury and non-killing, the doctrine has noble ethical and spiritual values. More deeply it means forbearance, non-vengeance, returning good for evil, mental poise, justice, impartiality, patience, quiet and reserve, qualities that specially appeared in the great personalities like Buddha, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna and Gandhi. This provides an ample contact and a broad bridge to Christianity. We ought to turn friends more towards the spiritual implications of Ahimsa and ask them to begin with men and love them first and more than ants and bed-bugs. Then they will gradually see the great love of God for man and the relevancy of our loving our neighbours as ourselves. They will also realise that man's love for his fellows and even for other living beings can remain healthy and in its place only when it is based on, and flows from, Christ's vicarious suffering on the cross.



Orders of Monks: Sanyasis, Vairagis, and Sadhus, Brahmacharis and Jivan Muktas (both men and women) provide another instance of both the strength and weakness of Hindu religious discipline and organisation. In this field there is much in common between Christian and Hindu practices. The practical efficacy and serviceableness of Christian discipline in many groups will have a great appeal for the Hindu mind and heart. That discipline spiritual, moral and practical, is a means to an end, is intended for service of mankind and not an end in itself, will be acceptable to the average modern Hindu. That the example of Christ's life and sacrifice is a perpetual source of dynamic inspiration and is the secret of success of Christian discipleship has to be shown and made available in Christian Ashrams—spiritual homes, groups and 'cells', of the followers of Christ where discipline, simplicity and sacrifice will be the vitalising forces for witness and service. In this regard, the examples of the missionary Brotherhoods (Oxford and Cambridge), the Franciscan and Dominican orders, the celibacy of Roman Catholic Clergy and of the Eastern Church's episcopate have given great impetus to the rise of indigenous Ashrams and Brotherhoods.

IV. Reformed Hinduism

The Bhakti School or Vaishnavism, Kvirpanth, Sat Sang, Brahmo Samaj, Theosophy, Arya Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission and a few other movements represent Hinduism modernised under pressure of the logic of the inner evolution of Aryanism since the Vedas and also under the impact of Christianity (twice in history), of Islam, of Western science, technology and culture generally. In certain respects the Reformist religion is antivedic and in many ways a supersession and an outgrowth

th. But it keeps up a general fundamental unity with the source of Hinduism in the vedic age. Reformed Hinduism is largely and generally syncretistic—all paths lead to the same goal as all rivers join the ocean. Not to speak of the ordinary evangelist—even the expert will find it difficult to meet this position intellectually. To pose against this the exclusive claims of Christ and the uniqueness (as distinct from supremacy) of Christianity except in written and well reasoned apologetics is not only useless but positively harmful to the cause of the Kingdom. The Hindu mind is dominated by the idea of synthesis. Any attempt to sectarianise or sectionalise his mind is to him, violence to the very ideal of Truth. To him the inclusiveness of full truth, realised by comprehension and synthesis, is like a complete and perfect circle. Apprehension of truth is through its comprehension. His mind is metaphysically inclined. It primarily seeks unity, reconciliation, peace and not so much truth in its moral sense. We must distinguish between philosophic or mystic inclusiveness and moral exclusiveness. In Christ we have a true harmony of reconciliation of Truth and Grace (Love, Beauty) and a complete picture of Reality. Jn. 1:14, 17. So again the Hindu mind should be induced to realise the moral grandeur and the ethical beauty of Christ's personality; then at the end of his search through a process of steady attainment he will become conscious of the moral uniqueness of Christ. He cannot start with a hypothesis. Supremacy, uniqueness or exclusiveness must be the result of his Sadhana, the end of his pilgrimage for Truth and God. He cannot accept it as a dogma. The Hindu is anti-dogma but he will submit to experience wherever it may lead him and he will give absolute loyalty to the reached goal.

EXPERIENCE OF A SANATANI CHRISTIAN

Sanatan Dharm is the eternal religion of the Vedas and one who follows it and its derivatives in modern Hinduism is a Sanatani. The Vedas and the Rishis (the Hearers and Seers) are the source of all authoritative and essential Hindu truths. Anything anti-Vedic is not proper Hinduism. Modern Hinduism has a mixture of un-Vedic and non-Vedic religious influences — such as those of Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Dravidianism and Animism. A Sanatani Christian is one who has had a Vedic background and whom the Vedic truths have led to Christ for a deeper realisation.

