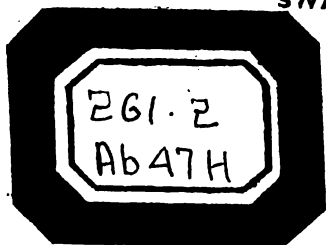


# Hindu-Christian Meeting Point

Within the Cave of the Heart

*By*

SWAMI ABHISHIKTĀNANDA





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**Within the Cave of the Heart**

By

**SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA**



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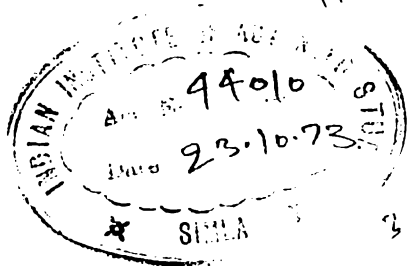


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## FOREWORD

This booklet gives the story of a Christian group of theologians and religious devotees drawn from the different Churches and Christian Ashrams in India, as they have sought to dig into the mystery of the interiority of the Hindu mystic experience of non-duality to discern where and how Christ is present and active in it and to discover what such discernment implies for Christian spirituality in India. The group rightly found that at the level of formulated theology and fixed doctrinal concepts there can be no true spiritual meeting or dialogue and went behind them to the level of the spiritual encounters of the self with God in the inner being and gave themselves to meditations on the sources of Christian and Hindu spiritual life; the Bible and the Upanishads. It is a daring exploration, full of dangers, but also full of potentialities for inter-religious dialogue at depth, and opens up the possibilities of understanding new dimensions of the meaning of Jesus Christ and of new theological formulations in the context of Indian religion. It is for the readers to evaluate the results. Of course, the common conviction of the Christian groups is that life in Christ, is, and should be lived as, the eschatological fulfilment of Hindu mysticism, if Christianity and Hinduism have to come to their true vocation. The contribution of the group to inter-Church understanding is not small, and it shows that common explorations of the Christian life in relation to the world outside is a potent instrument of Christian ecumenism.

This is the first publication undertaken jointly by the Institute of Indian Culture, Bandra - Bombay and the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore. We hope this will turn out to be the beginning of a co-operative effort in the study of Indian religions.

K. KLOSTERMAIER,  
Director, Institute of Indian Culture,  
Bandra - Bombay.

M. M. THOMAS,  
Director, Christian Institute for the Study of  
Religion and Society, Bangalore.

*September 1968*

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This booklet appears comparatively late upon the Indian scene—the dialogues which gave rise to it took place in 1963 and even earlier, and the French edition came out in 1965—but not too late. The Church in India is only now beginning to realize with a keen sense of urgency the need to integrate the spiritual values of Hinduism into her own life. Very little has so far been published on this subject in English, and nothing, it would seem, quite like this. The special interest of Abhishiktanandaji's book lies in that it takes us to the sources of both religions—the Upanishads and the Bible—and its aim is strictly practical: we go to the Upanishads to understand the Advaita and to the Bible to discover how the Advaitic experience can be related to the Christian revelation. In so doing we are led through certain passages of the New Testament, and especially of the Gospel of John, to what can, one feels, be described as an authentic Christian culmination of the Advaitic experience.

This Advaitic experience is first of all an experience of interiority. This cannot be sufficiently stressed today when a tidal wave of activism threatens to engulf the world. It draws men aback continually to what is most inward in himself, to the "cave of the heart" as the Upanishads call it, where God dwells, not as in a tabernacle, within and yet separated from man, but as the living Source of his being, of his very "I". At the height—or in the depth—of this experience, the soul of man is so overwhelmed by the glory of the Presence that his own finite self seems to vanish altogether in its splendour.

Christians are frequently afraid of this experience because it appears to threaten the radical distinction between God and the creature which is so strongly affirmed by the Bible

and, we may add, man's instinctive craving for autonomy, yet we cannot ignore the witness of the rishis of India who have described it so persistently with the conviction of men who know of what they are speaking. It is moreover clear that if this experience has been more common in India than in other parts of the world, it is not confined to Indians but would rather seem to be something possible in principle for any man ; though some may be more disposed to it than others by a keener "metaphysical hunger"—the supreme "*praeparatio Evangelica*" on the metaphysical level of the human spirit groping towards pure awareness of the mystery of God in which it is called to share by the two-fold gift of nature and of grace. Since grace does not destroy, but perfects, nature, one would expect to find no contradiction here (which does not mean no Paschal mystery of death and resurrection) and in fact the Advaitic experience seems to open up new depths in man, so creating in him a profounder capacity for the gift of grace.

Only in the cave of the heart can true dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism take place : contact at any other level can never be more than superficial and fleeting. Too often in the past Christians have given the impression that they were not even aware of the existence of this "space within the cavity of the heart . . . where resides the supreme Bliss" (Tait. 11, 8, 5.) : and too often, perhaps, the impression was true. Now, however, the time has come for Christians and Hindus to recognise in each other the gift of the Spirit, and for that both must go silently down to the depths of their own being, to "the place where the Glory dwelleth".

We are still awaiting a theological study of this theme : the author is the first to insist that this is not a scholarly treatise. Its role is to open up vistas, to awaken the Christians of India to the treasures of their double spiritual heritage, and so to contribute in some measure to the renewal of the Church in which the Spirit is so urgently demanding their collaboration. For He Himself dwells in the cave of the heart, and it is there that men must learn to listen to Him and to each other.

It should perhaps be added that this message concerns, not only the Christians of India, but the whole People of God, indeed the whole human race, for in the economy of salvation the gifts of one are the gifts of all. It has already been noted that the Advaitic experience is not limited to those who are sons of India by birth. The special contribution that India is called upon to make to the Church may well be, as Abbè Monchanin loved to insist, this very awareness of the dimension of interiority which prepares the way for a deeper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and of each Christian, and of the all-pervading, all-sustaining Mystery of God. The contemporary world, both eastern and western, in varied and sometimes disconcerting ways bears witness to man's ineradicable need for "That from which speech turns back, together with the mind being unable to reach it . . ." "He who knows the bliss of that Brahman", the Upanishad adds, "knows no fear. Every other creature lives by a small portion of that Bliss". (*cf.* Tait. Up. 11, 9). And the abode of that "Bliss" is the cave of the heart.

The translation departs slightly from the French original in several places, partly because of developments in the Ecumenical movement in recent years, partly to meet the needs of a different language and public. For kindred reasons the Archbishop of Bhopal kindly consented to rewrite the Preface he contributed to the first French edition. These changes were made at the suggestion or with the warm encouragement of the author who gave the full freedom in the matter. If any reader feels that adaptation has not gone far enough I must therefore accept full responsibility.

SARA GRANT, r.s.c.j.

Sophia College, Bombay.

*22nd August, 1968.*



## PREFACE

Ever since Pope John sounded his clarion-call for an "aggiornamento" in the Church, there has been a great deal of introspection at every level within the framework of the Church. The four sessions of the Council have helped considerably in this process and everywhere there is a conscious attempt being made at adjustment and accommodation to suit the needs of the changing times. The old is being displaced, altered, re-ordered, and efforts, often daring, are made to introduce the new.

It was in his opening address to the Council, on the 11th October, 1962, that Pope John set the pace for this renewal in the Church. With his prophetic vision he boldly invited the bishops to widen their horizon and look outwards: to consider, above all, how God's providence today was literally confronting the Church on the one hand with the Christian world of our separated brothers, and on the other with the vast assemblage of the peoples of the world who also believe in God.

Speaking of those who have not yet found faith in Jesus Christ, Article 16 of the Constitution on the Church states very clearly :

"Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God ; for the Saviour wants all men to be saved. Those who, through no fault of their own, are still ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of His Church, yet sincerely seek God, and with the help of Divine grace strive to do His will as known to them through the voice of their conscience—those men can attain eternal salvation."

Catholic theology today, says P. Fransen, is therefore being faced with an immense problem. To implement the

decisions of the Council through a renewal of theological reflection is no easy task, for this would entail, side by side, a reform of the pastoral ministry and of the missionary approach, a sincere adjustment of ecclesiastical law and an authentic adaptation of the sacramental dispensation in the liturgy, in keeping with the changed times. This, moreover, is something that cannot be done alone by the theologians in Europe and the Americas. It cannot be done at all without the active participation of theologians in all parts of the world. For this is a Catholic undertaking and must therefore reflect the myriad viewpoints and diverse problems arising from the living experience of the Church among the nations. (See Foreword to "The Wider Ecumenism" by Eugene Hillman.)

Over the years Swami Abhishiktananda (*alias* Dom Henri Le Saux, O.S.B.), of the Saccidananda Ashram in South India, has dedicated himself unstintingly to the great cause of ecumenical dialogue with Hinduism, of which he has made a close and deep study.

In the pages of this book, he traces out very modestly the efforts he has been making in this direction with his other associates, both Catholic as well as Protestant: Shantivanam, Almora, Rajpur, Nagpur, all these are the little golden links in the chain that is now being forged to bring about harmony and better understanding between the different religious communities in this country.

The Church's encounter with the different religions of the world started on the first Pentecost Day, two thousand years ago, when invigorated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit she ventured out of the little Cenacle Room of Jerusalem in order to carry out the mandate of the Master. Now, these religions she came in contact with were by no means for their respective peoples like a cloak that they would merely have to cast off. Customs, traditions, social and intellectual life, morality, all bear their imprint. Must everything then be thrown overboard to give place to the Gospel?

There were, no doubt, those who used to claim that it should be so. Everything in these religions, they would say, is bad, and they must be destroyed and razed to the ground. We must rebuild everything afresh. This was Tatian's argument on the subject of the Greco-Roman world. This too was the reasoning of the Jansenists, who refused to believe that anything but corruption could come from the Gentiles.

"Such an attitude", says Henri de Lubac, "is unfair. It is not possible that what has lasted so long as the life-blood of whole races should not be worthy of respect from some point of view. Human reason is weak and wavering, but it is not doomed to error and it is not possible for the Divinity to be entirely hidden from it. The seed of the Word is innate in the whole human race. The Divine likeness in it may be dimmed, veiled, disfigured, but it is always there." (*Catholicism*, IX p. 147.) This is the thesis Swami Abhishik-tananda sets out to establish by his writings, and still more convincingly by his ecumenical activities. For quite some time, he and his small group of associates have had to contend against tremendous odds ; for many years theirs was a voice in the wilderness and their efforts for an ecumenical dialogue with non-Christians were being frowned upon by many within the Church.

The root of the trouble can be traced to the defective system of education in our seminaries. For all practical purposes the pattern has remained unchanged since the Council of Trent. The vast store of culture and religious tradition of non-Christian people among whom our missionaries have to work was for us almost a closed book. As one good Japanese Bishop has put it somewhat bluntly : "Our seminary education has made us strangers in our own country". This, I sincerely believe, has been one of the greatest handicaps to our missionary endeavour in this country.

"It is perfectly possible for a mission," says Hans Küng, "to abhor and condemn racial segregation, and yet to remain alien at heart from the race with which it is concerned ; this happens when the Church does not boldly graft herself

into the national culture, feeling, thinking and life of that race. The Catholic Church did thus graft herself onto the Greek and Latin culture, and then again onto the Germanic and Slavonic cultures ; so that she became, like St. Paul, Greek to the Greek, and barbarian to the barbarian. But has she become Bantu to the Bantu, Chinese to the Chinese, Indian to the Indian ? ” (*The Living Church*, p. 376.)

A growing awareness of the universal reality of salvation is an outstanding characteristic of current theology. This is clearly reflected in the teaching of Vatican II. “Many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible structure” of the Church, and so the “helps necessary for salvation” are always and everywhere available to all who are obedient to “the dictates of conscience” (*Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 8,16) “This kind of thinking” says Eugene Hillman, “is optimistic, and it yields a lively tendency to broaden the scope of modern Christian ecumenism.” (*The Wider Ecumenism*, p. 19.)

The Swami has done a great service to this cause of ecumenical dialogue. The *leitmotif* of all his writings has always been : “Religious experience wherever found must be approached with deep reverence. It is something like the reverence and awe exhibited by Moses close to the burning bush on Mount Sinai. The work of the Creator, however spoilt by man, yet remains the natural and necessary preparation for the work of the Redeemer.” Or as R. Panikkar has well put it : “The Christian attitude is not ultimately one of bringing Christ *in*, but of bringing Him *forth*, of discovering Christ ; not one of command but of service.” (*The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 45).

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8th August, 1968.

## INTRODUCTION

At Christmas 1963 a small group of Christians belonging to different denominations met at Nagpur to meditate together on the Upanishads, the Hindu Scriptures *par excellence*. This was surely a sign that the Church is now beginning to rediscover the treasures which the Holy Spirit has prepared for her at the very heart of the great religions of the cosmic covenant.

She has indeed always been aware that she is not confined within the boundaries which limit her in the eyes of men : the Fathers of the Church long ago sensed her presence far beyond the borders of her visibility when they spoke of the Church of the fathers and the Church of the patriarchs whose origins St. Gregory and St. Augustine traced back to Abraham and even beyond him to Abel the Just. Yet all down the ages and from the furthestmost limits of the world, men have been on pilgrimage towards that definitive manifestation of her on earth, where the splendour of her mystery shines out in all its fulness ; and, in return, from that shining centre light and grace have radiated into every moment of time and every corner of the universe.

Isaiah already saw in vision all the peoples of the earth converging on the mountain of the Lord, bringing their treasures, not as captives bowing their necks under their burdens but as free men coming gladly to pay homage to the God of Israel. Not that the new Israel should like her predecessor of old, pride herself on being the holy mountain of God.

“A mountain where God has chosen to live  
Where Yahweh is going to live forever.” (Ps. 18.16.).

If the nations are drawing near to her, it is not for her own sake. Dearly-loved daughter she certainly is, and cherished bride, but that should only make her a more faithful servant of the Lord—just as Christ “gave himself to be the servant of all”. The Church’s role is a *diakonia* ; she was created solely to gather in the harvest of her God. If she were to glory in this, indulging in triumphalism so vigorously condemned by the second Vatican Council, she would simply be putting herself in the place of her Master and so fail completely in her mission.

This mission of service to which she is called upon earth consists in bringing together for the glory of the Lord the treasures which he himself has spread throughout the universe in time and space. Her task is to call into the fold of God all the sheep whom the Father has branded with the mark of his Son, and to weave into a harmonious unity the hymn of praise which God expects from his creation.

The Israel of God has certainly her own family heirlooms, to speak—those of “Israel according to the flesh”, the law of the prophets and those that were brought to her by her Messiah-King in person ; but the treasures of the time before the law also belong to her, and all that came after—even those amassed by the prodigal son while he was squandering the heritage he had received from his father.

The Church of the ages before Christ is still mysteriously present in the world, hidden under veils which conceal her even from her own eyes. The great army of those who are “called by God” is still on the march, converging from all sides on the place of assembly, crossing the desert, advancing and retreating, experiencing once more the temptation to settle in the oasis of Cades. It is for the Church already arrived in the Promised Land and assembled in Jerusalem, whose praise even now resounds in the Temple of the Lord, to summon to her children who are still wandering between the Red Sea and the Jordan. Neither Reuben nor Gad were allowed to settle down in their own towns and villages as long as their brethren had not yet reached their goal (*cf.* Num. 32). She must summon them, not a

strangers or beggars to whom she means to give alms, but as brothers, children born of the same mother, co-heirs with equal rights of inheritance. She must summon them and say to them, like Pope John : "I am Joseph, your brother. All that the Lord has given me is yours. If he has brought me here before you, it was only for your sakes."

She must make them realise that she does not covet their treasures for herself, still less look upon them as spoils fit only to be put under a curse. All that she desires is that the inheritance of the Father should at long last be brought together, and that each of his children should be able to rejoice in the shares originally received by his brothers and added to by them in the course of their pilgrimage, as in his own possession.

The meeting of Christians at Nagpur at Christmas 1963 to read and ponder together in *koinonia Ecclesiae*, the Bible and the Upanisads, should be seen in the context of the ecumenism of the Church's invitation to enter into a genuinely religious dialogue with India.

No attempt has been made to give more than a brief outline of how the gathering came about and a general sketch of the main lines followed by the discussions and reflections born of our meditations on the Upanishads during those days of grace—for such indeed they were: days of grace and of fraternal communion.

Humanity is communion and the Church is the *koinonia par excellence*. It is only in a human community that man can develop and reach full maturity of mind and body, and in the same way it is only in the community of the Church that the Christian comes to understand the mystery of God, for there is but one Holy Spirit.

Each of the group would certainly have written this account in his own way and the results while agreeing in essentials would not have been identical on every point, for if every man lives by, with and for his brothers, each one nevertheless reacts in his own way, according to his tem-

perament and his particular gift. It is precisely in this that the grandeur of the *koinonia* and *agape* consists, showing as it does in a visible form the invisible life of the Trinity pouring itself out in the distinction and multiplicity of creation and yet simultaneously flowing back into itself, drawing all things into the bosom of the Father in the unity of the Spirit.

These reflections then, are the responsibility of the author alone. They are by no means exhaustive, they follow the order of the texts meditated upon and like the exchange of thoughts which followed the meditations, they are marked by repetitions and digressions. Even so, they may perhaps help some fellow-Christians to discover for themselves and for the Church these treasures which belong to them, both in the ancient writings of India and even more in that *guha* or secret place of the heart where they were first received, for this *guha* from which the Upanishads welled up as from a living source, is the inmost heart of every man and it is to the centre of his own being that the Christian is invited to penetrate under the guidance of the Spirit, to discover there in its fulness the mystery of the Atman, the self, which was glimpsed by the rishis. Here is the place of the ultimate encounter, where the spirit of man becomes one with the Spirit of God—the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and is given by the Son, the Spirit who is that essential “indivision”, *a-dvaita* which insistently drew the seers of India and at the same time essential communion welling up in the bosom of the Father and communicated to us by his incarnate Son : the Spirit who teaches us to say to God : “Abba, Father ! ” drawing us into the mystery of his own indivisible unity.



## I. A CATHOLIC ECUMENISM

The hour of Ecumenism has at last struck in the Church, and for this we can never sufficiently thank the Lord: Christians have become aware in Christ of the scandal of their lack of unity, and have begun to work together in an effective way to make visible in the world—"that the world may believe" (Jn. 17·21)—the mystery of unity in which Christ came to make us share even on earth.

But an even more important stage in the growing Catholicity of the Church is now opening before us. The clearest indication of this was given by the Holy Father at Pentecost, 1964, when he announced the creation of a new Roman Secretariat to be responsible for the relations of the Church with the "world religions". This too was an ecumenical event, for the disunion of those who have been baptised in the name of one Lord and in the unity of a single Spirit is not the only obstacle to the perfect Catholicity or universality of the Church. The term "ecumenism"<sup>1</sup> has in modern times acquired a limited and almost sectarian sense, but etymologically it implies the extension of the Church to the whole (kat'holon) of the inhabited universe.<sup>1</sup> The Church is of her nature Catholic by vocation and institution, but she will not actually *be* Catholic for all to see until she has finally integrated into the mystery of her own life all nations, all cultures and all tongues (Apoc. 7, 9). Only then will she be able to sing in the name of the whole earth "the new song" of God and of the Lamb. This was certainly how Pope Paul VI understood the word "Catholic" in his magnificent homily on that day of Pentecost.

The creation of the Conciliar Commission for the unity of Christians was a sign that the Roman Catholic Church recognised the presence of Christ, true faith in Christ and that sanctifying action of the Spirit among all who are baptised. Indeed it is no longer possible for any Christian to doubt the sincerity before God of fellow-Christians belonging to other Churches, nor to deny the fact that it is precisely through their membership of those Christian communities that individuals have come to faith in Christ and developed

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1 From the Greek "*oikoumene*", "inhabited (earth)".

their life in the Spirit. In view of all this it is the duty of all Christians to enter into sincere and loyal dialogue and to seek together, in humility and charity, the way to recover their lost unity, in fulfilment of Christ's last prayer.

In an analogous way the creation in Rome of a Pontifical Commission for World Religions looks like an official acknowledgement that God and His Christ are present among the 'Gentiles' too and that at long last Christians attribute to the Holy Spirit (and no longer to the devil : the greatest sin, according to the Lord, Mk. 3, 28) the longing for God present in those religions, and at least the normal manifestations of it.

This does not, however, mean that the missionary apostolate "ad Gentes" must come to an end. The Lord's mandate still holds in all its binding force, and will do so until "all the children of God who are now scattered . . ."

Nevertheless, in this process of "affiliating" to herself all those who are already "sons of God" in hope, the Church of Vatican II, emerging from a long and difficult period of theological reflection, can no longer assume as easily as in the past that all those to whom she must proclaim the Good News are without exception on the way to perdition, deprived of grace and of all true love of God. She no longer considers that the missionary's task is to build everything anew, starting, if necessary, on the ruins of all that was there before, adapting himself to the language and customs of the people he is evangelizing, if indeed he condescends to do so at all, only because of the cultural immaturity of those whom he wishes to lead to the fold of the Church.

It is certainly true that in a very real sense all is new in the coming of man to Christ : "Behold, I make all things new", . . . (Apoc. 21, 5, 1, 4).

There must be a "new alliance" (Jer. 31, 31 echoed by Heb. 8, 8), a "new man" (Eph. 4, 23), a "new heart" (Ex. 36, 26), a "new name" (Apoc. 2, 17), and a "new people", "*populus acquisitionis*" an *acquired* people (1 Pet. 2, 9), formerly "not-a-people" but now the People of God (Os. 2, 25). Entry into the fold of the Lord is a regeneration, a "new birth" (cf. Jn. 3, 3). The "passing over" into Christ and the Church, like the "passing" of Jesus from this world to His Father (Jn. 13, 1) of which it is the sign and "plero-

matic" fulfilment, is always a work of death and resurrection. (Lk. 24, 26).

And yet it is the very same reality that died that is now alive, new, risen. The same being that was *animalis psychikon*, natural, is now and *will be* for ever *spiritalis, pneumatikon, spiritual* (1 Cor. 15, 44 ff.) renewed in Him "who was, who is and who is to come" (Apoc. 1·8), "the Lord of that which was and of that which will be, He who is today, and who will be tomorrow also" as the Katha Upanisad (4, 13) mysteriously proclaims, anticipating the Epistle to the Hebrews. (13, 8.) It is indeed this "resurrection" which gives meaning to all that preceded the death that made it possible. Just as time achieves its fulfilment only in the *eschaton* to which it tends, so all that comes to be, and therefore passes away, will find its true nature by sharing in the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection and entry into glory, for He is the Alpha and Omega, "the beginning of all things and their end", and therefore their final and only explanation.

If then we are to take a truly Christian and Catholic view of the religious traditions of the Gentiles and the outward forms they assume, we only consider them in the context of their eschological fulfilment in the very heart of the Pleroma. The Church, her eyes enlightened by the gift of faith, sees all things in the eternal radiance of the Word and perceives already in the groping and uncertain expressions of man's deepest longings, the full and perfect revelation of their ultimate realization. In the scriptures of the cosmic testament she discerns in this first pale glow of dawn she sees the full brilliance of noon. She knows that the whole universe down to its smallest detail, each individual human being born into the world, the great civilizations and religions of man, all sprang into existence in response to the Father's creative word that they are destined to share through His Son in the glory that was His even before creation, and that all are kept in existence ordered and given movement and life by the Spirit who is Himself the eternal movement to the Father through the Son, firmly and gently guiding all things to their fulfilment in the mystery of the Pleroma of the Incarnate Word.

The Church then realises that her mission is not to lead to Christ their Saviour isolated and poverty-stricken in-

dividuals, sunk in essential error and sin. With reverent wonder she finds that in these hearts to whom the name of the Lord has not yet been revealed His Spirit is already at work, accomplishing His task of fulfilment and resurrection, and this not in spite of their religious traditions with all their varied outward expression in scripture and ritual and the immense spiritual desire which they have fed and handed on from generation to generation, but precisely through the instrumentality of these things. The mission of the Church is to bring to Christ, to gather up into the Pleroma of His glory and integrate into the People of God individuals, yes, but individuals who have been placed by God in particular civilizations and religious cultures, each endowed with unique treasures (*"non est inventus similis illi"*) by the Lord of history which are slowly being brought to fruition by His indwelling Spirit in view of the "fulness of time."

The time has then come for the Church—indeed for all Churches together—to enter into official contact with these religions. This would mean that she will no longer rest content with the private contacts established by some of her members on their own initiative with members of the cosmic religions, but will try to engage in direct dialogue with their accredited representatives, in the case of institutional religions, or at least with those whose personal competence and spiritual worth are such as to make them acceptable to their co-religionists as authentic interpreters of their beliefs and aspirations. In such a dialogue the Church will certainly invite her interlocutors to co-operate with her efforts to stem the tide of materialism which is sweeping over the world, but it is even more important that the faithful followers of Christ and of the great world religions should try to understand each other in a profound spirit of humility, sincerity and charity, each aware of the irresistible attraction of the unfathomable mystery of God in the depths of his own being and recognizing the religious beliefs and practices of his neighbour as the outward signs of a similar awareness of that Presence and of a desire to respond to it that is closely akin to his own.

It is certain that in her efforts to establish such a dialogue the Church will find herself confronted with the most serious problems of mutual comprehension in her relations with

the great religions of the Far East. With Islam and Judaism she has at least the clearly-defined common heritage of Abraham's faith in the living God and a considerable area of semitic and Mediterranean culture ; it was, therefore, to be expected that the desire for mutual contact should first find expression within the response evoked by the visit of Pope Paul VI to Jerusalem and the words which were then spoken on both sides to realize the affinities underlying the differences.