1. One who holds that the Veda — Vākya, Nada, Shabda — the true knowledge, the Vidya — the Word of God — inspired, infallible, not originated from man, sure reflection of the Divine Truth — is the Sanatani. Such an one finds in Christ the living and full incarnation of the Veda — the Word. He is the eternal Logos — The Aum — the Aunkar Dhvani — the Primeval Sound — the Vidya — the meaningful utterance (the spelling out, the Gospel) of God. He is the Jyoti — the uncreated Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He is the Creator and the source of all life. He is the Nada Brahma or Shabda Brahma made manifest in terms intelligible to ordinary men but full of personal grace and truth as of the only Begotten Son of God. Jn. 1:1-14.

2. The Hindu to whom the Veda is the very Word of God possessing illumination and potency finds this belief a natural bridge over to the Word of God in the Bible. A Hindu who has been influenced by the Brahmo and Arya

Samajist ideologies or scientific and rationalistic thinking will not have the same reverence for the Word. The Sanatani Christian can be neither a fundamentalist nor a liberal, but through the harmonising power of his inheritance he holds a happy synthesis of the two positions.

3. For the acceptance of the Incarnation of God in Jesus the Sanatani is prepared slowly and gradually. The idea of the Brahma — the Birat Purush (the Great Person) who is manifest (incarnate) in the universe is the foundational idea. Brahma as *chit* (intelligence, reason, thought) is communicative and as *anandam* (bliss) he is explosive. This is later on developed in the Gita Ch. 4:7-8. Here the function of the Avatar is truly stated to be re-establishment of righteousness and justice. But it is temporary and its scope is limited (Yugavatar). The Sanatani Hindu impelled by the universal and creative ideas of Chit and Anandam and transcending the limitations of the Avatar finds in Christ the Incarnation of God — the true and full identification of God and man and the continuing mission of Christ by his incarnation in his Body — the Church — effecting salvation and reconciliation till the End.

4. The great truth of Varnashram. This is the natural division of Society into four classes. Varnashram is divinely ordained. The Great Purusha made the great sacrifice and divided himself into the four Varnas. This was perverted into the caste system in later years. The important thing to note is that it was an act of God that made the division. Farquhar rightly calls it the Divine Social Order. It is not just a human device for the division of labour as some modern Hindus are inclined to interpret it. But Varna is the very Body of Brahma (Rigveda X. XC. 12). In the Gita Sri Krishna claims to have created the four Varnas according to the principles of Guna and Karma (Gita IV : 13).

This is obviously analogous to St. Paul's doctrine of the Church being the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-30, Eph. 4:15-16). For a Sanatani it is a straight pass from Varnashram into the Church, from the Body of Purusha — hazy and hoary — to the Body of Christ — the clear, historical and dynamic Person and his equally impressive Church. While the fellowship of Varnashram came to be limited soon, the Church developed into a wide universal Brotherhood. The divine origin of both Varna and Church, the fellowship in each, is a reality which cannot be ignored. Even in the modern caste, fellowship and security within caste is substantial though local. Within the Church this is widened. So a Sanatani under the inspiration of Varna leaves the Hindu caste which is narrow but finds a bigger society in the Church. And his idea of divine economy and dispensation in the Varna system is fulfilled and satisfied within the Body of Christ — the Fellowship of the Church.

5. The most important and fruitful link between the Vedas and the Bible is in the sacrificial system of both. In Vedic religion all sacrifices culminate in the sacrifice of Prajapati who gives his body, immolates it for the sins of his children, gods and men, just as the purpose of the sacrifices in the Hebraic system finds its fulfilment in the Mahayajna (Great and Creative Sacrifice) of Christ on the Cross. Modern Hindus have forgotten their Vedas and have been deprived of great blessings of Aryan faith in the remission of sin through the shedding of blood. Heb. 9:22. In the absence of the Lamb of God, they have taken to a soft and comfortable view of God, especially due to the imperfect teachings of Buddhism and Vaishnavism, and a small section of Hindus, the Shaktas, have been maintaining a caricature of animal killing miscalled sacri-

fice. They have lost the meaning of it all. So also many Christians today, both converts and born within the Church, have missed the meaning and, therefore, the power of the Cross — having lost **faith in the remission** of sin through the shedding of blood. The Sanatani Hindu in search of the reality of the Vedic conception of sacrifice and of the manifestation of Prajapati in history, is repelled equally by modern non-ethical rationalistic Hinduism and its bloodless and bloody Karma on the one hand, and by disbelieving liberal Christians as well as mechanically-led sacramentalist liturgical church men — the Sanatani Hindu recoils back on his great Vedic truth perfectly exemplified in the Cross. He becomes a vedic-biblical Christian -- nothing less, nothing more.