It must, however, be confessed that once the Christian has crossed the frontiers of Western culture he feels ill at ease and finds himself ill-equipped to understand religious values which have developed in mental and spiritual climates other than his own. This is not primarily due to his faith: the Christian revelation is essentially Catholic, as the Holy Father so strongly pointed out in the Pentecost allocution already referred to. The real reason is that as a fact of history Christianity is deeply rooted not only in the semitic civilizations that prepared the way for the Gospel but also in the Greco-Roman world, whose cultural, philosophical and juridical treasures it inherited and whose external structures and patterns of thought and experience it could hardly help adopting.

The Oriental world, on the other hand, whether Hindu, Buddhist or Taoist, seems to have reacted so differently from the dwellers in the cultural and religious milieu of the Mediterranean lands to that experience of indwelling Mystery which lies at the root of all genuine religion that the religions which grew up in these very different cultural settings seem to have their origin in quite different areas of the human psyche, like rivers rising from the same watershed but flowing down opposite sides of the mountain because of the different rockformations encountered near their common source.

In India, man has not felt the need to objectify, to project outside himself, the mystery he senses in the depths of his own being and at the very heart of the universe. If he has ever done so, it has been only provisionally, as a temporary aid for one who is still "on the way", as a man makes use of a raft to cross a river or a piece of flax to light a lamp. In the last resort, the spiritual man of India refuses

to name this mystery, this absolute Reality, still less will he attempt to define it, distinguish himself from it or consider himself apart from or "before" it. Adoration for him can end only in a worldless "recollection" at the heart of Existence, in the experience of *Sat-cit-ananda* Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

This is probably the main reason for the Church's failure to awaken any real response in the Hindu soul, and in spite of the great efforts she is at present making to rediscover and reveal her true countenance, even the most "open" statements made by European theologians and the richest and most promising Conciliar texts have very little chance of being listened to and understood in India because they are—perhaps unavoidably—formulated in terms of the situation in which the Church finds herself in the West. One has only to recall the extremely moving pleas of the Council Fathers from the Near East and Africa, and then to reflect that India is even further from the Western world than Constantinople or Africa. Her personal realization of the mystery of God and the faith which each man has in the experience of his teacher and the sacred treasure of his scriptures have led her into quite different spheres of thought and a religious and spiritual atmosphere which are wholly other.

Confronted by this experience, which has been handed down through countless ages and is still living in the hearts of the holy men of India, the Christian can only adore in reverent silence the mystery of God and the unsearchable ways of His providence. He may be disconcerted by the outward expression of this experience at the level of "religion"—prayer formularies, rites, etc.—as long as he is still conditioned by his Western upbringing, but if the Spirit has already communicated to him some awareness of the innermost depths of his own soul, indwelt by the unfathomable silence of God, then when he first comes into contact with the true spiritual tradition of India, the words which he reads or hears will awaken a profound response within him, as though they had been born from the depths of his own spiritual experience. Then, still unable to understand, much less explain, what is happening he will find himself exclaiming, "The finger of God is here"—the finger of God

who is the Holy Spirit, as the Fathers realized so well in their pondering on the Gospel. (Mk. 12, 28 ; Lk. 11, 20).

If the Church is really to enter into dialogue with Hinduism, it is absolutely essential that Christians should prepare themselves adequately : otherwise they will remain forever incapable of establishing any real contact with genuine representatives of Hinduism. A superficial acquaintance with the religious folklore of India is not enough, nor is a scientific study of her rites and traditions, nor even a merely intellectual knowledge, however profound, of her scriptures and the writings of her spiritual masters. The Christian who wants to enter into contact with the scriptures and the mystical tradition of India needs above all else an inward disposition—what the schoolmen called a *habitus*—of recollection and contemplation, the “knowledge” of those ultimate depths of the self, the “cave of the heart”, where the Mystery revealed itself to the attentive soul of the Rishis. It is only here, in the secret place of the well-spring, or the “source” as Ramana Maharshi called it, in his *Upadesha Saram* that a true dialogue can begin. Religious dialogue with India originating at any other level will necessarily remain superficial and inadequate.

It may perhaps be objected that at this depth of the human psyche dialogue will no longer be possible, since by definition all words or mental images will be excluded. But it is only when contact has been established at this level that a true and spontaneous dialogue can be entered upon at the level on which concepts and words are formed, for only then can it spring directly from an immediate and fundamental encounter. The same thing is true of “encounter” with the sacred texts handed down by the rishis and other sages : it can take place only in the depths of one’s being. Distance in time and space constitutes no obstacle, for the flesh alone creates boundaries : in the Spirit all can meet—at least all those who have entered into the Spirit. This in the closely related domain of visual art—in India art, no less than the written word, is the transmitter of the sacred—the encounter with the Mahadeva of the cave temple of Elephanta pierces to the very depths of the soul, communicating the vision of the unknown sculptor with the impact of direct experience.

Preparation for the dialogue of Christianity with India means that in the study of the Bible and of Christian tradition very special attention must be paid to those texts which speak of intimate union with God. It also means that the Christian must allow himself to be drawn with the beloved disciple into the "deep heart" of the Lord, where the secrets of the "eternal life which is in the bosom of the Father" are revealed.



## II. NAGPUR 1963— RETURN TO THE SOURCES

The non-Roman members of the group, particularly the Presbyterians, were unanimous in their recognition of the exceptional interest of our discussions and even said that they “envied” the depth at which this search for dialogue between India and the Church was being carried on. Moreover the “*anamnesis* of the undivided Church” had been experienced as strongly at Rajpur as at Almora, especially by those who had there joined us for the first time. Nevertheless a certain regret made itself felt among them. Should our study not be centred more directly and more explicitly on the word of God? At Rajpur we had certainly read a chapter of the Bible each evening before Compline, and at the beginning of each session a passage from Scripture had been suggested for all to meditate on in silence, as a Biblical and spiritual introduction to the theme which was to be developed afterwards. But they would have liked something more. Would it not be possible to set aside a definite time each day for common study and meditation on the Scriptures as is the common practice in gatherings of Evangelical Christians?

This suggestion was accepted. Then one day, in the course of conversation, someone suddenly said, as though inspired: “Why shouldn’t we read the Upanishads in the same way?” However strange this idea seemed at first sight, we realized as we thought about it that it was full of possibilities and deserved at least a serious trial. Thus we tentatively decided upon the plan which was actually followed at Nagpur: meditative reading in common of the Bible in the morning and of the Upanishads in the evening.

In the meantime some members of the group who happened to be in Delhi decided to meet at the headquarters of one of their number, the Anglican Fraternity of the Ascension, or the Cambridge Brotherhood, for what they called “a probe” (the Russians and Americans were just then competing with each other in sending “probes” or “soundings” into space). On the last evening, the then coadjutor Archbishop of Delhi accepted an invitation to join them. Next

day he confided to one of them that this prayerful and ecclesial reading of the Upanishads had been for him a revelation of the undreamt-of interiority of the Hindu scriptures and of the challenge offered to the Church, and especially to her ministers, by the existence in India of such a profoundly contemplative spirit.

We had decided to study the return to the sources demanded of Christian spirituality as a result of its contact with Hindu spirituality. The contemplative and ecclesial reading of Biblical and Hindu texts now suggested would compel each of us to experience this return in an existential way each according to the modality of his own spiritual life.

The Hindu Mystical tradition witnesses to the existence of levels of spiritual awareness which are too often neglected by Christians. It is true that the Hindu experience of interiority takes place rather at the pancosmic or meta-cosmic level, and rarely attains to the personal, or rather interpersonal, dimension of Being revealed by God to men in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. But this Christian meditation on the Upanishads would precisely help to awaken and at the same time redeem in us these profound depths or dimensions of the Hindu experience, and be for them a kind of baptism and final illumination, their resurrection and eschatological fulfilment. We would be looking at Christ our Lord, "the beginning of all things and their end", through Hindu eyes, and so "redeeming", as it were, the essential values of the Hindu tradition which are in danger of being swept away in the current of contemporary materialism.

In spite of the term "Bible-study" which we adopted because it had been hallowed by long use, our reading of the Bible was not to consist in a speculative or exegetical analysis of the text : we envisaged rather a prayerful reading, the *lectio divina* of patristic and monastic tradition, a reading done in the Presence and aiming above all at inward assimilation of the message of God under the action of His Spirit. Moreover this reading was to be undertaken in *koinonia ecclesiae*, in the "ecclesial community", in that Church of which every group of believers gathered together in the name of the Lord is already the sign (Matth. 18, 20)

and whose unity is shown sacramentally in the "breaking of bread" celebrated in common (Acts 2, 42 and 44).

This would demand, the silence of our understanding and, as the Bible says, "a listening heart", and even more the silence of our instinctive egotism which urges us to impose our own views, our own ends, our own impressions even in the holiest things, and so frequently stifles the voice of the Spirit. It would also mean that we must allow ourselves to become "vulnerable" to the Word of God and to the unpredictable demands He is liable to confront us with when we come face to face with Him in holy scripture. The living actuality of the Word of God in the Bible can only make man afraid ; but his faith keeps the Christian constantly open to His action.

As the foundation of all this we must finally have a firm purpose of *metanoia* or conversion. Otherwise how could we be ready to change to "turn-back" (*con-versio*) if God asked it of us, and "obey the Gospel", as St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans (10, 16).

Therefore, after a moment of recollection and a prayer drawn from ecclesiastical tradition, the scriptural passage would be read in two different translations : study of the original text was to be done privately. A brief commentary would follow, given by one of the group, to bring out its essential points. The chief purpose of this commentary would be to show the relevance of the message for those who were listening to it at that moment, Christians of India, or at least Christians involved in the mission of the Church in India, called to serve India in her ascent to the Church and the Church in her advance to meet India. The commentator should be far less anxious to propound his own pet ideas than to help his brothers to enter more deeply into the thought of the inspired author and become more fully open to the action of the Spirit present in the Word.

This would be followed by ten or fifteen minutes of recollection spent either in reflecting on the text in the presence of the Master within, or in listening to Him in silence of mind and heart. This would be followed by the sharing of the thoughts and questions suggested to each one in his hearing of and meditation on the sacred Word.

The most important thing of all was to preserve the contemplative character of this reading in the Community of the Church, which certainly should not exclude careful theological and exegetical preparation ; this must however be done beforehand. The statement of possible differences of opinion was not ruled out, nor was frank and fraternal discussion of apparently conflicting points of view ; but the basic attitude which would make this free exchange possible would be precisely that which would enable each of us to listen to and question the Spirit in his brothers, *in koinonia ecclesiae*, and pass on in his turn to them in all simplicity whatever he thought, *in Spiritu*, should be passed on.

The reading of the Upanishads would follow the same pattern as that of the Bible. Based on the same general principle and carried out in the same way, it too would be contemplative, communitarian and ecclesial, marked by the same openness to the Spirit, each one listening and asking questions, humbly suggesting and never propounding dogmatically.

As actually carried out at Nagpur, the programme consisted of a moment of recollection followed by the "chant of peace" of the Isa-Upanishad, "Purnam Adah" (see Chapter V), a Sanskrit litany to Jesus, the Lord, the Anointed of God, the Saviour, Son of Man, God-Man ; a verse from the Puranas affirming the supremacy of the Lord ; and finally the singing of the well-known verse of the Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad :

"From non-being lead me to Being,  
from darkness lead me to light,  
from death lead me to immortality".

This was followed by the reading of the Upanishad in two versions, its chanting in Sanskrit, a brief commentary, fifteen minutes silence and the fraternal exchange of thought.

The circular for the next meeting warned especially against the temptation to institute a premature comparison between Biblical and Sanskrit texts and judging the latter too hastily in the light of the former. It insisted strongly on the point that we were coming together above all to *listen* to what the Hindu scriptures mysteriously foretold of Christ—that "settling down to listen" recommended so

warmly by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam"! This would presuppose first of all, for the Upanishads as for the Bible, a very humble approach to the literal sense ; we must before all else try to understand in the Upanishad what the Hindu (not the pure exegete, nor the pure philosopher, but the spiritual Hindu open to both personal experience and living tradition) himself understands by it. The Christian interpretation of the Upanishads must spring from the authentically Hindu interpretation of them as a whole, like the topmost branches of a tree which reach up towards the sky only because they are supported by the solid trunk well rooted in the earth. To single out individual texts which seem more in harmony with Christian ideas, or even with the Western cast of mind, and indulge in "Christian" speculation based upon them would be to betray both Hinduism and Christianity.

The primary purpose of the Christian reading of the Upanishads in the presence of Christ was, as has already been said, to rediscover in ourselves the secret place of the rishis' experience, and then under the inspiration of the Spirit and by an existential process wholly personal to each one, to allow the Christian expression and Trinitarian culmination of this experience to find its full development in us. In the Bible itself, the revelation of Christ was only gradual : "Before Abraham was, *I am*", declared Jesus. But who knew him then? The revelation of the mystery of God was accomplished by progressive "unveilings". It began with Adam and will be completed only at the end of time. What the Christian finds in the Upanishads, if he reads them attentively is precisely an unveiling of this mystery which takes place according to the measure of his own growing sensitivity to the inner "voice". The mystery of Christ is not clearly revealed in the Upanishads any more than it was in the Old Testament ; moreover, the insights expressed in them do not bear upon the same aspects of the mystery as those of the prophets and sages of Israel. St. Paul boldly tells us that he did not know Christ according to the flesh. St. John, for his part, constantly invites us

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1 "Before speaking ourselves, we must first listen with great attention to the voice and even more to the heart of a man."

to contemplate the eternal mystery of Christ and his oneness with the Father in the Spirit. It would seem that it is into this interiority and transcendence of the mystery of Jesus that the spiritual tradition of the Upanishads should help us to enter.

Some would have preferred the reading of the Upanishads to take place in the morning, so as to form a preparation for that of the Bible, in the spirit of Advent. The Bible reading in the evening would then have stood out as the crowning point and fulfilment in the Word of God of all that men docile to the Spirit have sensed or conceived of him : does the Spirit not lead us to the Son, as the Son leads us to the Father? In the end, however, we kept to the order originally planned, and as it turned out the passages from the Upanishads read in the evening in the radiance of the morning's Biblical reading somehow found their fulfilment and completion in the Bible reading of the following day. It often happened that successive passages from the Bible and the Upanishads linked up with and illuminated each other in a wonderful way, without any deliberate planning of this on our part. It was like a continual ascent to the "high places" of the soul. "They shall go from height to height, and God will appear to them in Sion" (Ps. 84, 6 and 8) ; "deep calling on deep" (Ps. 42, 8).

It was moreover fitting that the Bible should come first, for the Christian approaches the Upanishads already enriched by his faith, his personal experience in Christ and the Church, and his sensitivity to the Spirit. It is his very habit of reading the holy Scriptures and recognising the inspiration of the Spirit in the writings of the prophets and the Apostles, not to mention some of the more unlikely pages of the history of Israel, that has made him capable of recognising the voice of God in everything—that Voice which fills the universe and all the ages of time as it fills the heart of man, making itself heard throughout the evolving cosmos and all the stages of history and even more mysteriously in the words of those specially privileged men who try to express in human language something of their intimate experience of God—the *patientes divina*, as St. Thomas, echoing Denys the Aeropagite, calls them.

Certainly if a Christian wants his study of the Upanishads to have any value at all, he must temporarily put aside, *en epoché*, not indeed his Christian faith, but at least to a great extent the conceptual expression of that faith, even more seek to free himself from conditioning by personal and sociological circumstances. He must see that he does not allow the concepts in which dogma and theology have so to speak encased revelation to obtrude themselves perpetually into his mind as he reads and confront those through which the Upanishadic experience is transmitted to him. He must first of all listen to the witness of this experience itself, trying to make himself totally transparent to it and assimilate himself to it as intimately as possible. Above all he must see that he does not refuse to accept the echoes and resonances this message will certainly awaken in his heart. He is not reading the Upanishads as part of a course in comparative religion, but in order to enter as authentically as possible into the experience which has moulded the religious soul of India. How otherwise could the treasures of this experience ever be added to the wealth of the Church and this precious seed providentially preserved by the Spirit spring up in the soil of the Christian soul, no less providentially prepared to receive it, to "bring forth fruit a hundredfold", in the words of the parable? (Mk. 4, 8). Is not Israel called to "suck the breast of kings", as Isaiah says so vividly, and how can a babe be fed by milk without clinging to the breast from which it flows?

It goes without saying that this attitude of mind does not in any way endanger the Christian's profound dispositions of faith, docility to the Spirit and self-transcendence in the depths of his soul. Only in Christian revelation is the Word which creates and redeems transmitted to man in its total purity, and the attitude of deep faith which makes the Christian a Christian, contains within itself all the essentials of the Advaitin experience: it is the Christian experience which normally brings the Advaitin experience to the full fruition in the heart of the believer; for it is everywhere and always through his faith in the revealed Word that the Christian hears and listens to the Spirit.

If this principle of *epoché* were accepted in advance by the whole group, it would allow of the greatest freedom in

discussion and the exchange of views, making it possible for each one to ask with complete liberty of spirit any questions or express any reactions aroused in him by the reading of the Hindu texts, secure in the knowledge that he was among deeply Christian brothers who all recognised each other as such : no one would dream of doubting another's faith on the grounds of inaccurate or clumsy forms of expression, still too much enveloped in Vedantin terminology to correspond perfectly with the precise though conceptually limited formulations of traditional theology. We would be able to think aloud together, submitting for one another's consideration ideas which might later turn out to be dangerous, the first uncertain steps of men emerging from the conceptual night of the Vedantin experience.

Such were the preparations for the meeting which took place at Nagpur between Christmas, 1963 and the Epiphany, 1964. Nagpur was finally chosen because of its central position. The Himalayas had certainly provided a magnificent setting, but the fatigue of the long journey weighed heavily on those who had to travel from South India. The house at Nagpur kindly put at our disposal by the President of the National Christian Council of India was very pleasant, sufficiently far from the noise and bustle of the city, with a large garden looking out over lovely country.

As on former occasions, the day began with the Eucharistic sacrifice. This was usually a Latin Mass sung in Gregorian chant, but we also had celebrations in the Chaldaean rite of Malabar in Malayalam and in the Syro-Malankara rite in English. Unfortunately our Protestant brethren had again to celebrate the liturgy and "break bread" separately before coming to unite themselves, by prayer and song, with our community offering. In the evening Compline sung according to the ancient English rite of Sarum brought us together once more in adoration and thanksgiving.

This time the meeting lasted for a whole week, from Saturday evening to midday of the following Saturday. The Archbishop of Nagpur, Mgr. Eugene d'Souza (since transferred to the newly created see of Bhopal) was present at most of our gatherings. He had just returned from the



second session of the Vatican Council at which he had made several courageous interventions. He gave us the warmest encouragement and, like the practical man he is, suggested several ways of increasing the influence of our group. The Principal of the History College of Nagpur, Dr. D. G. Moses, co-President of the World Council of Churches, also attended our conference as often as he could. Another very welcome visitor was the Anglican Bishop of Nagpur, J. W. Sadiq, himself recently returned from Rome where he had been as an observer at the Council.

The discussions were very free and devoid of all formality. We usually held them in the garden, sitting cross-legged under a great tree and changing our position from time to time to keep in the shade when their prolongation made this necessary.

### III. FROM THE KAUVERY TO THE HIMALAYAS

#### SHANTIVANAM

The Nagpur meeting was not the first of its kind. Similar gatherings had taken place the two previous years, at Almora and Rajpur and even earlier, soon after the death of Father Monchanin, at Shantivanam, an ashram in Tamil Nad on the bank of the River Kauvery. These meetings attracted little attention and the number of participants was small—several Benedictine monks called by vocation to a life of contemplation, a lay friend who was a frequent visitor and a priest, a professor of philosophy and comparative religion, who was following his own contemplative vocation 'in the world' in full agreement with the mind of the Church in our times. Nevertheless they seemed rich in promise for the future.

The central theme of these conversations was always mystical experience considered in its most typical form. Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists all testify to the reality of a supreme experience of the divine mystery to which the greatest among them attain. This undeniable fact poses a number of problems for Christians—first of all, perhaps, problems of apologetics, for especially in a country like India, which has such a rich spiritual and mystical tradition, the Church cannot hope to win a hearing from truly religious men and women unless she herself makes it quite clear that she too has a profound experimental knowledge of God. The problems in the theological sphere are even more serious. Surely Christians have a grave obligation to try to understand this presence of the Spirit beyond the frontiers they are only too ready to assign to His activity, and above all to discover the relation between the experience which the Hindu regards as ultimate and the experience of the Christian mystic. In the light of the teaching of Christ it would seem that the ultimate experience of God must be an experience of the mystery of the eternal generation of the Son in the depths of the Godhead and of the inexpressible "non-duality" of Father and Son. Apart from revelation, no man could attain to this fulness of experience: "no man knoweth the Son but the Father and no man knoweth the Father but the Son and he

to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him". Yet the mystical texts of India speak of "plenitude" and ultimate fulfilment, and it is not easy to refuse their testimony. One thing at least is clear: no solution can be found if we confine ourselves to the conceptualisation of Christian theology, useful and even necessary as these are in their proper place. It is from within that we must approach this double experience, seeking to realize in the depths of our own being both the immediate experience of the ultimate "non-duality" of existence which the Vedantin regards as the final goal of human life and the experience of divine sonship in the unity of the spirit which lies at the heart of our Christian faith. Only if we have this experimental knowledge will we be able to formulate an adequate theology of this presence of God at the very source of the personal existence of man, and so become capable of engaging in fruitful dialogue with our Hindu brethren. Solutions cannot be imposed *a priori*. Even if the instinct of our faith makes us sense from the very beginning of our effort at comprehension that the experience of non-duality is of its very nature ordained to the experience of the Father through the Son in the Spirit, this does not give us the right to dispense ourselves from inquiry—not so much rational as intellectual, in the highest sense of the term *intellectus*—until the formulations of our conceptual thinking correspond at last to the mystery which is dawning in our innermost beings. Only on these conditions will we be able to show our Hindu brethren that the Christian experience is not inferior to that of the Vedanta, but that without destroying or diminishing any of the essential values of that experience, it opens as it were, from within unto new depths of the unfathomable mystery of God.

The Shantivanam meetings took place in the peace and silence of the palm trees near the quietly flowing river. The day began with sung Lauds and Mass as befitted Benedictines. One year the night office of Christmas and the three Masses at midnight, dawn and noon were all sung.

In 1960, Shantivanam welcomed new guests. A providential contact between the Catholic ashram in the south and the ashram of Jyotiniketan in the north made it possible to invite to Shantivanam for a week of study and prayer a small group of non-catholic fellow Christians, most of them ordained ministers of their Churches: Anglicans, Presbyterians,

Congregationalists, members of the Church of South India and an archimandrite of the Russian Church. They came from ashrams, parishes and seminaries. Some were a little apprehensive at the prospect of crossing the threshold of a Roman Catholic ashram, but within a very short time all were completely at home. Proof of this was quickly forthcoming when even those who had cautiously arrived in formal European garb promptly shed it in favour of the simple Tamilian *dhoti* or long northern *vechti* which they had packed just in case.

The hospitality offered at Shantivanam was in the Tamilnad tradition: the guests slept, sat and took their meals on the ground, and the food was strictly vegetarian, as is the custom in an ashram. Morning and evening all gathered in the mandapam or portico of the chapel for prayer. This consisted of readings from the Bible, each followed by a psalm sung in alternating choirs and a prayer read or improvised by one of those present. The morning prayer was followed by sung Mass in which the Catholics of the village took part. Epistle and Gospel were read first in Tamil, then in English. In the evening, after the reading of the Gospel and recitation of the Magnificat, the offering of light—the *arati*—of Indian tradition was made to the chanting of the *Trisagion* and the *Phos Hilaron*, as at the ceremony of the Lucernarium in Christian Oriental tradition. It was also in the same *mandapam* with the doors of the sanctuary closed that we took our midday and evening meals in the manner of an agape and while the rice was served, we sang a Sanskrit hymn to Christ adapted from the Upanishads.

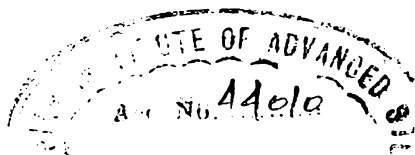
We held our meetings twice a day. We always began by ten or fifteen minutes of silent meditation. Then one of us spoke briefly on the theme for the day and discussion followed. These themes were always centred on the essential point: contemplative prayer, the most urgent need of the Church in India. Each one contributed his own experience and the light he had received in his constant meditation on the Word of God. Thus we spoke of prayer in its different forms, of the Eucharist . . . . One day the Orthodox member of the group introduced us to the grandeur of the "Prayer of Jesus". In the middle of the week we decided to observe complete silence from Compline until Noon of the following day, and this was a most fruitful period of our time together.

## Wider Horizons

In January 1961, Dr. J.-A. Cuttat, who had recently arrived in India as Swiss Ambassador, expressed the desire to bring together a group of priests and theologians interested in the problem of "dialogue in depth" between India and the Church. The experience of the meetings at Shantivanam and the resulting contacts made it possible for this wish to be realized, and arrangements were made for Easter week of the same year. The purpose was to enable these theologians to get to know each other so that they could freely exchange experiences and ideas, encourage each other in their endeavours and put an end to the isolation which so easily breeds discouragement.

We had no intention of trying to formulate resolutions or arrive at final conclusions. The territory in which we were working was far too little explored for that, premature attempts at formulation destroy spontaneity and can lead into perilous paths. We knew that a long period of maturation was necessary, and our desires and hopes remained modest. Our chief aim was to discover the main lines along which the Holy Spirit seemed to be leading India towards the Church and the Church towards India. We wanted this for our own sakes first of all, with a view to deepening our own contemplative life, without which no communication is possible in the world of grace; but even more we wanted it for the Church, and especially for those Christians who are less free to undertake these investigations for themselves, and who live in closer contact with popular superstition and the ever-growing materialism of our time, for they too must be helped in spite of everything, or rather through everything, to recognize the providential designs of the Lord for India and the ways in which He is inviting all Christians to co-operate in their realization.

It was decided from the beginning to confine these meetings to Christians. There could as yet be no question of beginning a group dialogue with representatives of Hindu thought and spirituality. Each of us, it is true, had had considerable contact with Hindus, though at very different levels, according to the particular circumstances of his vocation, and it was the sharing of these experiences that gave



our meetings their unique value. Nevertheless we were acutely conscious of our need for a more thorough preparation before we could think of meeting Hindus as a group officially representing the Christian Churches.

We all know how difficult it is to achieve an *epoché*<sup>1</sup>, however provisional, of one's own convictions—especially one's religious convictions: yet this is the condition *sine qua non* for all genuine dialogue. Without it, it is impossible to discover the thought of one's partner as it really is, its peculiar orientation and the basic principles from which it springs: one can only interpret what he says in terms of one's own mental categories.

If this *epoché* is not easy for a Christian, it must be plainly stated that it is far more difficult for a Hindu. The Christian, because of the very security which his faith gives him, can accept provisionally human reasons in the course of research or discussion based on positions which do not take into account the data of revelation. The Hindu, on the other hand, at least if we may judge by public statements, written or spoken, is rarely capable of carrying on a discussion which is not conditioned at every stage by an incredible conviction of the indisputable superiority of the postulate of Hinduism that rites and beliefs are purely relative, corresponding to the different stages of evolution and spiritual growth of societies and individuals, and that all converge on an ultimate mystical experience which is of course identified with the Vedantic experience of non-duality.

Frank recognition of obstacles obviously does not mean that efforts to achieve a desired end must be abandoned: they should simply be redoubled, and the Christian possesses in his faith and charity and the power of comprehension they give him all that is needed to render both possible and fruitful even encounters with a partner in dialogue who may not be as "free" as he is himself. Discussion between sincere and thoughtful Christians moreover provide an excellent preparatory exercise, even when all are not equally well attuned by grace or by temperament, to the spiritual values of Hinduism.

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1 *Epoché*: a bracketing-off or putting out of circulation, not to be confused with the "methodic doubt" of Descartes. Husserl defines it as "a certain suspension of judgment combined with a conviction of the truth which remains unshakable."

However such considerations would not have justified the inclusion of Hindus in our group of theologians. They could only have felt ill at ease in discussions which took as their starting-point the promise of faith that, in the designs of God, Hinduism tends of its very nature towards Christianity as its eschato-logical fulfilment. An unsought for experience we had at Almora amply confirmed this decision. If one of the participants is driven to retreat behind his defences and either relapse into total silence or perpetually emerge to give battle, the atmosphere becomes impossible for dialogue. It was therefore unanimously agreed that the hoped-for meetings between Hindus and Christians should be kept quite distinct from those of our own exclusively Christian group and that in planning the Hindu-Christian discussion great care should be taken to see that the participants on both sides were equally matched in all respects. We also agreed that the meetings should be confined to persons who were anxious to engage in real dialogue as opposed to parallel monologues, and who would therefore show genuine interest in and consideration for each other, and have it at heart to remain on a truly spiritual level without degenerating into either intellectualism or sentimentality.

### **Almora**

The first meeting of the group took place at Almora in April 1961. The Methodist Bishop of Delhi kindly lent us his house and friends who lived near saw to the preparations, including food supplies, for it must be admitted that though the position of the house was magnificent, its distance from the town created more than one problem in the material order. The site was unique, and we have never since found its equal. For our morning Eucharist we assembled in front of the house under an immense Deodar tree, and the backdrop of the altar, if one can so describe it, was the all but incredible circle of the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas gradually illumined by the rays of the rising sun.

The suddenness of the decision to hold this meeting had not left much time for detailed organization, and moreover no one felt he had the right to impose on others his own ideas about hours of work, rest or free time. The result was that the

inspiration of the more eloquent among us knew no restraint. Work-sessions encroached upon meal-times and the hour for the afternoon discussion period found us still engaged in conversation at the lunch-table. As for the prolongation of the evening sessions, the less said the better.

However, these interminable conversations never wandered away from the fundamental points we had met to discuss: dialogue "*from within*" between Hinduism and Christianity, reflection on the mystery of "interiority" which is so characteristic of the Indian approach to the divine, and the challenge offered to Christianity by the existence of an authentic mystical experience beyond its own apparent frontiers. All those who were present have a very happy memory of that simple and spontaneous sharing of thoughts and experience which enabled us really to "meet" one another and to deepen our mutual understanding to the point of recognizing ourselves in each other.

In spite of the almost uninterrupted conversation, an atmosphere of prayer reigned. We were aware of the Presence. There were no newspapers, no importunate visitors. Everything was centred on the essential, in complete freedom and mutual trust. Indeed, contemplation of the immense solitude of the Himalayas, our permanent horizon, could not fail to create in us a deeper and deeper sense of the ultimate Mystery. It was in these very mountains, according to Indian tradition, that the rishis lived—those holy men who were the first to hear and reveal to their brothers, the imperceptible murmur of its presence in the depths of the heart, like the murmur of the streams which wind through the Himalayan gorges, scarcely noticed by travellers along the higher slopes but swelling continually as one descends towards the torrent until at last it drowns every other sound in its all-pervading thunder . . .

The high point of our meeting was the day on which each one was invited to tell the others, in a spirit of simplicity and fraternal union in the Lord, what he himself as a Christian had learnt in India, how India had helped him personally to understand better the Mystery of Christ—in a word, to describe the impact on his spiritual life of his encounter with India. The idea was not to reflect in an academic way on what India could or should contribute to Christian spirituality,



but to say what in actual fact she had given to us whose vocation it was to travel as pilgrims along her paths in our ascent of the mountain of the Lord.

One of us said he had first come into contact with India through books and also through some esoteric European acquaintances. Through reading, meditation and the practice of Yogic concentration he had become aware of hitherto unknown areas of the psyché in which he had discovered a dimension of interiority, not only psychic, but religious and still more spiritual, whose existence the bourgeois Christianity in which he had been brought up had not even led him to suspect. The confrontation of this superficial Christianity by the deeply spiritual Hinduism into which he was now initiated could only result in a loss of all personal interest in the rites, customs and conceptualizations of his traditional religious observance. It was only later on, when he was introduced to Orthodox spirituality and above all to the Prayer of Jesus, that he discovered in Christianity too the profound values which India had revealed to him and which, but for her, he would never have known. As he loved to put it, for him grace had come through India.

Another had also felt in his contact with the scriptures and holy men of India the vertigo of the vast abyss, but one day, in the very depths of the non-duality of the created and uncreated spirit that the Upanishads and the confidences of holy men had revealed to him he heard as though from an even more inaccessible abyss the voice of the Father calling him to be, in the Son, himself both son and creature . . . This invitation had drawn him into a secret place, far deeper, it seemed, than the rishis' "cavern of the heart", whose existence no man can even suspect if he has not received the revelation of the Trinitarian mystery: the interiority of the Spirit, the "non-duality" of Father and Son. The Vedantin night, he concluded, is surely a royal and incomparable path by which to enter into the ultimate secret of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

Someone else said that he had found in the life of the Hindu monks a witness to the Absolute and a detachment whose equal he had never before met except in the greatest of the Fathers of Christian monasticism. It seemed to him that through them God was calling him first of all to a more

complete and more essential self-stripping within his own monastic tradition, and later on, perhaps, even to a kind of monasticism which would seek to rediscover the spirit of the Fathers of the Desert, freed from the institutional forms imposed on it in the West, which would at last bring the traditional *sannyasa* of India to its eschatological fulfilment in the Church.

Yet another had arrived in India with all the paraphernalia imposed on him by the missionary society to which he belonged. Then he came into contact with the poor of India and with some disciples of Mahatma Gandhi who were serving them in humility and poverty, leading a life whose total authenticity gave him pause. In these servants of the poor of India he seemed to rediscover the Gospel, the good news, the call to service and to love uttered by Christ to the crowds in Galilee, lived with a rare sincerity. He understood that Christ was already here if not yet recognized by the name revealed by the angel, at least in the reality breathed by the Spirit . . . . He realized then that it was not for us, too often blinded by esteem for our privileges as Westerners and Christians of long standing, to claim that we were bringing Christ to India with us, in our luggage, so to speak. If we really wanted to lead the people of India to the Paschal illumination of baptism and acceptance of the Church's testimony, we must first of all, whatever the cost, live the Gospel of the *Beatitudes* at the level of the people and in full communion with them always remembering as well the instructions given to "missionaries" by Jesus Himself when He sent the seventy-two to announce His coming (Luke 10, 1-7), at the level of the people and in full communion with them. This was the inspiration which had finally led him to live in prayer and service, poverty and humility, among poor illiterate peasants on the banks of the Ram-Ganga.

Another of the group was living among Bengali university professors and students. He too had experienced very intensely the mystery of the One-without-a-Second, and protested vigorously whenever anyone used any expression to describe the relation between God and the creature which seemed to him to endanger that fundamental intuition or border on an impossible dualism. However what he spoke of to us that morning was the impression made on him by

the piety, or *bhakti*, of the people among whom he was living, and the reverence with which they venerated the *murti* or forms under which the divinity is represented and worshipped in their temples. He helped us to understand that truth that is hidden under the "idol-worship" which in India at least does not deserve the unqualified curses called down by the prophets of Israel on the Canaanite and Babylonian cults. He explained to us the religious and even contemplative meaning of the worship of "signs", and told us how "idol-worship" had made him enter more deeply into the mystery of the signs which the Church uses to transmit grace and concretize, so to speak, the adoration of the People of God—and especially that essential sign which constitutes the Church, the Eucharist.

The last speaker—for it is not possible to quote all—told us of the admiration aroused in him by the devotion of the Marathas. His studies had familiarised him with the great mystics of Maharashtra, especially Tukaram, the peasant who composed magnificent psalms to the glory of his Lord. He described how, following in Tukaram's footsteps and singing his "gradual psalms", he had accompanied the crowd of pilgrims who come every year, sometimes from great distances, to the sanctuary of Vithoba at Pandarpur. He too helped us to understand the religious value of *bhakti* and realize that the Lord conceals himself under the humblest of signs to meet his own and lead them to the very heart of the mystery in which He dwells.

So each one gave his own witness of *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) or *karma* (Service), each according to his particular gift and his personal vocation—each too according to the special circumstances in which Providence had placed him.

Two conclusions stood out more and more clearly as the days passed. The first was that the Lord is already in India, and we need not imagine, poor feeble creatures that we are, that it is we who make Him present. Our role is to help the holy seed which has been sown by the Spirit in the hearts and traditions of India to germinate, or better, to put ourselves at His service to cultivate this seed in the very earth in which He has planted it, and according to the conditions of development which He Himself has laid down.

The second conclusion was that India has received from her Creator a very special gift of interiority, a unique inward orientation of the spirit, and that no presentation of the message of the Resurrection has any hope of awakening an echo in the heart of India unless its own essential interiority shines forth in such a way as to penetrate to those secret depths (Ps. 31, 21) in which the Lord has willed to hide His chosen children of India. By "presentation of the message" is meant not only the direct preaching of the Gospel, but the whole life of the Church which should be a perpetual revelation of that message: her rites, her institutions, her prayers, in a word, the whole way of life of the Christian people and above all of those who are the leaders and the "chosen portion" of that people.

Another and quite unexpected result of this meeting was our discovery of each other as Christians. It had originally been intended to bring together a group of exclusively Roman Catholic priests and theologians. However, the memory of Shantivanam had led to the proposal that a few non-Roman friends should also be invited. No one dared to refuse, and so the wonder occurred.

All of us, Protestants and Catholics alike, had of course had previous contacts with members of other Christian confessions on the human and even the theological plane, but here at one swoop we passed beyond all such levels. The call of the Spirit to that inner depth of the self which is the grace and as it were the special mission of India, heard and responded to together, had led us to recognise each other as Christians at a hitherto undreamt of depth of inwardness and truth. We knew each other as brothers in Christ on a level at which all apparent differences were in a manner transcended. "It is like the *Anamnesis*<sup>1</sup> of the early Church, before the divisions" said one of the participants. "Or a prophecy in the Spirit of unity restored," added another.

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<sup>1</sup> *Anamnesis*, a Greek word which means *memory* or rather *memorial*. It is a remembering which actualises and makes present what is remembered. Compare the use of the word in connection with the Eucharist and its liturgical use for the part of the Canon which *recalls* the divine work of our Redemption.

Each of us however preserved intact his own theological convictions and confessional loyalty, for it was precisely as holding these convictions and belonging to one's particular denomination that we expected to be recognized by our brethren as a sincere and authentic disciple of Christ. Yet each of us also felt very strongly that the deep commitment to Christ which underlies the division of Christians into separate groups is something far more important than all their differences and even oppositions on the institutional and confessional level. It cannot be doubted that when all Christians and all groups of Christians now separated from each other become aware of the depths in which their faith in Christ is rooted—that dimension of interiority on which India insists so much—the theological and institutional differences which keep us apart will appear in a totally new light, and their solution will at last become clear to a Church undivided henceforth in fact as well as in principle.

So, face to face with India, and through the grace of the Lord radiating through the religious thought and the spiritual experience of India, Christians themselves became more deeply conscious of their unity in that same Lord.

### **Rajpur**

The following year we were the guests of the Presbyterian Retreat and Study Centre at Rajpur at the foot of the Himalayas on the road from Dehra Dun to Mussourie. This time it was not the remote peaks of the mountain-chains that formed our horizon, but their lowest slopes and, to the south, the plains stretching into the limitless distance.

The choice of a place was of great importance for the success of our meetings. To enter truly into the spirit which should animate them we had absolute need of isolation from the world, absence of noise, an atmosphere of peace and recollection and a sufficient remoteness to discourage visitors who might lack the necessary preparation. All this Rajpur offered us, though in a completely different setting from that of Almora. Moreover—and this was an advantage we greatly appreciated—all the material arrangements were looked after by the management of the Centre.

The programme for Rajpur was more fully worked out than at Almora. We had decided to have a fixed time table, and in the evening, whether we felt like it or not, we interrupted our after dinner conversation to read the Bible and sing Compline. A definite theme had also been chosen for each session taken from Hindu spirituality in the morning and Christian spirituality in the evening. After a presentation, which took from twenty to thirty minutes, discussion and exchange of views began and sometimes continued without interruption for two hours at a stretch.

The first meeting put things into focus. The conclusion drawn from Almora had been the necessity for us as Christian to integrate into our own life of faith the dimension of interiority so characteristic of the Hindu spiritual approach. This naturally led to the question : "Can Hindu interiority be taken over by the Christian just as it is?"

On the one hand, Christianity is a historical religion : it is founded on events dated in time—the birth of Jesus under Caesar Augustus, his teaching under Tiberius, his execution under the procurator Pontius Pilate. Can history be "interiorized" without losing its temporal nature? For the Hindu, history never has more than a symbolic value, and the "incarnations" of Hindu mythology verge on Docetism.

On the other hand, Christianity is essentially an "encounter" between man and a personal God. Can this encounter too be interiorized without vanishing altogether into the a-personalism of the Advaita? Again, the Christian experience is based on man's recognition of his sinfulness, and begins with repentance. In the absolute interiority proclaimed by Hinduism there is no place for real sin, and therefore none for a true repentance.

Stated in these terms, the problem is insoluble. The questions with which the Hindu experience confronts the Christian by the very fact of its existence send him back to the philosophical principles on which he has based his theology. His concepts of time and creation, of person and encounter, especially demand a fresh and more thorough examination in the light of the experience of the East. There is here no question of replacing Western concepts by Eastern ones, but rather of trying to enter more deeply into both in order to discover first of all the *terra firma* of the experience of the

*intellectus*, and then the valid, but not necessarily the only possible, development of that experience.

The first Hindu teacher whose spiritual approach was presented to us was Shankara, the master *par excellence* of the Advaita. For him the ultimate spiritual experience is the experience of the Self, the One-without-a-Second, the *Atman* which is identical with Brahman. This supreme Reality cannot be represented by any concept: the ascent to the Real is the way of pure negation: “*neti, neti*”—“not this, not this”; all that passes away is simply appearance, and therefore cannot be the Real in itself. In that Reality there is neither duality nor diversity: the supreme experience is of pure non-duality—there alone is truth.

The created world is neither real nor unreal; it is *maya* without substance, like the shadow that flits across a cine screen. It has no value except on its own level, for one who has not yet discovered the Real, the Self in its essential truth.

This truth of Existence can be known only through revelation (the scriptures) or experience. Reason cannot guide one to it, still less action, ritual or otherwise. The Self shines by its own splendour: the experience of the Self *is*. No path leads to it, none ever reaches it. All that a man can do is to free himself by following the way of renunciation and negation from all the “illusory” attributes he has “superimposed” on the Real in itself which he himself fundamentally is.

Another type of pure Advaitin was Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Arunachala or Tiruvannamalai, who died in 1950. He had no philosophical training and to begin with, no knowledge of the scripture. Only several years after the experience which transformed his life did he discover that it was the very experience described in the Hindu holy books and the writings of the learned. There was moreover nothing in his psychological make-up to suggest that it could be explained in terms of the spontaneous eruption of an overburdened subconscious. One day, at the age of seventeen, he had a sudden conviction that he was going to die. He decided, with complete intellectual detachment, to experience to the full this act of dying which so closely resembled falling asleep. He allowed every distinct thought to vanish

from his mind and consciousness, until consciousness itself alone remained, concentrated on one central and unique point : *I am*. Every attribute of that "I" had also disappeared : nothing was left except sheer awareness of existence in its crystal purity and limitless plenitude.

Can this experience that *I am*, the Vedantin experience *par excellence*, be taken over by Christianity ?

It has been said that "the Christian experience is, or at least starts from, the awareness that *I am not* (the sense of the nothingness of the creature, the less-than-nothingness of the sinner)". But is such an affirmation of non-being ever possible ? *Who* says "I am not" ?

The experience that *I am* is the most fundamental experience of the conscious being, which dominates every other experience. That was why Ramana centred all his spiritual doctrine and all his teaching on the simple question : "Who am I ?" "Who are you ? Discover who you really are and the rest will infallibly follow."

The Christian transcendence of Maharishis' teaching must be sought along another line, in the depths of the inner silence where the experience of existence makes itself felt beyond the utterance of any word, even the word "I". For the man whose inner ear is attuned to the murmur of the Spirit this silence resounds with the voice of the Father uttering Himself in His Son and calling into being in that Son all that exists : "Thou art my Son"—the primordial *Thou* which answers to the essential *I* of Existence.

The Bhagvad Gita reflects all the fundamental tendencies of Hindu spirituality—so much so that teachers of the stature of Shankara and Ramanuja could write commentaries on it which practically contradict each other.

The Advaitic experience is somewhat rare, at least in its extreme form : it was therefore necessary to provide for the ordinary believer a spiritual path more within his reach, and the Gita lays most stress on the way of love and devotion. It also wisely takes note of the fact that to aim at total non-activity would be to pursue a chimera, a Utopian dream, and what is needed is to do all that we have to do—the performance of ritual ceremonials, the various actions demanded by daily life or circumstances—simply because it is commanded by the Scriptures, out of disinterested love for



the Lord alone, without looking for any personal advantage whatever. This, according to the Gita, is the surest way of achieving liberation and passing to the Lord at the hour of death.

It is often said that the Gita contains the richest and profoundest treasures of the Hindu spiritual tradition : it is certainly the most widely-read book in India. But it should not be read in isolation from that tradition as a whole ; least of all should one concentrate only on certain passages, or even single verses, which seem to be more obviously intelligible.

It is also said that the Hinduism of the Gita can be more easily "Christianized" than that of the Upanishads. Certainly its insistence on love, loving surrender to the Lord and disinterested action seem familiar to the Christian reader. But it must not be forgotten that even in the Gita the personality of the Lord is dangerously insubstantial : moreover, traces of a latent pantheism are constantly in evidence, and disinterested action as it is here understood would exclude even the desire of ultimate beatitude. In short, the "way" of love and of works advocated by the Gita, no less than the radical Advaita of Shankara or Ramana Maharshi, demands a radical renewal and transformation from within before it can become a truly Christian "way of salvation."

On the last morning we were invited to reflect upon the spirituality of Shri Aurobindo. His distinctive intuition was that in the supreme experience the manifold cannot be separated from the one, and that humanity is moving towards a state of consciousness in which the divine, in the form of the "supra-mental", will invade the world of the manifold. Aurobindo would have nothing to do with the ruthless renunciations and negations of the Advaitin path : the being of man in its entirety, including his body, must be assumed by the divine by means of an ascesis which Aurobindo called "integral yoga".

Some may be disconcerted by the conceptual imagery in which these intuitions are expressed. However, no attempt at a "Christian transcendence" of the Advaita can afford to neglect the thought of Sri Aurobindo, any more than it can neglect Ramanuja, for whom the Advaitic experience as formulated by Sankara remains only a stage on the way to the ultimate experience.

The Christian spiritual teacher studied as a parallel to Shankara was Meister Eckhart who also sought to attain to the mystery of God in the depths of the self by following a path of negation and total nakedness, refusing to make use of concepts or feelings or any kind of support from within or without : for him, nothing but God could be an image of God ; nothing but God could be the way to God.

Once it has arrived at this perfect purity, the soul discovers the purity of her own essence in the very mystery of God. She can no longer distinguish herself from God. Hence arose the paradoxes in the Master's teaching which led to his trial and condemnation—a trial which one cannot help feeling, might well have had a different outcome if it had been conducted in an atmosphere freed from human passion and by persons with a less academic understanding of theology.

Eckhart, it is true, sometimes seems to imply that the "Godhead" in some way transcends the divine Persons. In this he was a victim of the Latin Trinitarian theology which took as its starting point the divine nature and so proceeded to the Persons. Such a theology was incapable of expressing what he had experienced of the "deep things of God". What drew him irresistibly was the mystery of the Father as the ultimate source of the Trinity, "before" to use an impossible expression, the Son was born of Him—the *shunya* which has so fascinated Buddhist contemplatives : God "before" He is anything that can be uttered, not yet Father nor Son nor Spirit, God "before" He can even be called God. It was here in the mystery of the unmanifested and the wholly ineffable that Eckhart discovered also his own pure essence "before" he existed at all. He was not the only man of his age to experience this particular kind of fascination, and no one will be tempted to dismiss it as some kind of intellectual game who has ever been drawn by the Spirit into the mysterious regions which lie beyond the reach of all the "clear and distinct ideas" which men devise for themselves when they begin to think about God.

After Eckhart we discussed Eastern Christian spirituality which is much closer in spirit to India than that of the Latin Church. If Russian monks had evangelized India, they would not have needed any of the complex and far too

rationalistic "adaptations" which Western Christians not infrequently feel themselves obliged to adopt : the witness of their life and words would have been sufficient in themselves.

Hesychasm, for instance, and the "Prayer of Jesus" which goes with it, embody methods of ascesis and contemplation which are perfectly familiar to India. The Prayer of Jesus has its counterpart in the *nāma-japa*, the continual repetition of the name of the Lord, and Hesychasm, like Yoga, makes use of certain bodily postures and ways of breathing to promote recollection.

The Prayer of Jesus, uttered at first with the lips and tongue, should gradually become more and more interior, invading the consciousness and finally taking up its abode in the heart. Then the soul is established in God, and no evil thought can find entry, for the Prayer has taken complete possession. Only he who has experienced it can describe this peaceful penetration of the Name of Jesus into the heart.

From another angle, the three stages of this ascent may be described as the contemplation of nature, contemplation of the Scriptures and entry into the mystery of God. This is the highest point of the spiritual life, the coming of the Holy Spirit which we ask for everyday in the "Our Father" under the name of the "kingdom of God". Simeon the New Theologian and, closer to our time, Seraphin of Sarov have left us unforgettable accounts of this final possession by the Spirit.

This experience, however, could never be expressed in the non-dualist terms of the mysticism of the Vedanta or Master Eckhart, for at the same moment the soul realizes herself so intensely as nothingness and sin that the invocation to Christ the Son of the living God spontaneously ends with the cry : "Have mercy on me a sinner". Moreover it is not confined to the individual who prays : the whole Church and indeed the entire universe are included in it, in the communion of the Spirit.

Gregory of Nyssa offers the rare spectacle of a theologian who fearlessly set himself to study the writings of "pagan" philosophers. This made it possible for him to express his own Christian experience with unusual felicity in categories of thought borrowed from Plato and Plotinus.

For Plotinus the *noûs*, the intelligence of man, was divine. Gregory, enlightened by Genesis, sees it much more accurate-

ly as the image of God. For him, the whole of man's spiritual life consisted in the effort to restore this image to a perfect resemblance to its archetype. In the tension—*epectasis*—of this effort, man is united to God. "One cannot know God save in the impossibility of knowing Him." "Desire of God is itself the vision of God". The Christian life is an endless ascent, an irresistible and spontaneous movement towards the divine essence which ever remains hidden, for even in the next life the *epectasis* continues unceasingly, through the eternity of cons. At last the soul surrenders to God, and having thus attained to existence beyond all possession, she possesses Him in the abandonment of all possessing, in the ecstasy of pure love.

The contemplation of Gregory of Nyssa, like that of Hesychasm in later centuries, is Christ-centred, ecclesial and cosmic. A spirituality based on the notion of the *image* of God could hardly have been anything else.