6. Both modern science and rationalism have destroyed, amongst all religions, the desire for union with God and a vision of Him. Yet our Lord said that "the pure in heart shall see God." The ancient prophets of Israel had direct dealings with God. They talked with God. The Rishis of India *saw* the Mantra (Truth). This direct and clear touch with God — not merely an abstract notion of God — is characteristic of all true religion. God has been an unknown certainty or an unknowable hazy substance at best, until men believed that God could be seen in form and colour and they idolised and imaged him in lifeless unmoving figures, or better, in avatars who were living and dynamic. This urge in men to see God, touch and feel him and even to hold converse with him, has led men in India and all over the world to an endless variety of idolatry and a series of descents of God. But God in his own way and among a people who could not theologically believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, sent his Word who became Flesh in Jesus. In all idolatry and belief in the physical appearance

of God there is a hard core of truth which cannot be denied except to the peril of dynamic and realistic Christianity. St. Paul, a Jew and by nature an iconoclast, saw and heard the Express Image of God; the very substance or stamp of His Person in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:3-4). Christ is the faultless Idol of God and Christianity is the sound idolatry and the Christian is the true idolater When a Sanatani logically and inevitably finds this truth in Christ, his false idolatry based on pantheism, a wrong notion of God being identical with this material universe, is naturally shed. He then sees God in the face of Jesus (Jn. 14:9), and his power, intelligence, skill, beauty and majesty in all the works of his creation. He not only sees God's form in Christ, but also his true life and ethical nature — his righteousness and justice, love and humility in true harmony. The cure of idolatry is not fanatical vandalism but a delicate replacement of a wrong idol (imaginary and made of human hands) by Jesus, the concrete exemplification of the Father in heaven or revelation of God in history.

The Sanatani Hindu has enough spiritual material in the Vedas and in the idolatrous system of Hinduism to lead him to Christ in Whom is an enlargement and realisation of the truth latent therein. Thus the Sanatani Hindu does not deny his past altogether or reject everything in toto but makes the little truth, as it were, a jumping ground to reach the great Truth the unfathomable depths of reality and unimaginable heights of glory in Jesus Christ who is more excellent than the angels, not to speak of his incomparable glory over the powerless man-made images of gods and goddesses worshipped by men who have deviated from their own ancient truths. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man cometh to the Father but by him.

BY ONES AND TWOS

Rain starts in one's and two's in soft humble dribblets and slowly but soon there is a shower flooding the country. Seeds germinate silently in one's and two's and slowly, but soon enough, there is a rich crop in the field. Admission to a school is in one's and two's and slowly the institution overflows. Entrance into the Kingdom of God is similarly by one's and two's and steadily and surely it grows into a large enough Fellowship giving succour and peace to others.

When evangelism is quiet and personal through study of the Word, meditation, praise and prayer, and by the method of sweet reasonableness and persuasion and by appeal to conscience, heart and will, there is less risk of the wheat getting mixed up with tares. Mere appeal to intellect may bring about conversion but it will produce dry barren Christianity. Strong open air appeal to emotions in large crowds, hell fire preaching through fear, exploiting men's poverty and credulity, or suggestion of indirect inducements to worldly success — these and other methods might bring many, as they have done in the past, but they create problems far outweighing the gains and marring their importance and value.

When the Lord Jesus saved me— a sinner and I was baptised in 1908 (vide "My Spiritual Pilgrimage" written in 1911 and published in the N.C.C. Review of March 1949) I felt an inner urge to preach the truth of Christ among my own people. Within hours of my public confession in the Church I was led to go out and witness to a crowd of fairly educated people in a park on the river

bank. Such spontaneous voluntary and independent preaching went on for some years. In spite of heavy work as an advanced student and soon as a teacher, I used to address large numbers in halls, in the open air, in cities and in villages—sometimes audiences as large as five thousand. It was all direct and frank—preaching the Word—and appeal to heart and head to accept the claims of Christ upon one's life. I soon realised the futility of it all—its impersonal vagueness, its vanity, its costliness in mental and physical energy, above all its temptation to name and fame. I preached in the village of Dacca, Barisal, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Nadia, 24 Parganas, and Pabna districts of the then undivided Bengal and always in cooperation with missionaries and Indian evangelists. I preached with my Gospel Team in the halls and squares of Dacca and Calcutta, and was the leader in arranging huge evangelistic campaigns for John R. Mott, Sherwood Eddy and others and was the first and last Editor of "Prochar Abhijan"—a monthly—promoting evangelistic campaigns in Calcutta and in the presidency of Bengal. I also associated myself, and more happily, with the evangelistic activities of the Church of God under the able and unique leadership of Bhakt Alauddin Khan—the first instance of independent voluntary and indigenous evangelism I came in contact with—and a spiritual movement that stirred Assam, Bengal and Orissa in the beginning of the century.

But soon I was led to a new spirit, a nobler motive, a congenial and quiet evangelistic approach. My experience has been a verification of the personal, friendly and indigenous method in evangelism as spiritually and otherwise valid and effective.

God has abundantly blessed my humble and quiet ministry mainly among Hindus—for which I cannot be

too thankful. Indian Christians, and many of them, who have visited me in the Benares United City Mission and in the Ashram for the last one third of a century for study, experience, or work as casual observers, have often asked me— Mr. Das, how can you, as a Christian, live in this atmosphere in a city enveloped in the thick darkness of heathenism. Some of them have even quoted Scriptures in support of their position. But the same spirit supplied the answers. I fear that the current theology of evangelism in the Church is rather crude and not scriptural. Had they known St. Paul at all properly they would not have given vent to such scepticism partly coloured, I am afraid, by prejudice.

In my labour of love for the Lord and the Kingdom, it has been my thoughtful endeavour to bring men not so much, and deliberately, to the Church as to God in Christ. For I believe that when a man finds his Saviour and God in Jesus the Church's fellowship is natural and automatic, nay, inevitable, as it happened in my case. Though, to be sure, there are difficulties and problems connected with it and often the fellowship may be superficial and restricted. It is the serious responsibility of the Church to take the initiative in offering the fellowship, guidance and nurture, to the young converts who quite naturally feel diffident: otherwise the converts will be confounded and frustrated. I have also been careful not to preach doctrine or theology as such, because these do not have the power to bring men to the Cross, though I know that Christianity is the most convincing and self-consistent piece of theology and provides the best philosophy of life to any serious seeker of God and Truth. Nor have I entangled myself or enquirers in philosophical discussions, though I have been a student of philosophy and know what a useful training it is to the

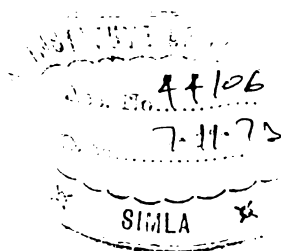
mind. I have never drawn the attention of Hindu enquirers to the so-called Christian civilization or western culture, though I admire and acknowledge many beautiful and healthy elements of Christian truth in them. I have on the contrary, talked of the importance and the discriminate place of Indian culture in the personal life of the convert and in the Indian Church.

I have generally ignored but sometimes condemned the harmful role of the Church as a religious Institution in the political life of a country, though I have supported participation in political life by Christians as citizens of the country. This should be done by convinced and practising Christians imbued with Christian principles of justice and integrity in order to help build up a truly democratic and socialistic state. It has been natural for me to do it (and it should be natural for all nationalist converts) as from my youth up I have been in the midst of the struggle for freedom under the banner of the Indian National Congress. The appeal of Christ in the context of broad nationalism, political and cultural, has been found very helpful, because the impression that has gone round in the country is that the convert to Christianity or to Islam—both foreign religions—is a minus, a loss, a reduction in the loyalty to the country.

I have also tried to make it perfectly clear to all enquirers that without a heart-realisation of the truth of Christ and without a sense of assurance of the New Birth and Forgiveness, Peace and Power of the Holy spirit on the basis of the atonement through the shed blood of Jesus and the Resurrection and the Pentecost, mere formal baptism upon intellectual conversion or social attraction of the Church and to become a "Christian" as distinct from a believer and disciple and a child of God—is not only of

no use but positively, wrong, reprehensible, and injurious to all concerned. On the contrary Baptism in the sense of an open confession of Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, Lord and God and in the sense of being grafted into the Body of Christ, the Holy Catholic Church and Fellowship, though it may create temporary misunderstanding and resentment and may lead even to persecution, is the healthy and sound thing to do. It brings about beneficial results for all concerned in the long run.

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