In the final conference at Rajpur a parallel was drawn between John of the Cross and Shankara on the one hand, and Teresa of Avila and Ramanuja on the other.

In John of the Cross we find in essentials the approach of Shankara, without of course his philosophical foundations : apophatism, detachment, negation—the doctor of the "Ascent" and of the "Nights" preaches them relentlessly. The *all* is to be found only in the *nothing*. Like Shankara, he invites us to penetrate to the "deepest centre" below all the superficial levels of the soul. However in this deepest centre of his heart he finds no impersonal and aloof Absolute, but the transcendent life of the Blessed Trinity, in which the transformed spirit of man is invited to share . . .

As for St. Teresa, she, like Ramanuja, is more drawn to the way of devotion. She knows that the Lord lives and abides within her. All her desire is simply to rest her head, like Magdalene, against His feet.

We parted from each other with the determination to continue our research on this essential integration of Hindu interiority and Christian spirituality the following year. Many problems had been raised during this session. Before they could be solved they needed to mature in our minds and be pondered in our prayers.

## IV. THE GENTILES IN THE BIBLE

The Biblical texts for the morning sessions were chosen to help us to understand in the light of the Word of God the "manifestations of the Spirit" (I Cor. 12,7) in a non-Christian or rather pre-Christian land. The Old Testament it is true sometimes speaks very harshly of "the nations" implying that they are all doomed to massacre and extermination on the "great day" of the wrath of Yahweh or at least to perpetual slavery within the restored kingdom of Israel. However it is not difficult to find here and there in the Bible texts which have a very different ring and it is especially to these texts that the Spirit seems to be drawing the attention of Christians to-day when the Church finds herself with a certain astonishment, in the midst of an *oikoumene*, a known and inhabited world, stretching to the utmost limits of the earth. It is surely very significant that one of the most remarkable books of the Old Testament bears the name of a dweller in the land of Hus, and therefore a non-Jew, and that this pagan was given by God as a model of patience to his own people. Again, when Ezechiel wishes to give an example of three just men capable of checking, if possible, the anger of God, as Abraham once did in the case of Sodom (Gen. 18, 22 ff.), whom does he name? His first choice is Noe, who was, it is true, the remote ancestor of the chosen people, but with him he ranks the "man of Hus" already referred to, the Arabian sheikh Job, and the mysterious Daniel, the Canaanite king whose reputation for wisdom was still a living tradition in Palestine (Ez. 14,14). The master-craftsman chosen to cast the pillars and the sea of bronze and fashion the vessels and other utensils destined for the cult of Yahweh is Solomon's temple was none other than the "resident alien" Hiram Abi, son of a Tyrian (2 Ch. 4,16). Nor should we forget that the Lord willed to include in his earthly genealogy not merely just men and women but also prostitutes, not only Jews but Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite. Some may be tempted to say that these are very insignificant pointers, yet who would dare to set limits to the mystery contained in the Word of God?

## The Priests of the Gentiles

The first scriptural texts proposed for our meditation were those which speak of Melchisedech, whose memory the Holy Father was just then recalling in his homily at Bethlehem. Melchisedech is mentioned in Genesis (ch. 14), in the Psalms (Ps. 110) and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 7). He was both king and priest, King of Salem and priest of the enigmatic El-Elyon, a title explained by the translators of the Septuagint in the form "the Most High God". Abraham bowed down before him to receive his blessing, and offered him tribute. In the person of Abraham all the holy people of Israel and the priestly order of Aaron thus did reverence to the priest of the cosmic testament and offered him the sign of their submission (Heb. 7, 7-10). Later on it was revealed to the psalmist that it was "according to the order of Melchisedech" that the Messiah himself would be a priest, and "a priest for ever". The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews was to see in Melchisedech a kind of antitype of the Son of God; while the Roman liturgy recalls the memory of the Melchisedech in the anamnesis of every celebration of the Eucharist, and asks that the offering of the people of God may be as acceptable to Him as that of the priest who blessed Abraham.

Yet who, after all, was Melchisedech but a Canaanite priest of the "cosmic religion"? He exercised his priesthood independently of any mission received from the *debar* Yahweh, the "Word of God". He worshipped according to the rites and traditions of his own people, and had never received any revelation like that given to Abraham. Was he so very different from those Vedic priests, his contemporaries, who were even then offering sacrifice to God in accordance with their own traditions in the high places of the Himalayas and the plain of the Ganges, or from their successors by natural descent or ritual initiation who continue to adore God under the name of Shiva the Beneficent at the foot of Mount Kedarnath or upon Arunachala, the flaming mountain of the Dravidian countryside? Should we not rather call him their brother?

Of course it will always remain possible for certain exegetes to minimise the significance of these passages, but that

does not alter the fact that it can hardly have been without the connivance of the Holy Spirit that this stray text, which cannot be attributed to any of the known sources of the Pentateuch, was included in Genesis, and that the figure of Melchisedech exerted such an extraordinary fascination over the psalmist, the author of Hebrews and the first generations of Christians.

According to the Bible itself, then, we must go back beyond the Mosaic liturgy and priesthood to the priestly cult of the cosmic order to find the first foreshadowing of the unique sacrifice of the Saviour and the liturgy of the new covenant, and it is precisely in view of its eschatological completion in the Church that this cosmic liturgy is already pleasing to God, "a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim", as the Roman canon so daringly says.

This surely means that we are invited, whenever we are present at the religious ceremonies of India, to open wide our minds and hearts to discern, beyond the vivid sights and sounds which meet our senses—the perhaps out-dated symbols, the formalism, even the superstition—the very reality which these liturgies in a mysterious way foreshadow. If we find certain aspects of them difficult to integrate into this perspective, we should perhaps remind ourselves what the Jewish cult was really like before the great feasts, with the temple transformed at times into a slaughterhouse, and reflect upon some of the prayers from the Psalms which the Church still puts upon our lips, in spite of the reluctance of our Christian hearts to utter them.

The parallel text of Malachy (1, 11) was not studied in detail at Nagpur: it had been examined at Delhi a few months earlier. The full and prophetic Eucharistic meaning of this text was certainly ratified by the Council of Trent, but this is simply a supplementary proof of the presence in the cult of the Gentiles of the Christian eschatological mystery under the form of prophecy and sign. There can be no doubt that the prophet actually had in mind the offerings which daily rose to the Most High Lord, the God of heaven, from the eastern boundaries to the western limits of the Persian empire, of which Palestine then formed a part.

The offering of the heart is of far greater worth in the sight of God than any ritual offering, which can never be

more than a sign. Whenever such an offering rises to the Lord from a sincere and truly devoted heart, it is surely a foreshadowing of the mysterious sacrifice of the Lamb, known obscurely from the very beginning, but clearly revealed only in the final Pasch.

### **The Treasures of the Nations**

The second Biblical conference was devoted to Isaiah (chapter 60) to which were added a few parallel texts from the same prophet and also the verses from the twenty-first chapter of the Apocalypse which echo it so strikingly.

Foreigners will rebuild your walls  
and their kings will be your servants (10).  
The sons of your oppressors will come to you bowing,  
at your feet will fall all who despised you (14).

It must certainly be admitted at once that some verses of the sixtieth chapter of Isaías directly envisage the ascent to Jerusalem of the nations and their kings as slaves, bowed beneath the yoke and destined henceforth to serve Yahweh and his people in virtue of the right of conquest, like the Canaanites who had escaped destruction when the People of God took possession of the Promised Land (Jos. 9) :

But that is by no means the whole story. First of all, the nations will come freely to adore God in Sion and seek to know his law (Is. 2,4)—the sons of the stranger will be allowed into Yahweh's house of prayer, their holocausts will be received upon his altar (56,7; cf. also 19,21, 24-25; 18,7).

Even this is not all. In those days, their wealth will become the wealth of Yahweh and of his temple and his people. They themselves will form part of his treasure and his splendour :

All the flocks of Kedar will gather within you,  
they will come up, for acceptance, to my altar,  
to adore the Temple of my glory (7).  
The glory of Lebanon will come to you. . .  
to adorn the site of my sanctuary,  
to glorify the resting-place of my feet (13).  
You will be suckled on the milk of nations,  
suckled on the riches (Heb. : breasts) of kings (16).



Such texts and other passages of Scripture clearly show that the Church must *receive from* the nations, not only materially, but spiritually. Certainly no one would dare to limit to the material order the increase of beauty and glory that will come to the new Israel through the entry of the Gentiles into its fold. In baptism, the Church does not incorporate into herself and unite to the Pleroma of the risen Lord anonymous bodies and souls, but persons individually called and "named" by God, who have been prepared by him with divine solicitude for this day, and who bring with them into the Church all the cultural and spiritual wealth they have accumulated.

to adorn the Temple of Yahweh,  
to glorify the resting-place of his feet.

Moses himself, after all, was providentially led by God to the court of Pharaoh and instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians so that, when the time came, he could use it for the benefit of his people, the "people of God".

By way of conclusion, there is in the following text an image of unequalled daring and power to which reference has already been made :

You will be suckled on the milk of nations,  
suckled at the breasts of kings.

One does not suckle the breast of an enemy or a slave—it is to a mother's breast that one clings,

to be suckled, filled, . . .  
savour with delight her glorious breasts (Is. 66, 11),

to receive that food sacred above all others which she has prepared from her own substance to nourish her babe. It would be impossible to find a more forceful way of expressing what the Lord has hidden in the very heart of the nations for his new people of Israel.

### Everything Written

Tuesday morning was devoted to those passages of the Gospel in which Jesus makes his disciples realize that the sacred texts of the Old Testament were "Written of Him". The most striking of these passages is this verse of St. Luke: "Then he told them, this is what I meant when I said, while

I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms has to be fulfilled" (24,44-45).

The Gospel is, however, full of such references to Scripture: "This was done in fulfilment of what is written . . . ." For instance, in St. John: "Because all this happened to fulfil the words of Scripture" (19,36), "After this Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the Scripture perfectly he said, I am thirsty" (19,28).

It is certain that Jesus, as man, read in the Scripture the detail of his Father's will for him, the way in which he was to carry out his mission of redemption. He meditated on the Psalms, and it was by quoting them that he invited the scribes to recognize him (Ps. 110,1, in Mt. 23,43-45). On the cross he again applied Ps. 22 to himself: "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" and also Ps. 31: "Into your hands I commit my spirit". He had also pondered the writings of the prophets, and knew himself as the "servant of Yahweh" described by Isaias and as Daniel's "son of man": throughout his life it was his great pre-occupation to fulfil exactly all that had been foretold of him.

It was not only in the Scriptures of his people that he discovered his Father's will: he found it inscribed in all the circumstances of his incarnation in time, in his cultural, racial and family background, in everything that "defined" him in space and time and "concretised" him, so to speak, as a man and as *this* man—man and son of man yet unique among many brethren. Since he saw all these things as the expression of his Father's will, he was an obedient son to Mary and Joseph and, as he grew up, a faithful though not formalistic Jew, making no attempt to escape the obligations imposed by his human birth on the grounds of his mysterious origin (Mt. 17,23 ff; cf. Ph. 2,8ff). He simply carried out his Father's will as he read it day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, in the great book of human history, made up for him as for other men by the seemingly insignificant events of ordinary life.

Yet it was above all in the religious traditions of his people, all oriented towards himself, and in their sacred writings in which all that was written was written of him, that he found the clearest and most precise indications of his Father's

will. He recognised it too in the spiritual disposition of the leaders of that people.

During the discussion someone objected that the Lord could not be bound, even by the Scripture: He is himself the Lord of Scripture, and if he offered himself to the Father in the sacrificial act of the Pasch it was "because he willed it" (Jn. 10,18), because of the twofold and yet unique love that burned in the depths of his heart for his Father and for men, his brothers.

There is surely no real difficulty here. Neither the creation of the universe nor the historical circumstances of the incarnation can be considered in abstraction from the great work of the Pasch to which the whole course of human history is oriented and which is, in the designs of God, the determining cause of all things. If the history of mankind and the conditions in which God became incarnate were such as they were, this was because Jesus himself, for whose sake they existed, had also to be such as he was, because the love which is identical with the very being of the Father could be adequately revealed to man living in time in no other way. We can say, then, that Jesus as man read in the Scriptures what he himself had, as God, written in them "before the foundation of the world".

In the Church the Lord continues his work of gathering up all the life and toil of succeeding generations into his unique and definitive "passing to the Father": she is, therefore, the extension to all times and places of the incarnation of the Son of God which actually took place as a historical fact in one determinate place and time. It naturally follows from this that the Church, like her Lord in his mortal life, is invited by God to read the will of the Father for her in all the historical, social, and cultural conditions in which she finds herself on earth at any given point in space or time. It is through the men in whom she is now embodied, through their traditions, mentality and language, that the local Churches, in whom the whole universal Church is present, must try to discover the specific will of God for them, and so show forth in time the mystery of their eternal vocations realizing the "new name" by which they are to glorify the Blessed Trinity. It is clearly by studying, not only the racial and psychological characteristics, but ever more the spiritual

and religious preparation of the peoples whom she has been sent to draw into the Passover of Christ that the Church must learn the form her incarnation among them should take. This will be especially true of those peoples who have been particularly favoured by God.

It cannot, therefore, be doubted that the Church in India must read, in the presence and in the name of the Lord what is "written" of her in the cultural and religious traditions of India, since in the mystery of the Spirit they have all foretold and prepared for her coming. She will discover in the scriptures, which are the source of these traditions the special form of glory she is called to give to the Lord, for as was said of Abraham in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, and as the liturgy repeats of each of her confessors, each one is unique and irreplaceable in the mystery of the Love of God.

Certainly in this mysterious passage to the evangelical order of faith some things will have to be purified and pruned away, "so that the branch may bring forth more fruit" (Jn. 15, 2). This was true even of the law of Moses, which had nevertheless been revealed by God; it is obviously even truer of the scriptures of the "Gentiles".

The Biblical text chosen for the following day would provide us with the key to this Christian transposition and sublimation.

### **The Veil to be Lifted**

This text was the great passage from the second epistle to the Corinthians (chapters 3 and 4) in which St. Paul explains that the Jews have as it were a veil over their heart when they read the Old Testament which prevents them from perceiving in it the true meaning intended by the Holy Spirit and the mystery of Christ which it foretells. The apostle adds that when a man turns to the Lord, the veil falls away. Only Jesus can open the minds of men to understand the scriptures (Lk. 24, 45) just as no one but he has power to "break the seals of the Book" (Apoc. 5, 9).

The Christian in his faith will also say of the scriptures of India that they too will find their full and definitive meaning in Christ the Lord and the Pleroma that is inseparable from him. As St. Paul says in the same passage, the Lord is Spirit,

and it is the Spirit who leads to Christ. All that is luminous in the scriptures of India can only have been put there by the Spirit in preparation for the "coming" of the Lord—the Spirit who "searches all things, yea the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2, 10). The Spirit is the Revealer of the Lord, and there is no time and no place in the universe in which He is not carrying out his mission. This mission has its origins in eternity. The first sign of it in time was his brooding over the primordial waters at the very moment of creation (Gen. 1, 2). As Revealer of the Lord in the very mystery of his Person, the Spirit unveils him little by little to men in the measure in which they are capable of receiving him. It was only when the Word of God had himself become man and made known to his brethren in human language the secret of his life in the bosom of the Father that the Spirit could at last reveal in its full splendour the mystery which He had hitherto been able to reveal only gradually and in a hidden manner. As St. John reminds us (7, 39), the Spirit could not be given in his fulness until Jesus had been glorified. Scripture also gives us to understand that the gates of heaven—the heaven that is "above" and the heaven in the depths of the created spirit—remained closed until Jesus had himself entered them through the veil of his body (cf. Heb. 10, 20).

The "fulness of time" will come for India too, when the Upanishadic "revelation" at last unfolds its final and eschatological meaning, and the sign of its coming will certainly be a son of India who has gone down by the path of the rishis and the seers of old into the depths of his own being to the place of the great Experience, and there encountered in that deepest centre of the self the glory of him who has said: "From the depths of darkness let light spring up", and been transformed by the glory of God shining in the face of Christ into that same glory (3, 18; 4, 7). It will be a Christian such as this, a steadfast believer in the Lordship of Christ and at the same time an authentic heir of the fathers and patriarchs of the India of the Spirit, who will be the true cornerstone of the Church of India, setting the seal upon the predestination of his ancestors.

Such a Christian reading of the Upanishads is strongly reminiscent of the constant "re-reading" of the earlier Biblical texts by the inspired scribes of Israel, of which we find so many

traces in the Old Testament. For as the voices of the prophets were gradually listened to, and the sages became more docile and more attentive to the Spirit in their meditation, the ancient texts were illuminated for them by a new light, and revealed secrets which earlier generations had been incapable of discovering. The climax of this process of re-reading was the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Then the Lord came. The Apostles, guided by his teaching and inspired by his Spirit, received at last in all his fulness (cf. Jn. 7, 39; chapter 14 ff.), penetrated into the words of the Old Testament to depths beyond the reach of any prophet. The church in her turn, in her liturgical prayer, has continued to read the psalms and the prophetic books with fresh eyes, unsealed by the Spirit, finding there, century after century and people after people, ever new treasures of praise and adoration and an ever deeper understanding of the intimate mystery of God. St. Jerome's Vulgate is an especially authoritative witness to this kind of Christian re-reading of the ancient prophecies.

It is the same with the Christian who takes up the sacred texts of India. For him, however, there can be no question of contenting himself with rapidly and superficially adapting to his own beliefs certain isolated words or phrases, after the manner of the *peshva* in which the scribes of Qumran took such delight. It is the very thought of the *rishis* that he must seek to discover, assimilate and enter into, opening it up from within, so as to set free all that the Spirit has destined it to *signify*, and liberate it from the limitations necessarily imposed by the pre-Christian stage of thought in which it was formulated. And this can never be achieved unless the Christian is willing to enter into and dwell in that "cave" of his own heart where the experience of non-duality wells up and where, more mysteriously still, the Spirit murmurs to his spirit that he too is a "son" (Rm. 8,16).

### **The Plenitude to be Achieved**

The Thursday morning session was centred on the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, with reference to the parallel texts of Ephesians.

These texts reminded us once more that nothing in heaven or on earth can escape the primacy and plenitude of Christ our Lord. "All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth" said Jesus before leaving this world. Paul explains in this epistle, as John was to be in his Gospel, that this primacy and plenitude existed even before the Incarnation; the supremacy of the Lord transcends time. He is himself the Beginning, he in whom all things were willed, predestined, realised, called into existence and to grace. He is also the End, on whom all things converge, in the cosmos and in history as well as in the life of each individual. In Him all things *subsist*, everything holds together. He is the ultimate and only explanation, the *raison d'être* of all that is and all that comes to be. It is in him that everything comes from and returns to the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 15,28). All the fulness of the godhead dwells in his theandric being, as St. Paul says in the extraordinary ninth verse of the second chapter of Colossians.

His Church proceeds from him and is in turn his own "fulness" or completion. He has reconciled all things to God, snatching them from the power of darkness, in heaven and upon earth, and the Church is precisely this gathering-together of all men and all other creatures, the realisation, or "recovery" on earth and in time of that plenitude which is the very mystery of God and of eternity.

All things in the universe are already bound up together and interdependent, for all were contained in the original atom from which the cosmos developed, and all will be found once more, fulfilled and as it were sublimated, passed from the state of sign to that of reality, or *res* in the final consummation. This is no less true in the spiritual order, of which the cosmic order is simply the sign and substructure. Here too everything expresses an original and ultimate unity; everything comes from the returns to total plenitude. All things are in movement towards the eschatological recovery of the glory of the Lord and the universal assembly, "all together in one"—which the ecclesial and Eucharistic assembly prophetically signifies and sacramentally proclaims.

All the generations of men, all empires, civilizations, religions, traditions, intuitions of sages and contemplation of seers exist for the sake of the Lord. Nothing can withdraw

itself from his dominion, nor escape from the impulsion of the Spirit which bears everything, on earth and in the heavens, towards the consummation or recapitulation of all things in Christ, who will at last be "all in all" (Col. 3,11) and even more mysteriously, with and in Christ, in God. (1 Cor. 15, 28).

It was hardly necessary in our group to insist on the importance of these texts as a help in recognising the presence of the Lord everywhere in the world, his pre-existence, so to speak, in the cosmos and in human societies even before his coming upon earth; his presence, too, in those who, though living after his resurrection, have not yet been effectively touched by his message and his "calling together" in the Church.

But the point especially brought into relief during the discussion which followed the reading of these texts was that this recapitulation of all things in Christ is essentially a work of separation, of reconciliation with God and of grace, as St. Paul himself says, a work of "snatching from the powers of darkness". Insistence on the positive values of Hinduism and the Upanishadic tradition must not mean that one fails to notice or neglects their deficiencies. The "enemy" has passed this way too (Mt. 13,29) and sowed cockle in the Lord's field and in many hearts, unfortunately, he has found favourable soil. It would not be according to the Christian faith and the teaching of the scriptures to expect a smooth and effortless ascent of man and the universe to God; it is his lack of emphasis on this point that prevents Teilhard de Chardin's magnificent vision from being entirely convincing. The Cross is at the centre of history, and nothing can come to God save through the Cross of the Lord. Sin is a reality which has set its seal on the whole human family and only too often spoils the greatest achievements of man. On the other hand the revelation of sin—for without revelation how could man really know himself to be a sinner?—has itself made man understand the depths of his own being and the real meaning of his existence as a person. As the tempter quite rightly pointed out (Gen. 3,5) he is, if one may so express it, God's equal in the determination of his eternal destiny. This means that each man has an inalienable part to play in the final restoration of all things in Christ, which can be achieved



only by the active co-operation of every individual in the redemption wrought by the Saviour. Man must take a personal part in the Pasch—the “passing over” to God—by going completely beyond himself, beyond, so to speak, the utmost limits of his possibilities as man and as creature. In the mystery of faith and of repentance he must deliver himself totally into the hand of God (Ps. 31,6; Lk. 23,46) and in a kind of “transformation into grace” of his whole being surrender himself completely to the will of the Lord.

The passage from the Vedantic experience to the experience of the glory of God in Christ Jesus, of which we had spoken on the previous day, is not possible without this leap of faith. There is here a break in continuity, and grace alone can enable a man to reach “the other bank” (Ep. 2,14). But this leap is indissolubly both act of God and act of man, though it cannot be regarded as the composite effect of two distinct and complementary powers “added together”, so to speak. In the Paschal order of things, all is “theandric”, at the same time wholly of God and wholly of man.

The closer a spiritual experience comes to the ultimate revelation of the Glory, the greater will be the danger for him who receives it of refusing to make this transition and rejecting the true and living God, under the pretext of safeguarding “his” experience of God. Anything which has not passed over into Christ remains in danger of falling back into darkness, for as the Isha Upanishad reminded us the same day, “deeper is the darkness of him who thinks he knows than that of him who is simply ignorant”.

The closer one has drawn to the splendour, the more profound will be the darkness: the sin of Lucifer, the son of the dawn (Is. 14,12).

Apropos of this text and the one we had discussed the evening before someone asked whether we Christians, and especially those among us who are ministers of the Gospel, are really living and obvious witnesses of the Glory, the shadowless reflection of its splendour : do we truly transmit the radiance which comes forth from the Father and seeks to “penetrate to the utmost parts of the earth”, illuminating the whole universe and all those who inhabit it until it “increases unto the perfect day” of the heavenly Jerusalem? Only if that light shines within our own hearts, transforming

us from within, can we hope to pierce the darkness and become a source of light, leaping up from the depths of our being to illumine those of our brothers who still "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk. 1,79): a borrowed light, merely reflected from without, is not enough. Too often the chief reason for the failure of our apostolate and the lack of response to our proclamation of the Gospel is simply the absence of this light which we should not only bear but be, "sons of light" that we are by our very vocation, as St. Paul again reminds us (Eph. 5,8).

## V. THE INTUITIONS OF THE RISHIS

For the Upanishads we chose a *lectio continua* in preference to the reading of isolated texts. We took the Isha and Kena Upanishads, which are the first two of the canonical series and moreover seemed especially suitable for a first attempt at the contemplative reading in an ecclesial assembly of the sacred texts of the Vedanta.

In the first place they are short and relatively easy, at least in their general lines. The great primitive Upanishads, the Chandogya and the Brihadaranyaka, are certainly incomparable witnesses to the awakening of the soul to the mystery of being and of the self, and these earliest formulations of that experience have never been surpassed. They are, however, very long and their message is often inextricably entangled in psychological and cosmological reflections which are somewhat disconcerting for a modern reader. The Isha and Kena Upanishads belong to the period immediately following: they repeat the authentic message of the great Upanishads, but in a form that is more condensed and easier to assimilate. Above all they hardly touch upon the problems which the next generation was to raise. The Upanishads of the third period, the Mundaka and the Katha, for instance, are extremely interesting, and it was agreed that they should certainly be meditated upon at length in later meetings. However, even though they faithfully transmit the essential message, they introduce new problems and speculations which later developed into the philosophical system known as the Samkhya. The mystery of the person, *purusha*, then pre-occupied the minds of thinkers and interfered with their meditations on *atman-brahman*. They were groping after the mystery (not yet clearly perceived as such) of God as the "other", dimly discerned both in and beyond the mystery of the *advaita-ekatvam*, the unity and non-duality, of being: a problem which neither the thinkers of India nor those of any other country in the world will ever be able to solve satisfactorily until they have been illumined by the revelation of the "face-to-face" of Father and Son in the essential *ekatvam*, the very unity of the Spirit. These Upanishads, then, are also admirably suited for a Christian re-reading and it is certain that Christian readers will feel much

more at home with them at a first encounter than they would with the more ancient texts. However, it seemed better to begin with the Upanishads which reveal to us the *atman-brahman* in all the strict rigour of the Advaitic formulations which admit of no compromise. In this way we would avoid the temptation of superficiality and lay solid foundations for a Christian interpretation of the Advaitic experience.

No attempt will be made here to give a translation of or continuous commentary on these Upanishads, and any quotations given will be more in the nature of a gloss. Everyone can read and meditate on them for himself, if not in the original, at least in the very competent translations now available. The thoughts suggested here, a summary of what was said at Nagpur, aim above all at helping the reader to share their essential institutions and prepare the way for the contact which cannot fail to be established between his soul and that of the seer who has condensed in them his own immediate experience.

### **The Which is Beyond All :**

The Kena Upanishad can be regarded as the teaching of a guru seeking to awaken the mind and intelligence of his disciple to reality, punctuated here and there by the reflections, expressed or imagined, of the pupil.

However, no one should expect to find here a sequence of propositions logically deduced one from the other. The verses—and this is even truer of the Isha—are rather a succession of intuitions, whose logical connection is not always obvious to one familiar only with the heavy step tread of the concept. The logic of the Upanishads is of quite another order. In them everything—words, order of words, sequence or non-sequence of ideas—is aimed rather at shattering the accepted categories of perception and judgment in which man finds himself so much at ease. These categories, do, it is true, transmit an echo of the Real, but just because this echo is already so satisfying in itself, they very often prevent a man from going further and throwing himself headlong, so to speak, into total Reality. But it is precisely this passing beyond everything which satisfies that the Upanishad is trying to bring about: Therefore it seeks by a series of con-

tacts, touches or shocks to reach the very soul of a man. Words, images and symbols, even the harshness of style and the unexpected vistas suddenly opened up onto different levels of the macrocosm and microcosm—are charged with secret and powerful currents which reach us down the ages, transcending time, space and cultural differences, spring up from souls which have already touched the “depth”, seeking an echo and resonance in the depths of other souls, digging, piercing, like an inexorable diamond-point, until at last they reach the depths and the awakening occurs the attaining of the archetype, the direct contact of self with self, beyond any image or created intermediary whatever. This is why purely intellectual disciplines will always be an inadequate preparation for understanding the message of the Upanishads—at least as inadequate as they are in helping us to receive the message passed on to us by Isaiah or St. John. It is with the heart alone that a man can “hear” it, having first put himself into those conditions of receptive awareness in which it was originally received by the rishis of old.

In a word, the Upanishads do not seek to instruct, to impart conceptual knowledge, ideas to be stored up in some corner of the memory. Their aim is to help the disciple himself to reach the fundamental experience which defies every attempt at conceptual expression, to put him into the attitude of mind and heart which will make him capable of this experience. This means freeing him from everything that his reason tirelessly *superimposes*, all the symbols of conceptualisation under cover of which he seeks to “possess” Reality, leading him little by little to that state of total peace and relaxation, pure receptivity and awareness, conceptual emptiness of mind, of heart and of will and simple transparency, which alone will make possible the manifestation within him of Reality itself in all its plenitude.

The first question which the guru in the Kena Upanishad asks, or rather invites the disciple to ask himself, is : “What is it that is at the root of thought, of breath, of speech, sight and hearing ? What is at their origin? What sets them in motion?”

The Vedic tradition attributed to the *devas* (the *dei* or *theoi* of the Mediterranean peoples) all the energies active in the universe and in man. The *devas* were supposed to rule

over the elements and the powers of nature and the biological and mental activities of man. India had in fact discovered wonderful correlations and correspondences (the original sense of the word "Upanishad") between the various levels at which these powers and activities manifest themselves, parallels all leading towards the ultimate parallel—the supreme *Upanishad*—between the most interior principle in man, the *atman* and that of the cosmos as a whole, *brahman*. "Who then is the *deva* who gives impetus to sight and hearing? Who harnesses them? Who is the source and origin of their functioning?" And the guru invites the disciple to go back to the eye of the eye, the thought of thought, "the seer of sight, the knower of knowledge", as the Brihadaryanaka Upanishad had already said, "that which sees in the eye, that which breathes in breath, yet which the eye cannot see, nor thought think, nor breath stir", "the seer unseen, the hearer unheard, the thinker unthought", as the same Brihadaranyaka adds.

However, far back man tries to go in analysing his biological or psychological functions and the physiological and mental activities in which he reveals himself to himself, he finds in the end that his path is blocked and he can go no further. For these functions including thought, the highest among them are incapable of returning to their origins and discovering their source. Like man himself when he tries to grasp himself in his empirical consciousness, they are aware of themselves "in act" but the impulse which put them in act eludes them.

Behind the *devas* of the psychological or cosmological order there is another *deva*, as it were, a power which is greater than them all. They themselves are *devas* human or cosmic activity, only by participating in this primordial *deva*, this universal and original power. It is this ultimate mystery of being that is called in the Vedic tradition *brahman*. Whatever the etymological or primitive meaning of this term, in the Upanishadic period it stood above all for the mystery, the ineffable reality which lies hidden behind all things and yet penetrates all things, that which is at the origin of all that is, the absolute beyond and at the heart of the relative, the limitless beyond and in the heart of everything that is limited, the sacred and the numerous Presence which is to be found in the ultimate secret of all things.

From verse four onwards the Upanishad is a real litany of triumph, the chant of the successive discovery of Brahman in the depths of and beyond each of the *devas*, sight, breathing and hearing. "*It is this which is Brahman*", repeats the guru tirelessly, after the manner of a refrain, "and not what a vain and ignorant people imagines and adores as such!"

There comes a moment in the interior life when we have to pass beyond everything, even the world of concepts, which, while it helps us to know God, "the Reality of the Real" (Br. Up. 2, 1, 20), no less surely conceals him from us. God is nothing of what man conceives of him, nothing that man experiences of him. In this "nothing" alone, in pure and naked faith, is he truly found. This is the teaching of John of the Cross, who had learnt from his own profound experience the truth of what all he said: "He has risen he is not here". He is not in the tomb where men thought they would shut him in, keep him to themselves and venerate him at their ease. The grave-cloth and bandages in which the soul in its love had wrapped him are still there, but he has escaped—nothing could hold him back. The heavy stone no human power could move without the help of grace has been rolled back—the angel of the resurrection made it leap from its place as though by the merest touch of a finger.

The Lord himself has risen at last, and in the recesses of my own being, beyond the reach of any idea I could ever have formed of him, at a depth whose very existence within me I never even suspected.

"Woman, whom seekest thou? The living among the dead?" As though the living God could be contained within rigid concepts. And thou, living by his own life—why dost thou tarry on these superficial levels of thy being, where thou seekest to touch and "feel" him? Truly he is risen and has appeared to Simon—Simon, the son of Jona, whose faith upholds the Church—and to thee, in the depths of thy self, in pure faith.

I fell asleep, and was as though sunk in profound slumber. Now in my awakening I have discovered God, and in the mystery of God, the truth of my own existence.

But his Brahman cannot be reached by any *deva*. He is other than the known, yet far above and beyond the un-

known. The second chapter of the Upanishad plays magnificently upon these paradoxes:

“If you think : I know him,  
in truth you know very little of this Brahman,  
of what you are of him,  
of what there is of him in the *devas* .  
He is not known by him who knows him,  
not understood by him who understands.  
he alone contemplates him who has ceased to contemplate him  
In all knowledge, as though by intuition,  
The wise man finds him.  
It is in him alone, the *atman*, that each one is strong,  
It is knowing him alone that one becomes immortal...  
A great loss it is, in truth,  
for him who does not attain him here below.”

Such then is the ultimate mystery of man: such is the true nature of divine and sacred reality which must be turned to and sought after in lofty contemplation; and not the simple projection of their own minds with which men too often rest content, and which never leads them to Reality itself.

Chapter takes up the same idea, under the form of an extraordinarily striking fable.

The *devas* were proud of themselves, their powers and their achievements.

Did they not, by means of the external senses, put the whole universe within man's grasps? Intelligence and physical strength were progressively bringing the entire cosmos under his control, the infinite smallness of the atom no less than the infinite vastness of space. Had not man, by his power of thought, given meaning to all that he perceived in the world, and by his power of thought created yet other worlds? Through consciousness had he not become aware of himself in all the mystery of his personality and his freedom ?

The *devas* ruled supreme in the cosmic and psychological orders. They quite naturally attributed to themselves the credit for everything that took place there.

To put them to confusion and make them realize their “vanity”, Brahman one day appeared before them. But the *devas* did not recognize him. They asked each other who this “spirit” could be.



They deputed Agni to find out: Agni, fire, is the sensual or physical power, say some of the commentators.

Brahman asked Agni: "Who are you? What can you do?"

"I am Agni", he answered, "Jatavedas, he who knows the origin of all things. Nothing upon the earth can escape my power. I burn everything."

"Very well, burn this", said Brahman simply, and threw in front of him a wisp of straw.

Agni flung himself with all his strength upon the straw. He could not burn it. He went back to the *devas* and admitted his defeat.

Vayu was sent in his turn, and the wind, the vital power of man, too boasted of his strength in Brahman's presence.

"Then lift this", answered Brahman, throwing before him the same piece of straw. But blow as he would, the wisp of straw did not stir.

Indra, the king of *devas*, then approached the apparitions—Indra, the power of the human mind, thought, consciousness, the culminating point of the universe attained in man. But when Indra drew near Brahman, Brahman vanished.

Nothing in the cosmos or in man has power, strength or activity apart from That, That One, who is at the origin of all power and who is at work in every act, cosmic as well as human and when man tries in thought merely to recognize this power which is behind everything, beyond everything, within everything, the "phantom" or idea which the *deva* had conceived of this "spirit" has already disappeared. He eludes every thought of man.

"Other than thinking, beyond non-thinking,  
unknown when he is known,  
recognised only when all has disappeared".

At that moment, the fable goes on in the ethereal space from which Brahman had vanished a brilliant shape appeared, Uma, the daughter of the snows. Indra asked her, "Who was that 'Spirit' who has just disappeared?"

And Uma revealed to him that it was Brahman. "Through him 'alone', she added, you *devas*, won your victory, your dominion over the world and over man. It is through him alone that you have any right to be proud".

Uma is the highest wisdom, the fine point of the human spirit at the supreme limit of the intellect, in contact with both the world above and the world below, with the depths of the soul which remain for ever unfathomed and the powers or manifestations which reach out into the visible world. Uma is not unlike what Sri Aurobindo in his vision of the world calls the "Supra-mental"; she is the "spark" of which the medieval mystics spoke, and even perhaps a sign of that "Pneuma" of New Testament thought which reveals to our spirit as though from within the secret of its origin in the bosom of the Father (Rom. 8, 16).

Even the name of Brahman, the Absolute, can only be received by man. Of himself he is incapable of discovering it. There must be as it were an intermediary between this "ineffable" and the consciousness of man, between man in the depths of his being and the manifestation of himself in his faculties of knowledge and action. Of this intimate mystery nothing can be formulated, says the Katha Upanishad, except that "it is" — "asti" (6, 12) ; "*Tad etad iti*, it is that ! alone can be said of this ineffable supreme felicity..." (5, 14), in truth this joy and peace which follow in the soul upon even a secret contact with Brahman (cf. Kena 4, 3). In his effects alone is the presence of Brahman known.

When a Christian reads this Upanishad and reflects upon this mysterious and brilliant form appearing in the centre of the heaven of the soul, shining with the radiance of the vast solitary snows and revealing to man all that can be said of Brahman, the Absolute, his name—how can he fail to think of the light which gradually filtered into the minds of the inspired scribes of Israel and prepared them for the final Revelation ? That light enabled them to discern more and more clearly the mystery of the presence of Yahweh, the *shekinah*, of his glory, *qabod*, of his holiness and his being-wholly other, and soon also of his wisdom. Was not this wisdom, brilliant and almost personified (Wisdom 6, 12) like a sign of the double procession in the depths of God, of the Son who, himself proceeding out of the mouth of the most High (Wisdom 24, 3) would reveal through human lips and in human language the very name and secret of God, and of the Spirit who opens the ear of man from within to hear this

word and makes him understand this name, henceforth written in the depths of his own heart (Apoc. 3, 12)?

The fourth chapter concludes the Upanishad. What is the sign of the presence of this Brahman on the level of human perception?

"It is (the cry) : Ah ! (that one gives) when the lightning flashes, Ah ! when the eyes have blinked !

A flash of lightning : Ah ! The eyes blink : Ah ! That is all. Brahman has passed. We did not see his face, for that is impossible, but we felt his presence, and in some mysterious way a man is never the same again, because of the touch of Brahman.

There follows a further attempt to explain the nature, of the self at the level of the *atman*. The sentence is obscure, but in the light of II, 4, it may be paraphrased as follows : the self is that towards which thought is habitually directed, as though by a perpetual "recollection", the power which constantly orients thought from within itself.

Is not God Himself that Reality, truly present in the inmost depths of our spirit, though inaccessible to our Consciousness, soliciting and irresistibly drawing us to Himself? It is true that all the words, concepts and images we make use of in our attempts to express this presence are hopelessly inadequate and leave us with a sense of frustration and too often we even succeed in emptying out the mystery of what He has Himself revealed of it to us. Therefore, when the "lightning flash" comes, our mind is conscious only of a great emptiness : our spirit no longer seeks to encounter God as a Presence : all forms have vanished, it succeeds in grasping nothing but itself. The Lord then makes Himself known far more as an Absence than a Presence. He is in everything, yet He is beyond everything. Spontaneously, tirelessly, thought seeks to discover Him. But, as the Upanishad says, when thought reaches the place where it hoped to apprehend Him, He is already gone. Then there remains within the mind the memory of that "lightning flash". Convinced though she is that "*That*" is beyond her grasp, the soul nevertheless tends ceaselessly towards it. She is powerless, consumed by the interior flame of this absence which is a Presence, in the darkness which both hides

and unveils the light springing up from her inmost depths now that she has consented to be henceforth only darkness.

The Upanishad continues : the hidden name of *That*, this indefinable Brahman, is "*tadvanam*", "that desire", "that delight", or rather "the desire of That", "the delight of That".

"In the depths of all things, as that which attracts all desire, in the depths of all things, as that which fulfils and gives all joy".

"Master, tell me now the Upanishad", asks the disciple at this point, hoping no doubt to receive some additional instruction, some further ideas by means of which he still incorrigibly hopes to reach and know Brahman.

"You have heard the Upanishad", replies the Master in a tone of finality. "Truly, we have told you the Upanishad of Brahman !"

Indeed, what more could be said ? He who has known this "lightning flash" in the depths of his being—he alone has really "heard" the Upanishad of Brahman. Truly there is no other sign of Brahman than this lightning flash !

With the method of the guru of the Kena Upanishad one cannot help comparing that of Ramana Maharishi. To the disciple who came to ask him for instruction the sage never failed to reply by the same question : "*Who* are you ? *Who* is asking such and such a thing ?"

The disciple was not expected to answer by giving his name, or that of his family, purely exterior things which, moreover, we know only from other people. The Maharishi wanted him to compel his thought to withdraw into itself, in order to discover the thinker. This was not to involve a dialectical analysis of the idea of the self, but an interior movement of the spirit seeking to get as it were behind its immediate level of consciousness, which should be repeated as long as necessary. The moment could not fail to come, the Maharishi declared, when this consciousness "in search of itself" would vanish forever as though by magic and the essential and unique "I" would shine out alone in the firmament of the soul. Ramana did not even envisage the arrival of an Umapada to enlighten Indra for in the very instant of the

awakening of the "I", intelligence, thought consciousness, itself vanishes.

The Upanishads, as has already been remarked, are not "works of reference" or "bags of ideas" as we say today : still less is the Indian guru a man who has passed an examination and obtained his teacher's diploma. He is one who *knows* by personal experience, and is capable of establishing contact with the inmost soul of his disciple and mysteriously communicating to him, by his "grace" that very experience. The disciple, must be so pure, transparent, open and docile—*docibilis* (Jn. 6, 45)—that the words uttered by the guru penetrate to the very depths of his heart to become within him a perpetual source, like a fountain of living water.

The aim is not to discover the superficial "me" which, like every else material or mental, is inexorably drawn into the current of cosmic evolution. What one must try to recognise and bring to the surface of consciousness is the real "me", the true mystery of the person. This real "me" is certainly inseparable from the mental and bodily conditions of its manifestations in the universe, yet it infinitely transcends them and enjoys such liberty in their regard that even death can leave it unaffected. This is surely the mystery of the "new name" by which God calls each of us in a unique and irreplaceable way, to existence and to glory—His own Existence and His own Glory.

Having given this call to man, God does not allow him to stop halfway on the road to the discovery of the self : this is the meaning of time. He will not permit the creature whom He has invited to be eternally a "son" to remain for ever on the surface of himself, identifying himself perpetually with his own physiological or social function in the unfolding of the universe and of history, nor will he allow him to stop at the forms and signs under which he lives his relationship with God, his "religion". In mysterious ways He intervenes, making man aware of feeling of inner frustration even in the midst of his greatest successes in the physical, intellectual or spiritual order. For none of this is God : it is merely a sign of His presence, nor is it really man. Intoxicated with admiration at their own achievements, the *devas* forgot that there is a mystery even greater than themselves.

Then God in His mercy sends his messengers : night, darkness, suffering, incapacity, failure in the eyes of the world. He makes a "sign" to man, and waits. The devas are disturbed by this sign which they do not understand, and which appears like a phantom on their limited horizon. Who is this newcomer? What does he think he is doing? Why does he interfere? Everything was going so well without him.

Popular religion itself finds it perfectly natural to rest content with rites and formulas. "Let there be an agreement between God and us! We will offer Him all the sacrifices He has prescribed : then let Him leave us in peace. He can give us a nice simple catechism and a theology with very clear ideas and well-defined formulations of belief. We will be only too happy to profess, for example, that there is one sole God in three Persons, that the Word became flesh, died and rose again. But let Him limit His demands to this, and not expect these formulas to have any repercussions in our consciousness or in our lives!" Popular religion consoles and satisfies man : only too often it empties out the primordial restlessness implanted by God in his heart.

The secret and irresistible drawing into the unknown poses questions which remain for ever unanswered—he who thinks he understands, understands nothing but his own thought. The only hope lies in allowing oneself to be drawn, for refusal to die is itself a death from which there is no resurrection.

From the depths of the soul, from the silence at the source of being, rises the ultimate question : "Who am I?" This very question is the revelation of Brahman.

This question reduces the spirit to the silence which is itself Reality and Truth, the silence from which the Word is uttered in the bosom of the Father, as Ignatius of Antioch reminded the Magnesians. But this Word is uttered and heard at a level of the self which transcends the phenomenal consciousness. It is no longer a Word born of human thought or the human mind, but the very Word in which all things originate, the Vedic OM, the primordial utterance. . . The Word, the Logos, in whom all things were made, in whom at the dawn of eternity if one may so express it, the

Father, the Source and Beginning, became aware of Himself.

This attainment of the Self is the attainment of supreme Bliss, for Bliss, *Ananda*, is as the Taittiriya Upanishad says the inmost depth of being, the primordial sheath of the Self, the *atman*. Bliss is constantly identified by the Upanishads with immortality, the ultimate object of desire of all conscious beings. "Know and venerate That as *tadvanam*," "that delight", concludes the Kena Upanishad. Towards this all creatures tend. He who has found this Bliss in himself has truly become the centre of the universe, a centre in the unique Centre, radiating everywhere, from his own plenitude, this plenitude of Bliss, *tadvanam*, *Ananda*, a living source of love and joy for all who desire to come and slake their thirst.

He alone is a true guru who has discovered this source within himself and is, therefore, capable of becoming in his turn a source for others.

It is hardly necessary to make more explicit the Christian mystery which can be traced like a pattern wrought in filigree-work throughout this Upanishad.

There seems to be yet another parallel which could be drawn: the stages by which the Kena Upanishad raises thought above its own natural level to a mysterious higher region is somewhat reminiscent of the general trend of what are known in the West as the "proofs for the existence of God", but in the East the thought which discovers a region beyond itself makes no attempt to "think" or name this "beyond". It is simply *That tad*. It is certainly described as supreme Bliss, and also as a lightning-flash, but what more can one say of it? To name It would be to lose It. No one would even dare to say that thought and *That* confront one another: for who is left to think *That*? Where could one find in thought a thinking other than *That*? This, however, does not amount to an affirmation of identity, for that in itself would be a thinking, and Brahman would once more have escaped.

Advaita, non-duality, the Chandogya Upanishad had said, as indicating a simple negation of any discrimination, a recognition of the inability of thought to reach beyond itself. The Isha Upanishad speaks of *ekatvam*, unity: but does this mean any more than the universal and unique

presence of *That*, the Real in itself, which in the end is the only thing perceived by the wise man in everything he perceives? Here we meet once more the dividing line already noted between the spiritual attitude of the wise man of the West and that of the wise man of the East. They both discover in the depths of their souls a mystery which is beyond their comprehension. The first has no rest until he has named this mystery, this "Beyond", or at least tries to compel it to reveal its name like Jacob at the torrent of Yabboq (Gen. 32, 38) ; above all he will never forget that he is standing *before* it, whether it be in the pride of his manhood or the adoration inspired by the revelation of his creaturehood, or the humility which forces him to realize that he is a pardoned sinner. When the son of the East comes into contact with that Mystery, he can only be silent : even to adore it would be necessary to think of himself as somehow "apart" and in in the secret and infinite spaces of the heart, what thought can now come to birth?

It is certainly true that it was in the West that God revealed himself to man in His final and personal self-manifestation. Otherwise how could He even have been heard? Undoubtedly too it was to prepare for this "hearing" of the Word that the Lord allowed the religious thought of the West to take the direction it did, in spite of the risk of its deviating into quasi-dualist modes of expression which would empty out the mystery no less effectively than the pantheism of which the East is so frequently accused. However, it seems that the time has come to reintegrate into the Christian consciousness the complementary approach of the East, so that these two modes of experience may converge in the hearts of Christians, mutually purifying and freeing one another from the limitations each unavoidably entails. The ideal prototype of the complete experience is the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, at once supreme unity in the Spirit and source of that very unity, the mysterious "face-to-face" of Father and Son. Can we not say that the Church will not reveal the Mystery in all its fulness until she has at last integrated into her own spiritual experience, in the person of her Indian children, this dimension of ineffability and non-duality which the Spirit is holding in reserve for her in them?



## All in All

The Isha Upanishad is especially celebrated. It is the first in the series of canonical scriptures, and is very brief—a simple chapter and it is written in verse. Some of its shlokas border on paradox and it does not easily lend itself to attempts at *a priori* synthesis. Though it faithfully echoes the purely Vedantic teaching of the earlier Upanishads, it also shows some recognition of the path of “works”, thus preparing the way for the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita. What is even more important, it uses the masculine pronoun in speaking of the Absolute, the “*Tad*”, “*That*” of the Kena, and it shows scant respect for the *vidya* or knowledge to which too many so-called sages allow themselves to become attached.

The more difficult verses of this Upanishad will not be lingered over here, any more than they were at Nagpur. As with the Kena, we shall simply try to bring out its essential points and obvious teaching. Our purpose will be, as always, to penetrate as deeply as possible into the thought of the rishi and to share as far as it is given to us to do so, in his actual experience.

The Kena sang of *That* which is beyond all things, so far beyond that the mind cannot even discern it to gaze upon it and prostrate before it in adoration. Man founders, as it were, in his own being in his efforts to reach out in thought to that Beyond.

The Isha sings of the All-in-All, so deeply within that there remains to man nowhere inside himself where he can discover himself. In recollecting himself and seeking the “centre” of his being he founders just as inevitably: “*Purnam adah, purnam idam . . .*”

Plenitude everywhere “begins the Upanishad,

Plenitude there, plenitude here.

From Plenitude comes forth Plenitude,

and everywhere, one with itself, there remains Plenitude.”

In the thought of the rishi this certainly means that the total mystery of Brahman is revealed to the astonished soul in its “manifestation” at the level of what the senses can grasp and the mind conceive no less than in its ineffable “recollection” at the heart of the primordial “non-manifested”—an idea which the Upanishad develops throughout.

The Kena seeks to guide us to the intuition of the Beyond, to the very inaccessibility of this Presence whose attainment alone can make man fully present to himself. The whole meditation of the Isha is penetrated by the mystery of this Presence, this Plenitude which is inexplicably both *here* and *there*, the presence and the plenitude of absolute Existence, transcending all things in its very immanence and immanent in all things precisely because of its transcendence.

This conviction that the unique and infinite Plenitude is present also here below prevents the author of the Isha from yielding to the common temptation of Vedantin intellectuals who in a misguided desire to safeguard the transcendence of the Presence too often banish it altogether from the world, which they regard as pure illusion or *maya*, and therefore as something from which one must free oneself at any price if one wishes to attain to the Real.

The Christian who has pondered the Scriptures with an understanding born of the heart will find that this hymn to Plenitude, awakens extraordinary echoes within his own soul. *Purnam*, Plenitude, at once evokes the Pleroma into whose mystery Paul introduced the Church :

The Father is Plenitude, the Son is Plenitude,  
and Plenitude also the Holy Spirit of God!  
Plenitude in heaven, Plenitude on earth,  
Of the infinite glory of this Plenitude  
From Him who is Plenitude  
Proceeds He who is Plenitude,  
and proceeds to Him who is  
the Consummation of all Plenitude,  
from eternity and unto eternity the Unique Plenitude!  
Plenitude is God in his eternity,  
Plenitude is His Christ,  
Who reveals Him in time  
and in Whose body dwells  
all the Plenitude of the divinity!  
Plenitude is the Lord,  
Plenitude is His Church  
His very Body and the Plenitude  
of Him, who, being All in all things,  
is Himself Plenitude!

The first verse of the Isha Upanishad affirms the universal presence of the Lord, Ish, the Master, Power or Strength, here personified, whom the Kena showed to us at work in all the activities of the devas :

“In everything that moves, in whatever is in motion in the  
Ish dwells.”world,

The Kena took as the starting-point of its meditation the data of human psychology and thence rose to the contemplation of Brahman. The Isha begins from movement, the impermanence of the Cosmos, the multiplicity inherent in the universe, and discovers in its very depths the immutable, the Permanent, the ONE.

“One, immutable, he is more rapid than the mind.  
The devas try to catch him up  
He is always ahead of them.  
They run after Him  
But without moving he outruns them all.  
He moves, He does not move,  
He is down there, He is here, quite close.  
He is within all that is,  
From all that is, He is apart,  
He is everywhere,  
shining, bodyless, without limbs,  
seeing, wise, born of Himself.  
He it is who orders everything aright,  
throughout the eternal years.

To *That, tad*, the Isha usually gives the name of *atman*, whereas the Kena generally prefers that of Brahman.

The *atman* is the *self*—grammatically the reflexive personal pronoun—the principle which constitutes the reality of the person, his self-consciousness. This principle naturally defies any attempt at exhaustive analysis. As the Taittiriya Upanishad in fact explains, the analysis of the *self* reveals a series of progressively more subtle and interior principles, beginning with the material body “made of food”, and passing by way of breath, thought, intelligence and bliss, which seems to be the last, to that ultimate and incommunicable

secret which explains everything but is explained by nothing, the pure and unreflective self-consciousness which is however, never attained save in a total emptying-out of self.

This interior *atman*, which as the rishi of the Chandogya (3, 13 and 14) had wonderingly discovered :

“Within my heart, is smaller than a grain of rice,  
than a seed of millet, than the kernel of a seed of millet”,  
is also  
“that same light which shines through all things,  
through the universe,  
through the worlds beyond which there is nothing further,  
and it is the same light which shines within the heart of man.”

The sage who has experienced within himself the mystery of the Plenitude henceforth sees everywhere nothing but this same Plenitude :

*Sarvāni bhūtāni ātmani*

*Sarva bhūteshū ātmanām—*

the *ātman*, the Self, in all that is,  
and all that is in the *ātman*, the self.

For him it is as though

*Sarvāni bhūtāni ātma abhut—*

“Everything has now become the Self”.

Henceforth in all things he will contemplate the Unity, *ekatvam* or non-duality, Advaita, as other texts will prefer to call it, the purnam of which the opening verse of the Upanishad sings.

Unity, non-duality, plenitude—to attempt to explain the Mystery in our always limited and limiting concepts would be to deflower it. Anyone who imagines that he has said everything has certainly left out the essential. . . . That is why it is so difficult to found a philosophy on the experience of existence. If one does so then such a philosophy must be regarded, as is traditionally the case in India, simply as a launching-pad for the human spirit, enabling it to escape from the earthly attraction and take untrammelled flight into infinite space.

As for the man who has known this experience and realised that all things are contained in the essential unity, no

sorrow or illusion can ever again touch him (v. 7). The Supreme Ish is everywhere at home, in the whole world and in every creature, "reaching everywhere, luminous, freed from his body, limbless, sinless, wise, seeing all, as though born of himself, disposing all things rightly throughout the eternal years". This is the actual text of verse 8, quoted earlier. In the development of the rishi's thought, it can be understood equally well of the Spirit who dwells in all men and in all things, and of him who dwells in the Spirit. Has not St. Paul accustomed us to mysterious equations of this sort by what he himself says of the *Pneuma*?

There is in these verses, taken as a whole, a great lesson which is too often forgotten by the popularizers of the Advaita and the Vedanta. In India as in Europe, "Advaita" and "Vedanta" have in practice come to mean a kind of religion or super-religion, in the name of which all things are judged *a priori* from a very lofty viewpoint. Then, under pretext of this so-called Vedantic angle of vision, the most elementary duties towards others are promptly forgotten—the perfect counterpart of the Pharisaic hypocrisy so vigorously denounced by the Lord.

"He who sees the *atman* in all things" says the contrary verse 6 of the Upanishad, "does not shrink from anything whatever, has aversion for nothing, seeks to escape from nothing".

Jnana or wisdom is not an escape from the world of action, and the jnani is not necessarily one who withdraws far from men into the solitude of the forest or the mountain.

The Jnani is a man who has realised the mystery of the self, in an intuition of which he may even remain unaware on the level of conceptual thought. In this intuition he has taken the great leap which makes a man pass "to the other bank of the self". He has freed himself from the superficial consciousness of his own individuality which led him to take himself, a particular moment and point of the material and psychic evolution of the universe, as the very centre of the world, and as a result to treat everyone and everything else simply as a means to his own ends. Now that he has discovered the true centre of the self at the very heart of the world, in that principle from which the world itself originates, his "personal" interests will henceforth coincide wholly

with the divine plan and the will of the Lord for the world and for each existent. His own good is simply the good of every being. He is in a sense present everywhere, freed from everything that formerly confined him physically or mentally within the limits of his surface consciousness. Through the identification of his will with that of the Supreme Spirit, he is master of all things : his desire and bliss are one with the desire and the bliss of Him who rules the universe. His life will doubtless continue to follow its normal course, according to his Karma, as India expresses it, or, in Christian terms, according to his personal vocation and the providential circumstances of his earthly pilgrimage. If such is his vocation, he will spend his life in solitude and silence, detached and freed from all things. Then he will be for others a sign of the transcendence of the *atman* and of its inviolability and essential remoteness from every possible self-manifestation. But he may equally well remain among men, in which case he will be in their midst as a sign of the universal presence of that same *atman* in each moment of its manifestation in time and each act of its self-revelation through men and living or inanimate things.

Then the jnani will do everything that his brothers, companions and colleagues do but he will do it with absolute perfection. Freed from the limitations of human selfishness and worry he will be in an eminent way in all that he does, the instrument of the Spirit. He will be extraordinarily detached from all things, because if the Absolute is present in everything that happens, It is not exclusively present in nothing. If his vocation entails the service of his brothers, for example the poor, lepers, the underprivileged, he will give himself completely to each of them, without any *arrière-pensée*, for in each of these needy and unhappy people he will see the full revelation of the mystery of the Presence. Whether he explicitly realises it or not, his service will include the gift of himself to the other as other, in his personal reality and unique revelation of the mystery of the Self and also the gift to the other as his own self in a unity that transcends the act of giving. This is surely what is implied in the parable of the members of the body spontaneously working for each other as we find it in St. Paul (1 Cor. 12) and in the Upanishads (for example, Kānsh. III). What he does for this

brother he will do simply for this brother, with no other motive, without seeking any advantage for himself, nor even any other advantage of a different order for his brother. The only motive for his act of service is this particular brother, in his present situation, constituting as he does an actual and determinate expression of the presence of the "sacred".

This Upanishad should, therefore, be reflected upon with particular attention by those who believe themselves to be called to the way of jnana. It is certain that in true jnanis, charity is perfect and the gift of self complete. This is unfortunately not the case with those who have no more than an intellectual knowledge of Advaita and who nevertheless claim to be advancing along this path. Their selfishness is sometimes simply revolting. They consistently refuse to give themselves to their neighbour, accept no responsibility for their brethren and will not consent to render them any service : and all this under the pretext of protecting *their* meditation. Actually, by this putting the *atman* on one side and the world on the other, they are in practice setting the *atman* in opposition to the world : they treat it as *dvandva*, that is, as a pair or alternative to the world. By this very fact, they strip it of its plenitude and its non-duality. The true *atman*, which they claim to have reached in their meditation, has eluded them. They are left with their own undistinguished and egoistic little self which they identify with the supreme Self.

It goes without saying that times of retreat—of "withdrawal", to use the term of the Isha—of solitude and of silence, and even of liberation from all forms of "service", have their part to play in the spiritual ascent. They are, at the right place and the right time, indispensable means for freeing the soul from the trammels of the external world. What needs to be stressed here, in connection with this Upanishad, is that jnana or advaita have of themselves nothing to do with a particular kind of life, for instance a life of seclusion and continual meditation, and also that as long as the would-be spiritual man has not recognized the presence of the One-without-a-second in everything that is and everything that happens, he has as yet understood nothing of the mystery of the *atman*. His thought is dangerously concentrated and condensed into an empty concept, and

ultimately he is subordinating all things, the world and his brethern, to himself.

An anecdote concerning Ramana Maharishi forms a fitting conclusion to these reflexions. A disciple of Gandhi went to see him and confided to him his desires and plans for improving the lot of the poor in India. Sri Ramana interrupted him : "One thing alone is necessary : find out *who* wants to devote himself to social work. You—who are you? This alone matters". A few minutes later, Sri Ramana enquired whether the peacocks of the ashram had received their daily ration of grain. Thereupon Ramachandra (the Gandhian) asked him : "Bhagavan, if you show such concern for the peacocks of your ashram, why do you disapprove if I concern myself with men, my brothers? As a matter of fact, Maharishi never on principle advised a life of solitude or sannyasa. Without knowing it, he made his own the advice of St. Paul : "Let each one remain where the Lord has placed him" (1 Cor. 7, 17). For him this depended on the karma or vocation of each. The "realisation" of the self has nothing to do with the variety of occupations in which people are engaged. The essential thing is that, in the midst of one's occupations, mental or material, one should keep oneself unattached, "realizing" oneself as sovereignly free. This was undoubtedly what the sage was trying to convey in a paradoxical way to his visitor. He himself was always the first and the most devoted in performing the daily tasks of the ashram, and he never allowed anything to be half-done. Nor did he ever try to escape from the crowd to safeguard "his" solitude.

The Christian should also read these verses with great care, but even with greater attention than the Hindu.

He will find here first of all a kind of prophecy of the New Testament revelation of the universal presence of the Spirit, and as it were a presentiment of the unification of all that is, in Christ. The Biblical message will prevent him from arriving, as a result of his experience of non-duality, at a philosophical *ekatvam*, or ontological identification of God and the creature; this has already been made very clear in the course of discussion. It is absolutely essential for him to safeguard in his thought and his manner of expression the complete liberty of God in his decision to create and the utter irredu-



cibility of the creature to the absolute being of God. However he must affirm with equal conviction the *ekatvam*, the unity in the Spirit, of all things in heaven and upon earth, the mystery of God and the mystery of man. He will never have the right to minimize, for example, the "all-in-all"-ness of God (1 Cor. 15, 28), of Christ (or of the Spirit ?) (Eph. 1, 23), however incapable our human concepts may be of grasping it, nor the strong expressions used by St. Paul when he declares that it is the risen Christ who lives in the Christian (Gal. 2, 20), that there is henceforth neither Jew nor Greek nor Scythian nor freedman nor slave, but, once more "Christ the Lord alone, all-in-all". (Col. 3, 11).

Even less than the sage of the Upanishad will the Christian "refuse" himself to anything ; he will not withdraw from the world into which he had been called, nor from the service of his brothers, to serve a "God of his own devising", for God is visibly, and first of all, in his brothers, as St. John teaches in his epistle. Nor is it in flight from or refusal of his duties that the Christian monk withdraws into solitude and silence to be more completely attentive to the Presence. Christ did not ask his Father to withdraw his disciples from the world, but to "protect" them, to "free" them, from the world. The life of a hermit is also a *diakonia* in the Church. It is in the Church and in the world that the anchorite bears witness to the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom, a witness all the more necessary in that the world, and often even the Church, only too easily allows itself to be carried away by the tide of "becoming". It is in the name of his brethren that the hermit withdraws from their "presence" to witness "in their midst" to the truth that God is beyond every sight.

Finally, these verses of the Isha Upanishad could form the basis for a Christian understanding of the Vedanta. They assert with unusual vigour—even if they do not succeed in explaining it very well—the reality of the manifestation of God in the world. The world is not denuded of truth, of reality, it is not *maya*, or illusion, unless it is thought of as separated from Him who reveals Himself in it, because its whole function as a sign, its whole reason for existing, is precisely to manifest Him. If one does attempt in thought to separate the world from God, one should not say so much

that it lacks reality as that it is imperceptible, undefinable, inconceivable, neither *sat* nor *asat*, neither real nor unreal, with the great doctors of the Vedanta. The Christian also affirms that the world exists only in God, in the Word, by whom it was made. It exists not after the manner of a thing flung casually into existence without preamble or follow-up; nor like an object which owes its existence to God, but is somehow at a distance from Him. According to the Christian revelation, the world exists in the very depths of God, in the most secret and profound abyss of the Love of the Father of which it is the unutterable expression and manifestation.

At this point it will be illuminating to use as commentary on the Isha Upanishad a few verses of the Mundaka, which were read in Delhi at Easter 1963.

The Kena had taught that at the origin of all human perception, but inaccessible to perception, is Brahman.

The atman is motionless in what moves, one in what is multiple, simultaneously interior and exterior to all things, everywhere identical with itself, adds the Isha.

The Katha and the Mundaka love to symbolise the interiority of this mystery by the image of the grotto or cave, *Guha*, the secret crypt of the heart. It is there, says for example the Mundaka (II, II), that :

“He is, manifest, quite near,  
the dweller in the crypt, the great End,  
the centre of all ;  
on Him are pivoted all the worlds,  
all the inhabitants of the worlds,  
everything that moves, winks or breathes.  
He is, shining, the object of all desire,  
tinier than the atom,  
beyond the reach of all knowledge. . . .

This is Brahman, supreme, immutable.  
This is life ; This is speech ; This is spirit ;  
This is Reality ; This is Immortality.  
This is the mark to be aimed at.  
My dear, aim straight at the mark.  
Take into thy hands the shining bow of the Upanishads,  
on its place thine arrow  
sharpened in thy meditation.

Draw the bow of thy mind, straining towards unity.  
My dear, aim at this mark.  
It is He, the Immutable.

OM, the pranava, this is the bow ;  
the arrow is the self,  
thou art the arrow.  
The mark is Brahman.

Aim at it without letting thyself be distracted,  
fix thyself there, like the arrow in its mark.

He upon whom the whole of this world is centred,  
heavens and earth, breath and spirit,—  
know that this is the unique Self : it is thyself!  
Let all other words pass thee by.—  
This is the bridge that leads to non-death.  
Greeting to thee, passing to the other bank,  
beyond darkness. . .

Brahman in truth is all this, It is all.  
Brahman before! Brahman behind!  
Brahman on the right! Brahman on the left!  
Brahman above! Brahman beneath!  
Brahman alone, in truth,  
in everything, everywhere!"

The Isha Upanishad, like most of the others, loves to make use of the symbolism of light and darkness to signify respectively the condition of those who have realised the interior mystery and that of those who have chosen to remain in the world without exit (the *samsara* or endless cycle of births) of their senses and mental activity.

"There are sunless worlds (variant : worlds of the asuras or demons), says verse 3,

Thither go, when they leave this world,  
those who have killed the Self'.

He who has refused to surrender to the brilliant light of the atman in the depths of his being is like a man who has deprived himself of life on the physical level. What can he hope for now but eternal darkness?

By departure from this world is undoubtedly meant the death of the body, but it surely includes also the great "pas-

sage" of which bodily death is only the sign, for man must necessarily rise above the empirical and exterior level on which he first becomes aware of himself ; a passage from death to life, if it is successfully accomplished, but if it is not he inevitably falls lower still—the very lesson given by God in the revelation of original sin.

This passage is not optional. Lucifer himself could not escape the dilemma : either the first of Seraphim, or Resistance personified. Here again, he who flatters himself on having reached the goal is in great danger of being lost, just as he who prides himself on his knowledge is in peril of knowing nothing, an idea which the Upanishad expresses in a series of strongly rhythmic verses full of paradoxes (9-14) :

"Into utter darkness they go  
who are attached to ignorance,  
but into darkness denser still  
go those who cling to knowledge."

Knowledge no less than ignorance must be transcended : the Isha, like the Kena, never tires of repeating it : every level of knowledge, from the most elementary to the most sublime. In all knowledge there is the danger of complacency and attachment, a temptation to stop on the way. God is beyond everything, The thought of man will never be able to discover more than a sign of His presence, but the impulse given by the Spirit to the creature in the first instant of its creation can come to rest only in Reality itself. The comment of St. Gregory the Great on the young Benedict in his cave at Subiaco offers a fitting parallel : an ignorance which knows all things and a wisdom which knows nothing—the "wise ignorance" of which the medieval mystics used to speak. In the last resort, God is neither in knowledge nor in ignorance, for both consist simply of concepts by which man seeks to represent Him to himself ; He is simply in "Himself". Truly, man can say nothing of the "passage" to God ! It was precisely of this "naked faith" that St. John of the Cross sang :

"In that happy night,  
I remained hidden.  
None saw me,  
and I perceived nothing." (Dark Night, st. 3)

The teaching of the Upanishad continues :

“Knowledge has its roll, and so has ignorance,  
this have we learnt from the ancestors,  
who distinguished them for us.  
When knowledge and ignorance  
have both been transcended,  
only then does a man pass to the other bank of death . . .  
and attain immortality.”

At last, having passed beyond all darkness, he reaches that light of which the Mundaka Upanishad says :

“In the sheath of gold is Brahman,  
pure, undivided ; he shines,  
light of lights. . . .  
In him the sun does not shine,  
nor the moon, nor the stars,  
nor the flashes of lightning.  
He shines, and everything shines by him.  
In his light all becomes luminous.

Verses 15 and 16 of the Isha Upanishad are an ardent appeal to this “light”. They are quoted from the Brihad-aranyaka and may have originally formed part of a funeral rite. In the form in which they have come down to us they apply equally well to the man who is confronted by the great passage to the other bank of the Self of which temporal death is the symbol on the cosmic plane of becoming. or again :

“In the vessel of gold  
is hidden the face of Truth.  
Open this vessel, o Pushan (Sun),  
so that I, who thirst for the Truth,  
may at last behold it! ”

“The Real is hidden under the cup of gold,  
o Pushan, reveal it to me,  
who am consecrated to Reality,  
that I may see! (15)  
O Sun, send forth and at the same time withdraw thy rays,  
that I may behold this Glory that is thine,  
thy fairest form!  
O, he who is there, up there is thee, even he . . .  
O, he is myself!

The vessel of gold which encloses and conceals the face of Truth is surely the knowledge of things, and of God in things, to which man can attain, a knowledge which is already a wonderful thing, resplendent with the glory it radiates. For the seers of the Upanishads the sun is the symbol of the glory which fills the world of "manifestation", and which is known to man through the reflection of it which he himself is in his spiritual nature. And yet the "face" of the glory eludes us in its very self-revelation. The face of glory turned towards us by the sun which illumines this world is only the reflection of the true glory which is his. It is the "golden door" through which must pass the souls who are called to penetrate to the very heart of Reality, in the world of the supreme Brahman, immortal and imperishable (Mundaka 1, 2, 11).

Yet man cannot force this entrance. The door opens only from within, and in its opening, all his desires are at last fulfilled.

For the rishi a word, a phrase, sufficed to note and transmit his experience: in the Kena, Brahman a lighting flash; here, the sun which simultaneously sends out and draws back its rays. This is enough for one whose inner eye has been opened. To try to say more would be to profane the mystery.

There is Existence in itself and Existence as it manifests itself. There is God without a name and God named by means of the signs through which He utters Himself. There is the Godhead, as Eckhart used to say, and the Trinity in which it expresses itself. There is in any case—and this is in agreement with the most strict orthodoxy—God as yet unmanifested in the mystery of the Father, and God who expresses Himself to Himself in the Son, and who "draws back" this Son to Himself in the Spirit, the silence of consummation made one with that of the source.

There is also God in Himself, and God who makes Himself known in His creation, and in the long maturing of creation which we call time. But in this creation and manifestation too all finally comes back to the Father. The Son comes down from the bosom of the Father, but He ascends once more to the Father's bosom in the glory of the Ascension.

In the measure in which the soul discovers God more fully in the world of manifestation, a more and more irresistible attraction draws, impells it also towards what is beyond all manifestation. The Son stops nothing at Himself. He leads all things to the Father, bringing everything to its consummation in the Spirit.

“O Sun, send forth and withdraw back thy rays, that I, who have come from thee, may at last find myself in thee, in the very heart, of thy Glory.”

Perhaps we may once more refer to St. Benedict, who saw the whole world gathered up into a single ray of sunlight. As St. Gregory comments, how could it be otherwise for one who contemplates the glory of the Creator?

The last line of stanza 16 tells us of the final ecstasy of him upon whose countenance the Glory has at last shone, and who has discovered the mystery of his own being in the depths of that glory. It certainly would not have been possible for him to contemplate the glory face to face without being himself drawn into its depths, awakening at last to himself in the ultimate truth of his being, in the eternal non-duality of that glory.

Does this sound strange to a Christian ear? The mystery of the Glory, the *qabod Yahweh*, is sung throughout the Bible : the texts of St. Paul and St. John in particular which we read as parallels to these Upanishadic passages helped us to glimpse the wonderfully prophetic Christian meaning of these pages of the Isha Upanishad.

In His priestly prayer, the Lord asked His Father to give his disciples the glory which had been his before the foundation of the world. Was it not this glory that was revealed on Mount Thabor? And did not St. John and St. Paul, for example, understand the profound meaning of the mystery of the earthly life of Christ in the radiance of this same glory?

The Christian can never be satisfied until he has reached the very source of this glory, beyond as well as within the most sublime forms of its manifestation. In the last analysis his prayers, his rites, his whole life is nothing but a prayer full of longing to the Lord of Glory to show Himself to His own in the mystery of His very being—that Transfiguration

so dear to Oriental piety. One has only to recall the fervent expectation of His return in glory as we find it in St. Paul and the Acts ; or St. John's invitation to the secret descent into the depths of one's own heart towards that glory which was even before creation, in the Word pre-existing in God.

The last line cannot of course be interpreted by the Christian, as by a Hindu jnani, to mean a total identification, both ultimate and original, of the *Purusha*, or person, who is up there in the sun, at the very source of the glory of existence, and what he has hitherto called his self. Nevertheless the Christian does experience something like this in the depths of his being when in the night of his faith he hears the Father addressing to him the same word which He addresses to His only Son, and feels welling up in his soul, uttered in and through his own spirit by the indwelling Spirit of God, the eternal response of the Son to the Father : "Abba, Father".

In this unity with the Son in the Spirit, the Christian simultaneously discovers his own new name (Apoc. 2, 17) and the name of God (Apoc. 3, 12). It is only in the Son that he possesses existence, only in the image that is the Son that he himself is image and likeness of God, only in the Person of the Son that he is loved by the Father and loves Him in return. In the Son alone is he radiant with the Glory of God. It is only in the Son, the unique *Purusha*, the unique Person, that all that is conscious and awakens to itself is conscious and awakens to itself. Only in the Son can man become aware of himself in his truth, his reality and his immortality.

The Christian's inexpressible discovery of himself in the glory of God is analogous to that of the Hindu at the moment of his disappearance in the glory of Brahman, but for the Christian there remains something beyond even this. By a new and wholly special grace of God, reserved to the children of the Promise and unknown apart from the direct revelation of God, the Christian will at the last find himself again in God, in the mystery of this own personal vocation, peculiar to himself and wholly incommunicable : eternally *one* before the Father with Christ and his brothers, and yet alone and for ever unique in the Love of the Father.



The penultimate shloka of the Upanishād certainly belong to the funeral rite mentioned earlier :

“May the breath pass into the wind,  
and the body into the ashes!”

It is an extremely timely reminder that the passage into glory, the arrival on “the other bank” or in the “great Future” (Katha 1, 29), necessarily entails death, mystical no less than biological.

As for the final shloka of the Isha Upanishad, which echoes the Rig-veda, it would take very little to transform it into a magnificent Christian prayer to the Spirit :

“Agni, lead us towards the Good,  
along the blessed path,  
Thou, the God who knowest all our works.  
Keep far from us the sin that leads astray.  
To Thee for ever and ever  
be the hymn of our voice!”

### **The Choice of the Self**

When we had finished reading the Kena and Isha Upanishads, it was suggested that we should take for the last Upanishadic meditation the last few verses of the second chapter of the Katha, the most remarkable of which is the following :

“The Self cannot be gained by the Veda,  
nor by understanding nor by much learning;  
he whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained.  
To him the Self reveals his own (true) form” (II, 2, 23).

This verse, like those from the Isha quoted earlier, presents the attainment of Reality as a grace. No human effort can achieve it. Hearing and study of the Scriptures are by themselves insufficient. The Self alone freely reveals itself, and reveals itself to itself and itself alone, shining with its own light, comment the masters of the Vedānta. In this context, Ramana Maharishi, for example, would say, there is no question of *grace* except from the point of view of one who still sees duality. At the moment of awaking

you doubtlessly have the impression that someone else is snatching you from yourself and drawing you towards himself, but in reality—as you will discover in this very awakening—there was never *you* plus *another* : you who have been lifted out of yourself and another who thus lifted you. Always and for ever there has been, there is and there always will be only the Unique One-without-a-second of the Chandogya Upanishad, “that Person up there who is myself !” (16).

One should not weaken the very clear meaning of this verse of the Katha by interpreting it in the light of quite different texts which could equally well be interpreted in their turn by it. We frequently find in the Upanishads attempt to describe the supreme experience which seems, at least at first sight, mutually irreconcilable. The fundamental reason for this is the impossibility of expressing the total mystery of this experience in any human utterance. The Advaitic formulae themselves, which contain its essential core, are incapable of exhausting its riches. The rishis, therefore, suggested from time to time other ways of expressing it, which the rational mind has great difficulty in bringing into line with earlier attempts.

Christian faith, alone, is capable of resolving, in the light of revelation, the antinomy and paradox of created being, and also the further antinomy and paradox which result from it, that of the inseparable co-operation of man and God in the work of salvation. Yet no theologian has so far been able to evolve a satisfactory formulation of the mystery.

A man can tend with all his strength towards the ultimate experience. He can perseveringly practice the “Who am I ?” of Ramana Maharishi, or the “By whom is this done ?” of the Kena Upanishad, or give himself up to the complexities of Yogic concentration ; better still, he can create within himself an emptiness of all thought and all desire, surrendering himself completely in total relaxation to the transcendent power whose presence he divines within him. All this is insufficient. The opening must be made from above or, if one prefers, from the deepest centre of one’s being. The “golden door” is closed on the inside, and it will open only from within. A man must be chosen, as the Upanishad says. The Bible speaks no less plainly of the constant choices

of God. "It is only those who are given to me by the Father who come to me, whom I keep", repeats Jesus unceasingly in the Gospel (cf. Jn. 6, 37 ; 10, 26 ff ; 12) and the Psalms tirelessly repeat, like a leitmotiv, that God is "*susceptor*" or "*suscipiens*," he who takes to himself. To this raising or taking up by God corresponds man's "receiving" or acceptance of his vocation : it was these who *received* Him that the Word gave power to become the children of God (Jn. 1, 12).

This experience of *receiving* is characteristic of Christian faith and mysticism. It is this that enables us to penetrate into the infinite mystery of Him who is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 P. 1, 3).

The Christian can certainly go very far with his Vedantin brother in meditating on the Upanishadic texts. As we shall soon see, the most daring utterances of the Upanishads are outstripped by St. John and St. Paul. This is all the more remarkable in that the revelation of the New Testament was given in a cultural and religious milieu singularly disinclined to minimize the distinction between Creator and creature. There are in fact very few affirmations in the Upanishads which cannot be given a genuinely Christian meaning, as opposed to a vague "accommodated sense". They present no more difficulty than certain parts of the Old Testament which have to undergo considerable transformation in order to become Christian reading and prayer. The essential thing is that all should be done in the Spirit who vivifies all things with his mighty breath.

However, the Christian knows that everything that the Upanishad attributes to man has been received by him as a free gift and uncovenanted grace.

He exists, but *in* God, and through the gift of God, which is the Spirit. He is immortal, but through grace, *in* God, in the immortality of God, not in any immortality of his own. He is a son, but by grace, *in* the only Son, through the gift of God. All that he is, he is in the *communication* of the Spirit, on the plane of nature as on the plane of grace.

This is possible precisely because there is already communication within God—God in Himself *is* communion. In this communication in the depths of self which constitutes the very reality of Being, man becomes by grace what God is by nature through the "*divinisation*"—*theo-poiesis*, *dei-*

*ficatio*—so dear to the Greek Fathers. The being of man is wholly gift, wholly grace, wholly love. Even the revelation of sin and its terrible manifestation in the heart of each individual was essentially aimed at making him realize this yet more deeply and bringing home to him that it is not merely from nothingness but from a radical unworthiness to exist that he has been “taken up” even into God.

At the end it becomes impossible to find any foothold apart from the gift on which to take one's stand in order to recognize the giver, thank Him and adore Him. To tell God that we offer Him what He has Himself given to us has an almost artificial ring. My very act of offering is itself a gift of God, and so are my gratitude and my adoration. Once more, inexorably, we are confronted by non-duality, the indivisible unity of the Spirit, *advaita*, *ekatvam* : I exist only at the heart of a gift, in the very act in which God gives Himself to me.

The wheel has come full circle, and the silence of the Christian mystic flows into the silence of the mysticism of the Upanishads : but in the meantime the *Kevala*, the solitude of the Vedantin, has become enriched with a communion.

## VI. THE JOHANNINE UPANISHADS

The two final readings from the Bible were taken from St. John, the completion and crown of all that we had so far read and pondered, whether from the Bible or from the Upanishads. On Friday we read the Prologue and on Saturday morning, before separating, the great prayer of chapter 17 which concludes the farewell discourse.

John revealed to us in his turn the mystery which the rishis had dimly perceived, seen now in all its splendour and depth—the splendour and depth of the Word and of the Spirit.

The Biblical texts studied earlier had been chosen chiefly as a preparation for a Christian initiation into the reading of the Upanishads, to remind us of the presence of the Spirit at the origin of their message and help us to recognize Him in them.

The texts of St. John we now took up were quite different. It was as though we had returned from the Upanishads to the Bible with eyes miraculously unscaled, eyes accustomed to the depths, capable of a wholly new penetration into the mystery of the Lord—perhaps something like what would happen if a Hindu, whose mind had been formed by long years of reading his own scriptures and meditating on the inner mystery, began at last to read the Gospel in the radiance of his own experience of the *atman*. There was of course no question—it is necessary to repeat this constantly to avoid all misunderstanding—of finding in the Bible some new and fuller meaning of which the sacred author was unaware and which could be discovered only in the light of the Vedanta. We found in St. John simply what the Lord himself had put there, but we were aware too that man always has further discoveries to make in Scripture, and that it is precisely to help him to penetrate ever more deeply into the mystery of his Word that God has brought into being such a variety of individuals and cultures.

### The Logos, Life and Light

In the Johannine Prologue we have a true Christian parallel to the Upanishadic “soundings” of the mystery of being.

It has already been noted that the word "Upanishad" originally signified those correspondences and relations between the different planes of existence—the physical elements, the psychic or mental powers (the devas) and the atman—in which the ancient thinkers of India took such delight. These parallels are often forced, but they are also frequently extremely suggestive. Through a whole series of successive approaches and a very subtle interplay of identifications which, so to speak, fit into each other like a series of carefully-graded boxes, they lead unerringly to the perception of the absolute Reality. Tradition has set apart some of the most fundamental identifications, the "*mahavakhya*" or "great utterances", the Upanishads *par excellence*, which epitomize the Vedantic teaching in a particularly striking way. These are, among others, the identification of atman and Brahman (*ayam atma Brahma*, Mandukya 2), and that of the I and Brahman (*Brahma-aham asmi*, Brihad-aranyaka 1, 4, 10), and that of Thou and That (*Tat tvam asi*, Chandogya 6, 8, 6). These formulae, more than any others, contain and authentically sum up the Upanishadic experience; however, their truth can never be fully recognized except by one who has "realized himself" in that same experience. Used without discrimination at the conceptual level and in a purely intellectual way they can lead to fatal aberrations.

In the whole of Christian revelation, the Prologue of John more than any other passage recalls the Upanishadic approach, both by its use of the method of successive identifications and by its deeper and deeper penetration by this means into the mystery of God. This is surely a proof of the unity of the human spirit as soon as it interiorly transcends the particular conditions which limit and tie it down, and in finding its true self discovers at the same time the very mystery of God, its Source. It is also a proof that the Spirit is in every man, waiting in the "cave of the heart" until at last he is ready, silent enough to hear His voice, free enough to be by His breath.

We do not find in the Prologue of John, any more than in the Upanishads, as a series of deductions linked to and entailing one another according to the laws of classical logic. It consists rather in a succession of intuitions, each leading

to the next by some mysterious and secret inner connection beyond the reach of conceptual logic, a sequence of piercing insights each drawing us more deeply into the abyss of the Godhead. The paradox lies in the fact that the evangelist, starting from God and descending to the level of the creature, yet discovers in each fresh intuition a new depth, as it were, of the mystery of God.

The rishis sought to attain to the foundation and first principle of all things in man and in his consciousness in each being which their senses revealed to them, and in the cosmos as a whole. The problem which then presented itself to them was the ultimate non-duality of these apparently diverse principles, each of which appeared to be final in its own order.

John began from something given : the Living God, who had made himself known to his ancestors and to whom Jesus had borne witness in a wholly unique way. There was also the mystery of this world, the creation and manifestation of God. There was finally the man whose life he had shared, whom he had seen, touched and listened to, and who had said that he was the Son of God. Following in the footsteps of the prophets and sages of his people, the apostle had meditated profoundly on all that God had said of Himself in the inspired books, and the words spoken by Jesus had entered even more deeply into his heart. All this had gradually taken complete possession of the mind of the apostle, under the action of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, becoming a living and luminous personal experience. One day, under the inspiration of this same Spirit, there welled up from the very heart of that experience words which at last seemed capable of expressing his secret and introducing his brethren in their turn into the experience of the living God. Then, for the sake of the Church, John dictated.

He starts from the Logos, the Word, the *debar Yahweh* in which God had continually revealed Himself to his people ever since the day when He chose to make an alliance with Abraham. It was in this Word that He had created all things in the beginning : "He spoke and all was created" (Ps. 148, 5). The prophets and psalmists have sung of the power of this Word, the sages have meditated deeply on its

mystery under the sign of Wisdom. The term *Logos*, which John chose to convey in Greek the notion of the *debar Yahweh* was, for its part, one of the most characteristic themes of the Hellenistic wisdom of that period. It signified the order and principle of things, their origin, the Reason which is at the foundation and heart of all things and explains them all. We have therefore on the one hand the world as it was seen by the Jew in the light of divine revelation, created and kept in being by the Word, and on the other the world as seen by the Greek in the light of reason, existing and developing according to its own immanent principles. All this is gathered up into the mystery of the *Logos*, of whose glory John sets himself to sing :

In the beginning was the Word,  
the Word was with God  
and the Word was God,

*was God*, not *theios*, divine, not *ho theos*, the God, the Unique—but, mysteriously, *theos* without the article, God, called by the same name as the Unique and yet other than the Unique.

The *Logos*, in the thought of John, seems then to be in the last resort the very principle of all that is and all that lives, at once interior to everything and apart from everything, that very Thing of which the rishis had an intuition and into the heart of whose mystery they withdrew, calling It by the names of Atman and Brahman, self and the absolute.

This principle is in the depths of God, in the depths of Him who made himself known to Moses as He-Who-Is, and who throughout the history of Israel revealed himself as the living God. And this Principle in the depths of God is Himself God.

Then the *Logos* is identified with Life :

Through him all things came to be,  
not one thing had its being but through him.  
All that came to be had life in him  
and that life was the light of men,  
a light that shines in the dark,  
that enlightens every man who comes into the world.

Finally this *Logos*, God, Life, Light, is identified with the man who was born upon earth and lived there like any



other man, whom anyone could see, listen to or touch as he pleased (1 Jn. 1, 1) :

The Word (who had made all things)  
was made flesh,  
he lived among us,  
full of grace and truth.

To whoever received him, received this Life and this Light, the Logos gave the power to pass through the "golden door", to enter into the innermost mystery of God, to become sons in the only Son and contemplate his Glory, the very Glory of the Unique, for there is only one Glory.

All that was said in the Upanishads was in reality said of Christ. But in the radiance of the Gospels, all antinomies are resolved. In the glory of the Unique, the unsealed eyes of the believer have recognized the Son who proceeds eternally from the Unique and, in the Son, *himself* in his exclusive and irreplaceable vocation.

We find in St. John not only the same method of approach but also the fundamental themes meditated on by the sages of the Upanishads. Certainly there is no absolute identity. The preparations for the Gospel are many: God is too rich in resources to repeat Himself. But are not the resemblances no less than the silences, the approximations which echo but do not repeat each other, the very *lila* of divine Wisdom "playing in the world", and revealing to us in ever more wonderful ways the many facets of its mystery?

Thus John in his Prologue identifies Light, sung of in the Isha and Mundaka Upanishads, with Jesus, thus introducing one of the most frequently recurring themes of his Gospel.

So it is with Truth, *satyam*, towards which all the Upanishads tend. Already at the end of the Prologue John presents the Word made flesh as "full of Truth"—the fulness of Truth, Truth itself, as he will declare, echoing Jesus, in chapter 14.

So too with Life, the immortality or "non-death" of the Upanishads. Jesus is the Life and the way to eternal Life, the bridge which leads man to non-death, Jesus is himself that immortality which the sages identified with the supreme knowledge, Jesus truly is the Plenitude which inspired the wonderful opening chant of the Isha.

*Vac*, Speech, the closest Sanskrit equivalent of *debar* and *verbum*, was also an object of meditation on the part of the sages, though it was not given the same importance as the themes already mentioned. It is rather *OM*, the *pranava*, which scarcely occurs in our texts, that forms the point of contact. *OM* is the as yet undifferentiated sound in which God utters all that He utters, and the very origin of His manifestation. *OM* is also the undifferentiated sound ending in the silence which is the culmination of all that man utters of God and all that His "manifestation" says of Him. Everything comes from God in the Word, and it is in the Word that all returns to God. The Word is really the primordial and ultimate *OM*, the Word in which God himself, utters all, the Word which sums up all that those in whom He has uttered himself attempt to say of Him, the End rejoining the Beginning. "OM is all that was, all that is, all that will be", says the Mandukya Upanishad. "OM is also all that transcends the three times", Who fills all times and all space but "He who was, who is and who is to come", "He before whom every knee shall bow, in heaven on earth and under the earth"? Who, filling all times, yet transcends all times, except the Word of God made flesh, Christ the Lord, coming from eternity and going to eternity, living by the same life in the bosom of the Father and in the midst of men, present by his resurrection at every moment and at every place in the universe? It is in the *OM* which He utters eternally that God, in knowing Himself, knows man and it is also in the *OM* that man knows himself and knows God. But chapter 17 of St. John will have more to say to this knowledge which is finally identified with light and life.

Besides the Prologue of St. John, the Christian Upanishad *par excellence*, there are certain other texts of the New Testament which also express the ultimate mystery of man and God revealed by the Spirit by means of parallels which defy human reason left to its own resources. For example, "God is Love" in the first epistle of St. John (4,16)—to which one should add the characteristic little parenthesis of St. Paul in his hymn of charity: "Without love, I am nothing at all" (1 Cor. 13, 2). My own being is also love; *being* is love. The "transcendentals" of the philosophers have certainly been transcended here.

Again, there is the identification which penetrates the Gospel of John with such strength and grandeur whenever Jesus applies to himself the divine name revealed on Horeb: "I AM": no longer merely the "*Brahma-aham-asmi*", "I am Brahman", but simple "I am", without any attribute, the "I" identified with "being".

One could also quote the Eucharistic Upanishad, "This is my body" an identification no longer discovered in the secret recesses of nature, but realized by the power of the sacramental word. Paul will explain later on that the body of the Lord is also His Church, the "Plenitude" (1 Cor, 10,17; Eph. 1, 23; Col. 1, 25 ff.). Moreover the demonstrative pronoun "this" is very close to the "*tad*", "that" of the Upanishads. Without insisting on the point, and simply by way of indicating starting-points for research, one might recall that the *pleroma* of Christ includes the whole of creation, the *sarvam idam*, "whole of this world" of the Isha Upanishad at least according to the plan of its Creator. On the other hand, the whole of the divine mystery—the *tad* of the same Upanishad—dwells in its fulness in the body of Christ, *somatikos, corporaliter* (Col. 2,9), the mystery of the body of Christ whose eschatological fulness is sacramentally realised, achieved, by the Eucharist.

By way of conclusion we may note that extraordinary Upanishad of the Spirit which Paul tosses off as though in passing as he pursues his main line of thought, so completely obvious does it appear to him: "He who clings to the Lord is one spirit (with Him, an identification which is understood better in the light of chapter 8 of the Epistle to the Romans where it is explained that this mysterious" *Pneuma* (or spirit) which is within our own *pneuma* moves us from the inmost recesses of our being and causes the very word in which the Son "expressed himself" and "returns" to the Father to well up from the most secret depths of our heart—"Abba!"

There is here no longer any question of using the Bible in order to read the Upanishads and other texts of the spiritual and mystical tradition of India. What we must do is to make use of all that we have gained from our study of these texts the enter into a deeper and more experimental knowledge of sacred Scripture. For the Christian the Bible must always be the point of departure and the point of return: it is not a

source of reference which can be consulted now and then to illuminate or confirm the discoveries of reason or spiritual experience. It is from the Bible, the revelation of God made by His Word, His Utterance, in revealing himself to man, that all Christian experience takes off on its flight towards the infinity of God; it is also in it alone that the Christian will find the most authentic forms of utterance when he himself attempts to express in his turn the mystery into which he has been introduced. In between lies the domain of the human mind which also comes from God and goes to God, and whose whole development here below should be at the service of faith, the knowledge which obtains eternal life.

On returning to the Bible after reading the Upanishads one should not expect to find in it the Upanishadic concepts in the original form, even though, as is the case with the Prologue of St. John, there are parallels which are truly overwhelming. Whatever the timelessness of the Advaitic experience, its formulation, even in the simplest words of the Upanishads, always bears the mark of an age and a mental climate which are not those of the Bible. Moreover, overpoweringly evocative as the "great utterances" or *mahavakhya* quoted above certainly are, the words in which Jesus communicates his experience of the Father and those in which his disciples have passed on their own experience of God in Christ are incomparably more so, for they open unto the holy of holies, the mystery of the self-communication of God in the secret of His own being. In the depths of the Upanishadic identities faith makes us discover the reciprocity and communion of love which, far from contradicting the *ekatvam*, the unity and non-duality of being, is its very foundation and *raison d'être*. Yet what surer path can there be into the mystery of the unity of the Spirit than the Advaitic experience of the *ekatvam* of being?

### The Advaita of the Spirit

The seventeenth chapter of St. John makes us understand even more perhaps, than the first how one can say without hyperbole that the Bible appears to the Christian in his faith as the crown and completion of the Upanishads, for it confronts us, in Biblical terms this time, with the most

disconcertingly daring flights of the Upanishads themselves. The language is different, it is true, but the profound experience it seeks to convey is the same, or rather the whole of the Upanishadic experience is here taken up and relived in a purer and more intense light. Let us then see what St. John says to us in this chapter, or rather what Jesus Himself teaches us of the ultimate mystery, for here we have the very words of Christ as John heard them, not only with his bodily ears but with all the attention of his "listening heart", as he rested blissfully upon the breast of the Lord.

The Son has received from the Father, in the very act of divine generation, all that the Father Himself possesses. The Father possesses nothing which does not belong also by right to the Son, in virtue of his divine nature. This is the consequence of their "consubstantiality" or *homo-ousia*, as was defined by the Council of Nicea.

But all this—all that he is, all that he has received from the Father—Jesus communicates to his own. This truth is no mere theological or gnostic speculation: John himself, the beloved disciple, is our witness, for he heard it from the very lips of Jesus. All that Jesus is by nature he has given to those who are his own by grace. He has given them everything, reserving nothing for himself, passing on to his apostles the intimate secrets that he hears eternally from the Father, so that they in their turn might share them with the generations of Christians who were to follow them :

"(Father), I have given them  
the teaching you gave to me (17, 8)...  
I passed your word on to them (17, 14)...  
I call you friends  
because I have made known to you  
everything I have learnt from my Father (15, 15)."

In another chapter of the same Gospel, Jesus compares the knowledge by which he knows his disciples and they know him to the knowledge which he has of the Father and the Father of him :

"I know my own  
and my own know me  
just as the Father knows me  
and I know the Father (10, 14-15)."

This is the same secret knowledge reserved only for little ones of which Jesus speaks in his so-called "hymn of rejoicing", when his heart was filled with admiration and gratitude towards the Father (Matt. 11, 25ff):

"No one knows the Son except the Father,  
just as no one knows the Father except the Son  
and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

This knowledge in which the Father begets the Son and in which the Son receives existence from the Father is the "revelation" of God within himself which the Son came to make known to the world, inviting whoever "receives" this revelation which he himself is to share in his own divine sonship (cf. Jn. 1,12 and 18). As the Father and Son are *one*, so he and his own are *one*, in and with him :

"May they all be one.  
Father, may they be one in us,  
as you are in me and I am in you (17, 21)...  
That they may be one as we are one (17, 22)..."

with that unity of which Jesus says elsewhere :

"The Father and I are one" (10, 30).

The Glory which the Father has given to his Son, Christ, and which the Lord has from the Father as only Son, the Glory which has been his from the beginning (17, 5), which he mysteriously recovers in his Pasch—this same Glory has also been given to them, because it is only in this Glory that there is unity, *ekatvam* :

"That they may always see the glory you have given me" (17, 24).

"We saw his Glory", testifies St. John (1, 14).

Man cannot contemplate Glory without being engulfed in that same Glory. Jesus *shows* us nothing that he does not *give* to us. Just as there can be only one Glory, so there can be only one Life, the Life which, from the beginning, was in the bosom of the Father and in whom all that is, is Life (1, 4).

Jesus also communicates no less fully the Joy which is his:

"I say these things to share my joy with them to the full." (17, 13)

"So that my own Joy may be in you and your joy may be complete (15, 11)."

the Joy of God himself, the Joy that is God, of which Jesus said to the faithful servant: "Enter into the Joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25, 21).

He makes known to them the Name of the Father, the Name which only He can know and utter, because He alone, by right of his eternal birth, dwells in the bosom of the Father :

"I have made your Name know to them (17, 26).

To reveal the Name—the Name which Yahweh refused to tell Jacob (Gen. 32, 30) and of which his angel said to Gedeon that it is "mysterious" (Judg. 13, 18)—is to reveal the Person, to introduce into an intimate relationship, to give access to the most intimate secret of his being.

Lastly Jesus communicates to us without reserve the Love by which he is loved by the Father and by which he loves the Father :

"I have loved them as you loved me" . . (17, 23 ; 15, 9).

"So that the Love with which you loved me may be in them " (17,26).

All this is included in the gift of the Spirit who is the indivisible Love of the Father and the Son.

As there is only one Father, there is only one Son and one unique knowledge, that which the Father has of the Son and the Son of the Father.

As there is only one Son, there is only one Spirit, one Gift, one Love : the Gift, the Exchange, the Gaze fixed upon the *Other* that the Father is to the Son and the Son to the Father—the unique love by which the Father and the Son love each other eternally.

Creation adds nothing to God, to Being. Nothing that is can ever be anything but a manifestation of God, in the very depths of God : nothing can be called into awareness of existence except in the knowledge which the Son has of the Father, nothing can be called to love, joy or glory save in the unique Spirit who is the Fulness of God.

What the Upanishads and the Hindu tradition express in terms of Being, the Christian Scriptures make known to us according to the peculiar genius of the Semitic languages, in terms of Life, knowledge of the Name, Love, Joy and Glory. This is no less overwhelming for human reason which does not easily resign itself to the fact that God escapes

its grasp, and even the work of God and the outpouring of His love refuse to be confined within the concepts it attempts to construct—and this, alas, even after it has been illumined by faith. . . . .

And yet could God really have acted otherwise? Could he have given us less without being unfaithful to his promise and, as the Psalms say, to his truth and fidelity?

In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul tells us that we are co-heirs of Christ and heirs of God (8,17). If in truth we are sons and God is Truth and the Truth of what he says remains for ever—is there anything in the kingdom of our Father which is not ours? Who would dare to say that this name and title of *son* which God has given to us, and which Jesus came to reveal to and realise in us, is not meant seriously by God? God does not play with us, even though our intelligence is quite unable to fathom the wonders of his Wisdom and his Love (Rm. 11, 33; Eph. 3, 19).

In the last resort it is in the light of such texts that the whole Gospel of St. John, and indeed the whole of the New Testament, should be read. Countless pages echo them magnificently for example :

“We shall see him as he really is” (1 Jn. 3, 2).

“Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror ; but then we shall be seeing face to face.

The knowledge that I have now is imperfect ; but then I shall know as fully as I am known ” (1 Cor. 13, 12).

In the depths of his inner silence, springing up, as it were, from the primordial OM, the sage of India hears the murmur of *sat-cid-ananda* (*saccdananda*) “being, awareness of being, infinite joy”—the expression, still very obscure, of his unutterable experience.

In the depths of the silence of the Spirit, springing up, as it were, from the Word dwelling in him, the Christian too, meditating on this chapter of St. John, cannot help hearing deep within his own soul the echo of the same *sat-cid-ananda*, but a *sat-cid-ananda* which has now uttered all its secret :

Thou art one with me  
as I am One with the Father  
in the infinite Glory of Being,



the supreme revelation of *SAT*, Being, undivided,

having received from me  
the very knowledge  
that I have of Him,

the revelation of *CID*, the awareness of Being, God's own  
awareness that *HE IS*,

loved by Him, loving Him,  
as He and I love one another,  
in the very fulness of our Bliss,

the supreme revelation of *ANANDA*, the Bliss of Being;  
this is the Christian Saccidananda, which is no longer a closing  
in upon itself but an awareness, no longer monad but com-  
munion.

The Christian Saccidananda is the mystery of the Spirit,  
that most secret of the secrets of God, deeply hidden in the  
bosom of the Father.

Faith teaches us that there is in God a double procession,  
of the Word and of the Spirit.

In the procession of the Son, it is, as it were the *other-  
ness* of God which is manifested, the Awareness and Know-  
ledge He has of Himself, His self-communication in the  
depths of His own being.

In the procession of the Spirit, it is His unity which is  
revealed and expressed, the Communion of the *One* with the  
*Other*, the "recollection" of Father and Son in each other.

The first procession is a *manifestation*. The second,  
transcending manifestation, reaches that which is *not mani-  
fested* in God and never can be, the "unseizable" Spirit who  
is spoken of in the Scriptures only under shifting and almost  
fugitive symbols.

In the procession of the Son, God names himself and  
makes himself known. In that of the Spirit, he reveals  
himself as unknowable. The first procession is the existen-  
tial foundation of everything that appears manifold here  
below. The second reveals in all things the mystery of  
*ekatvam*, unity, non-duality.

The first is the Son's cry of *Abba*, Father, The second is  
the OM which ends in silence.

It is this double mystery, the mystery of Being itself, which draws man to itself from the deepest recesses of his own consciousness,

to Being,  
to Awareness of Being,  
to the infinite Bliss of Being,  
SACCIDANANDA !

Some theologians, no doubt, will seek to minimize the implications of the Gospel texts just studied. Similarly there are Hindu exegetes who attempt to reduce the Upanishadic formulae without remainder to the conceptualizations which they confuse with experience of God.

It would certainly be rash to interpret the intuitions of the apostles after the manner of Aristotelian definitions. They overflow on all sides the words in which they were formulated. But this is precisely when we should remember that theology is something quite different from philosophical speculation on the data of revelation: it is fundamentally a *logos* concerning God. Now the Logos is *theos* : he is in God and he is God. It is only within God that we can learn the Logos God utters of Himself and in which He says all that can be said.

This proves once again that it is only in the "cave of the heart", the depths of the spirit to which the Upanishads invite us, that man can begin to "understand" what it means to be *one* with other men, to be individually one and yet all together with the Lord, *one* in the Lord with the Father, the Source and Consummation of all things, in the non-dual mystery of the unique Spirit, *in unitate, ekatvam, sancti Spiritus*.

It remains true, however, that the Biblical revelation is given to us in time, just as we are. Jesus did not want to withdraw us from time, but only from the servitude of time—which means from all that is "mortal", "passing", limited, and from the impermanence and illusion which are inherent in time as long as its eschatological meaning has not been understood.

The call of eternity is addressed to us from the heart of our very temporality: the *epiphany* of the Lord penetrates to the furthest limits of our phenomenal consciousness in its

involvement in matter and in time. Vedantic speculation on *maya* and *lila*, illusion and the "sport" of God, is extremely prolific, and too often the commentators have spoken of the world of *maya* and *lila* as though it were some kind of alternative to being, unaware that in so doing they were emptying the Absolute itself of all reality.

Christian revelation, on the contrary, takes everything completely seriously in the epiphany of God, whether it be epiphany within the Absolute, the double communication in which Being has its origin and finds its consummation, or that even more mysterious epiphany in the abyss of His love, where at the very source of being, His creation simultaneously springs out from and returns to Him.

There is nothing that is not the *atman*, declares the Isha, Upanishad. There is nothing which is not in the *atman* neither the smallest imperceptible particle of matter, nor the most evanescent instant of duration. It is this very truth that Jesus revealed to us in himself becoming incarnate, in a perfect human soul and body, thus consecrating the whole of time, matter and space, for there is nothing in the universe which is not in communion with the whole.

By revealing the Father as the source and term of the cosmos, himself coming from the Father in the "fulness of time", to redeem and consummate time, by realizing the Presence and the Pleroma *corporaliter*, at the heart of space-time, and returning from the heart of time to the Father, while still remaining present to all times in his meta-temporal resurrected existence, Jesus has at last provided the solution to the Advaitic antinomy that the Vedantic doctors had sought.

However, the western Christian would be extremely ill-advised to confront the Vedantic sage at this point with the dualist categories of his own philosophers, or offer him a so-called Christian Advaita in which he would be able to recognize nothing of his own ineffable experience.

There can certainly be no question of relegating the whole history of salvation to some impossible transcendental region, after the manner of Valentinian and other gnostics: this would be to contradict both the Vedanta and Christianity. On the contrary, we must recognize the mystery of the Presence, indivisible, eternal, non-dual, at each stage of the

mystery of salvation and in its consummation: for salvation extends to all ages of the universe, redeeming it and snatching it from nothingness.

The Pasch was accomplished at a definite time and place in the cosmos. But the Pasch is neither something past nor something yet to come. It is wholly and entirely in this *present moment* in which I actually *am*. It is in this very moment of my present and my presence to myself, heavy with all the circumstances which have providentially prepared it, that the Spirit murmurs in the depths of my heart the *Abba* of sons, and it is also in this moment that I "pass from nothingness to being", from time to eternity,

"Crossing over to the other bank of death  
and attaining the Immortal, beyond darkness."

But this is still only a pale image, for this passage from nothingness to being, from time to eternity, is never more than a sign of my freedom in my acceptance of being, my power to accept or refuse immortality. Being can miscarry in me, I can become one of those "slayers of being" of whom the Upanishad speak.

In the last resort the Pasch is the awakening of my awareness of being, at the very well-spring of being. I am so wholly plunged in the depths of the mystery of God that it is in the very act by which God calls Himself into being that I too am.

The paradoxes used by Master Eckhart to make them understand this simple truth delighted his hearers, for whom all these words were simply passing indications along the way, to be quickly left behind. The theologians, however, raised their eyebrows and were not wholly wrong in warning simple folks against the soaring flights of the Master. These were, in fact, like the formulations of the Upanishads, wonderful in themselves and pregnant with the loftiest truth, but extremely dangerous for anyone who listened to them on a psychological level other than that on which they were originally uttered.

The Father calls to the Son, and in that same cry the Son responds to the Father: a mysterious exchange which includes also the summons of the creature out of nothingness and its response in time—the *Adsum* of Abraham, the *Ecce*

*Ancilla* of the Virgin—rising up to God, as it were, from the depths of non-being and of sin, *de profundis*.

But the attaining of the creature, in this very act of response which simultaneously constitutes him a free person, to the being that will be his for all eternity, is surely a sharing in the awakening to itself of Being at the dawn of eternity. The act of faith which justifies man, the love which animates that act, is a theandric act, in which man and God are indissolubly involved—an act which is a free and spontaneous response to God, but which is at the same time pure grace, pure gift of God, pure activity of the Spirit in man. Who could ever separate and distinguish what is of God and what is of man in that act, non-dual *par excellence*, in which the creature attains to God, attains to Being, attains itself, awakening to itself in the very awakening to Himself of God?

It is hopelessly wrong to imagine eternity as a kind of limitless time, or to speak of it in terms borrowed from time. The eternal present of God fills the instant of my own present. To say that God is *before* me is meaningless. If the Bible sometimes uses such expressions, that is simply out of consideration for our weakness, in order to lead us gradually from the milk of babes to the food of the strong, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains (5, 12).

In the divine mystery, the awakening of the Father to being and that of the Son are distinguished only dialectically: it is a non-dual awakening, *homo-ousios*, once again, *advaita*. In the awakening of the Son the whole of creation awakens to existence, in the dawn of eternity, of which the Paschal dawn is the epiphany in time.

If God has guarded the scriptures and traditions of India so jealously until our own days, this was so that his Church might at the moment of the Encounter, realize and live intensely the essential non-duality of the Paschal mystery. Is not this something of what Jesus meant to suggest to us in the parable of the wise householder who constantly brings out from his treasures things new and old (Mt. 13, 52)?

One who has never experienced the non-duality of being, nor been swept beyond the limits of his own understanding and all that he has ever known, felt or comprehended of himself, back to his unfathomable source in the depths of being, runs a grave risk of understanding very little

of the secret of love and eternal life revealed by Jesus, "very little of what he is of God, very little of what is of God in all things", to repeat the phrase of the Kena Upanishad.

As long as he looks upon God as "another" in the sense in which his neighbour is "other" to him, and Jesus is for him likewise "another", and the divine Persons are "other" both to him and among themselves, he has as yet comprehended nothing either of himself or of God. The ultimate mystery lies at the very heart of non-duality. The Spirit of unity alone silently teaches that essential reciprocal Gaze of Love in the depths of Being of which all earthly "otherness" is simply a sign.

There is in fact only one Upanishad, the one revealed by Jesus, and the disciple who rested on the heart of the Saviour at the last supper understood in that communion of Love all that the rishis of India had learnt, in the profound solitude of their souls, of the non-duality of being.

Starting from their everyday experience of the world of the senses and of thought, and continually ascending by means of subtle parallels through the different levels of existence, the Indian sages had at last, in the depths of their own being, arrived at the beatifying experience. John, the chosen disciple, meditating on what he had read of God in the Old Testament and what he had heard from the lips of Jesus, and attentive to the voice of the Spirit within him, at last understood and revealed to the Church that the glory of the Unique was the same glory which the apostles and witnesses of the Lord had seen on his face and known through grace in the depths of their own hearts, and that the Love of the Unique was the same love with which Jesus had loved them and which welled up as a living spring in their own hearts; that the "I" uttered by Jesus was the "I" of the Unique, that in the very unity which made him one with the Unique, they too were one with each other and with Him, coming in Him from the Father, and returning in Him to the Father, in the *advaita* of the Spirit.

## VII. DISPUTED QUESTIONS

It had certainly been made very clear before the Nagpur meeting that we were to remain on the level of "contemplative meditation": purely speculative discussions were to be carefully avoided. The subject matter of our conversations was to be not mere theories with little bearing on reality but experiences and problems of the existential order.

Alas, the demon of dialectic is perhaps the most difficult of all to exorcise, and it is possibly even more difficult to get any one to realize that he is entering upon a path on which he has himself declared no one should set foot. So it happened that the exchange of thoughts on the text of the Katha Upanishad, already quoted, quickly developed into an extremely academic comparison of Christian mysticism and its Hindu counterpart. This discussion moreover did justice neither to the Christian faith-experience nor to the Vedantic experience. The experience of the non-duality of being is no more susceptible of clear definition than the Christian experience of transforming union. The first fervours or aridities of the novice are neither the prayer of quiet nor the "nights", nor can the Vedantic experience be reduced to either the void of all thought or the sensation of "cosmic expansion" which sometimes comes to the *yogi* apprentice in his attempts at concentration.

### A Challenge

This probably explains the rather violent reactions of one of those present—a guest-member of the group. He considered that we were not taking sufficiently seriously the problem, if not the challenge, presented to Christianity by an Advaita genuinely experienced and lived. According to him, our discussions tended to degenerate into a too facile refutation of the Advaita in the name of a Christian theology which had not even gone down to its own foundations and moreover contented itself with mere shadow-boxing against a purely imaginary concept of Advaita of its own fabrication.

Here in India some have constructed from the Gospels an image of Christ in accordance with their own personal thoughts and experience. They are so sure of their conclusions that they naively reproach the Church for anything she sees in the Gospel that does not agree with their own interpretation of the Vedanta ! It must be admitted that the Christian runs an equal risk of fashioning for his own use a Christian version of the Advaita which excludes on principle anything that does not fit into a previously determined framework, and this even before he has made any attempt to enter into the Advaitic experience from within. This friend, then, ceaselessly brought us back to the absolute demands of the Vedanta. He would allow no one to rest content with *a priori* refutations or superficial appropriations, whether it was a question of Upanishadic texts or, more generally, of the Advaitin tradition which has always remained alive in India. He reminded us insistently of the contemporary example of Ramana Maharishi. Sometimes he even gave the impression that for him the experience of Sri Ramana was the norm by which all mystical experience should be judged in any spiritual or religious context whatsoever. He forgot, of course, that the experience of the sage of Arunachala was, like that of any other man, conditioned at least in its expression, and also that, according to the Indian proverb, "none but a *jñāni* can judge a *jñani*" ; who indeed would dare to pronounce judgement on that which of its very nature transcends all judgement ?

His attitude inevitably provoked contrary reactions. However, the resulting tension was not harmful and did not in the least diminish the cordiality of our discussion. It had above all the salutary effect of not allowing anyone to remain satisfied with his own sometimes too hasty approximations.

Some of the participants felt obliged to defend the "true" Christian faith and stress the incompatibilities between Vedantic formulations and Christian dogmatic pronouncements. Others thereupon reminded them that, however necessary this comparison might be, it should be left for a later occasion. The immediate aim of our meetings was to penetrate as fully as possible, without any external refer-



ence, the secret of the experience formulated in the Upanishads, hoping, in our faith, that the Spirit would not refuse to bring about Himself the desired osmosis in the depths of our hearts thus laid open to his action. It was only from such an osmosis on the existential level of experience that understanding could subsequently dawn at the conceptual level of reason. Moreover, this understanding could never be the result of a clash of ideas nor of an intellectual effect to achieve a synthesis: it must consist rather in the slow and gradual discovery of a higher truth in the depths of a soul attentive and recollected in the Presence.

It seemed at times that some among us sensed a real danger of losing their faith in a too close contact with the Upanishads, as though a sincere and true faith could so easily be lost! The answer given was that of Origen in the preface to the "Contra Celsum": "If I am really a Christian", says the great master in substance, quoting St. Paul (Rom. 8, 35 ff.), "who or what will ever be able to separate me from Christ? Tribulations, anguish, persecutions, hunger, dangers, the sword? How much less the jeers of Celsus!" No more, we may add, can the affirmations of the Upanishads—those "heights and depths" of which St. Paul speaks a few lines further on. Does not everything come under the royal power and primacy of Christ, and is everything not ordained to Him as to its end and fulfilment? There cannot, therefore, be any treasure in the world, however hidden or strange, which is not already taken up, at least potentially, into the pleroma.

The real stumbling-block for Christianity is not the Advaitic experience of India but its formulation, which is often one-sided, inadequate and conditioned, and even more, perhaps, the formulations of the Christian faith which are only too often marred by dualism. These can only mislead the Hindu as to the true essence of Christianity, because they give him to understand that Christian experience remains at a hopelessly superficial level. In the West the stumbling block of Christianity in face of the Communist advance is that too many Christians forget the Gospel of love and service preached by Christ at the beginning of his public life. Here it is more often their forgetfulness of the spiritual Gospel by which He completed and crowned his teaching.

1 The Advaita is not a challenge to Christian faith, except perhaps in some of its formulations. It is rather the relentless reminder that God—and therefore whatever He has done—can never be wholly contained in our concepts. It is a sane and ever necessary reminder of the essential “way of negation”, at once a condemnation of and a liberation from the intellectual idolatry in which our laziness and our pride perpetually threaten to engulf us. It is a refusal of a bourgeois and self-satisfied entrenchment in institutions and rites which, however indispensable and sacramentally efficacious, nevertheless remain signs, a deliverance from our very human tendency to transform the ineffable mystery of the Trinity in practice, whatever our theoretical expressions of belief into a kind of distinguished Tritheism, or, at the other extreme, a simple modalism ; it is also a deliverance from the temptation somehow to “add together” God and ourselves, his creation, on the grounds that we are not God, so falling into a dualism no less contrary to the faith than monism.

✓ This inexorable reminder and condemnation directly attack our congenital self-centredness. We spontaneously judge everything from our own angle. We project God in front of us, and think of him in our image. Even the revelation God has made to us of his mystery has to pass through these Caudine Forks. All is subordinated to the primordial affirmation of the *self*, and of a terribly *hylic*<sup>1</sup> and psychic self. If the Advaita inspires such fear, it is because it allows nothing to remain of that superficial *hylic* or at least merely psychic ego, which belongs to the plane of concepts. It allows us to rest content with nothing less than the “I” which God utters within Himself, in the mystery of the procession of the Son and the Spirit. The challenge of the Advaita is addressed not to Christianity but to the laziness and pride of Christians. It condemns their reluctance to accept one and for all these words of Jesus : Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it ; anyone who loses it will keep it safe (Luke 17:33). Is not this the inviolable and inexorable

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1 From the Greek *Hylic* (*hule*), psychic (*psuche*), pneumatic (*pneuma*) or spiritual : terms adopted by the Gnostics which designate the different planes on which souls live and act : the corporeal or material, the mental and the spiritual.

law of the entry into life : "Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain" (Jn. 12:24).

There is no real contradiction except between the substitutes for Advaita and for Christianity the premature and limited synthesis put forward on each side by those who think experience can be enclosed within a definition.

He alone will find the solution who consents to go to the end of both the experience of Christian faith and the Advaitic experience. It is to be found in a higher light which human reason will never be fully able to explain. Even enlightened by faith and guided by Scripture and tradition, human reason has never been able to find an adequate formula for the mystery of God's concurrence in man's free action and the mystery of grace. Theologians who have attempted to do so have gone from Scylla to Charybdis, mutually denouncing each other as heretics. Both parties were in fact victims of the same dualist prejudice which seeks to add together God and man. Advaita means precisely this : neither God alone, nor the creature alone, nor God plus the creature, but an indefinable non-duality which transcends at once all separation and all confusion.

It is truly said in the Kena Upanishad that Indra, the intellect, is incapable of recognizing Brahman. It is only when Brahman has vanished into the spaces of the spirit that there appears in those same spaces Uma, the shining and lofty wisdom which reveals to him who He is.

This is the paradox of the Isha :

"He who clings to ignorance is lost,  
He who clings to knowledge not less so !

As long as *vidya* alternates with *avidya*, there is no knowledge, Truth is not yet attained.

The Advaita is opposed to nothing, on pain of being no longer itself. In an analogical way, when Christianity sets itself over against any other religious tradition, as though it were itself "another" religion, it abdicates by that very fact the transcendence which belongs to it by right, for transcendence admits of neither otherness nor comparison.

In everything that has any positive content of truth, Christianity recognises itself as present in seed, for Christ is already there. The Church too is already present every-

where, for the Church is Christ extended to all times and all places. The fact that she emerges visibly only in certain specific times and places changes nothing of her essential nature. There is nothing true, beautiful or good which does not bear the mark of the Spirit. Evil arises only when this truth, beauty or goodness stops at itself, making itself the All, the final Plenitude, and refuses to enter into the history of salvation for which it was nevertheless created : this was the temptation of Eden so magnificently described by Ezechiel :

You were once an exemplar of perfection,  
full of wisdom,  
perfect in beauty. . .  
Your heart has grown swollen with pride  
on account of your beauty.  
you have corrupted your wisdom  
owing to your splendour (28 : 11-17).

This was the very question proposed in the course of the Nagpur meetings : what would be the attitude of the *jñāni* confronted with the fact of Christ ?

It was pointed out that one would have to take into account the conditions of this confrontation. It should not be confused with mere preaching which often does not penetrate the "cave of the heart" where alone a message becomes truly personal. But if the message does reach that spot and is recognised as an invitation welling up from the very depths of his being, then one can confidently say that a true *jñāni* whose spirit had passed through the ultimate experience could not refuse it : is not the *jñāni* by definition pure openness to the Spirit, since he is wholly freed from all selfishness ? A sinful refusal of Christ—like that of Lucifer or the leaders of the Jewish people who, according to St. John, knew but refused to submit—is inconceivable except in the case of a spiritual man still "on the way". He would then refuse the Lord in the name of an Advaita of his own conceiving, in which his own pride and ego would be exalted and puffed up : or it might happen in the case of one who was a *jñāni* or yogi only in appearance. In such an individual, it is not the empirical "me" which has disappeared into the Supreme Self, but the "I" of phenomenal consciousness which has

appropriated to itself the supreme and absolute character of the essential "self" and the essential "I" exalting itself after the fashion of the *devas* in the Kena Upanishad — a temptation which many, it must be confessed, unhappily do not resist.

Perhaps the message of the Lord will even be the definitive sign and the means of discrimination chosen by God to bring man to ultimate realisation and in the degree of depth of awareness and self-mastery to which his asceticism has brought him—just before the opening of the "golden door"—the freedom of the Hindu spiritual man is such that in such a case it will be in complete lucidity that he will either consent to adore or refuse to do so : this is the mystery of those very lofty vocations involving a supreme act of choice of which holy Scripture speaks so clearly.

### An Integration

There can be no question of dreaming of an impossible synthesis between the Advaita and Christianity, nor even, strictly speaking, of a Christian transcendence of the Advaita. This latter formula is certainly nearer the truth ; yet it is still very imperfect, for as soon as the Advaita is given any qualification whatsoever it ceases to be Advaita . . . . Such forms of expression assume that Christianity and the Advaita could confront each other as though they were separate realities. This may be true up to a point on the conceptual level, but it no longer holds on the real and existential plane. Both Christianity and the Advaita lay claim to transcendence in relation to everything else. Moreover, to compare the formulations of Sankara with those of Denzinger and judge them accordingly would be as futile as to attempt to judge by each other expressions of the experience of Christian faith as mutually dissimilar as those left to us by, for example, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.

In reality the Advaita lies at the root of the Christian experience. It is simply the mystery that God and the world are not two. It is this mystery of unity, *ekatvam*, that characterizes the Spirit in God and in the whole work of God. Before leaving his disciples, Jesus insisted on this mysterious presence of the Spirit in them. He entrusted

them to the keeping of this Spirit. The Church in her turn recalls the Spirit and his mystery of unity at the end of all her solemn prayers : *in unitate Spiritus Sancti*. She invokes him in the Eucharistic epiclesis<sup>1</sup> and at the beginning of all her consecrations.

Instead of speaking of synthesis and transcendence it would seem much more accurate to speak of the Advaitic dimension of revelation and of Christianity. It is even a dimension inherent in the act of faith which leads to salvation—one should perhaps say a dimension of depth, of which contact with the Upanishadic experience gives a more complete awareness.

If in fact the Advaita were not at the very heart of the Christian act of faith, it could not have been attained in the experience of the Vedic rishis ; it would then follow that there must be in the work of God two directions and two goals as it were : first the ideal of a pure nature, where man would have tended towards the perfection of his nature along the straight line of his faculties and his capacities, and secondly the ideal of the redemptive incarnation which would then have come to break this original line of development and impose on man a new end. But none of this is compatible with Biblical and patristic tradition. Once out of Eden, the human race has known as a matter of historical fact only two states : that of fallen nature and that of nature redeemed; everything in man is ordained to salvation in and through Christ.

Is not the Christian act of faith already initially contained in the acceptance by the *Jñāni* of his condition at the moment in which he attains to the supreme illumination? Have we not here a kind of foreshadowing and antetype of the Paschal mystery? The transcendence of his empirical self and the attainment of the "other bank" the transcendent regions of his being, can surely be compared to the passage across the Red Sea, and the entry into the cloud which hides him from himself when he has passed into the ultimate splendour is strongly reminiscent of Moses' ascent to the

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1. Epiclesis from the Gk. *epiklesis*, call, invitation. In the Christian, and especially the Oriental, liturgy it means the invocation of the Holy Spirit to perform the work of the sacraments and most particularly the Eucharistic transformation.

mountain of God whose slopes were covered with cloud and whose summit shot forth flames. To enter here, the *Jñāni* has had to surrender himself completely, leaving behind entirely the effort of his understanding to express in its own fashion the mystery of man and the mystery of God. It is in a way a repetition of the laying of Christ in the tomb and the repose of the great Sabbath, when he awaited the dawn of the eighth day. Only in that dawn and that awakening is it given to man to hear his new name, the true expression of his personality, the unutterable and undreamt of "Thou" which echoes in the depths of his heart and gives back to him, wholly renewed, the "I" he thought he had lost forever. And yet he will never be able to hear this "Thou" or at least recognize it in himself, until he has heard from Jesus or from his messengers—*ex auditu fidei*—the "good news" of the eternal hearing of this "thou" by the Son in the bosom of the Father.

The act of faith is essentially a Paschal act, and that is why it is indissolubly linked with Baptism. It is the passage to the other bank of the self; the act by which the believer dies completely to himself and receives a wholly new life in Christ and in God (Rom. 6, 4, 10). This death and self-transcendence in faith means that a man consents not to make himself, as he knows and discovers himself, the final norm of existence or truth or the moral law, and accepts the fact that this norm is something beyond his own thought, consciousness and being. Then he bows down in adoration or disappears from his own sight into the depth of that Beyond. If on the other hand he refuses and chooses, like Lucifer, to defy the Eternal, whatever the consequences, then he sins, and falls back into an impossible duality between God and the creature. Such is the alternative that confronts every man at the moment in which he becomes aware of his freedom, as St. Thomas has magnificently explained (S.T. 1-11, 89, 6).

This irrevocable choice between self-surrender to divine grace and the decision to remain for ever in his own greatness has to be made by each man according to the specific conditions in which divine Providence has placed him, and especially in terms of the cultural and religious setting in which he finds himself and the extent of his own awareness.

When at last the ultimate revelation of the Lord Jesus dawns upon a man, he is asked to give up even what is best in himself and to pass beyond the symbolic pasch he has already lived through, and which now stands revealed as simply a sign and foreshadowing of a greater reality. He must now allow his own adoration to be lost in the theandric adoration of Jesus, God made man and his loss of himself in the non-dual unity to be lost in its turn in the even more profound abysses of the Trinity, in the unity of the Spirit.

Christian faith and Vedantic wisdom, mystical experience within the Christian revelation and the Advaitic experience, should be compared far less in their so-called objective content than in their essential nature. The Advaita is no more an idea or an intellectual discovery than is faith. It is something that touches the soul in its deepest centre, and takes complete control of everything within it. It is a fundamental attitude of the soul originating in the very roots of its being, a total gift of self and a complete surrender to the mystery which has revealed itself within the self.

In the soul of the *jnāni* who is still, in a sense, living in the times before Christ the Spirit of Wisdom has carried his work to the extreme limits of the possible. He has made him live his connaturality with God (S.T. 11-11; 45, 2) so far as this may be for one who has not yet heard the Word made flesh. When he has listened to and recognised Jesus of Nazareth, the Spirit of Understanding will fling wide the doors of his mind and reciprocally illumine his former experience by the light of the new revelation, and this new revelation by the incomparable experience already lived in anticipation in the depths of his heart. Nor is this all. Not merely by the concepts of theology will the *Jnāni* now attain to the Trinitarian mystery; the Spirit of Wisdom Himself will lead him directly and existentially to the very heart of this mystery, in an experience analogous to that which he has already known, but incomparably more profound. Through the words of revelation, he will hear in that inner place where he takes his origin in God, the substantial Word by which the Father in begetting his Son begets him too in the mystery of his adoptive sonship, he will recover his incommunicable personality in the "Thou" by which God calls him into existence in the unity of the Spirit of love.



His contemplation of the Trinity will not be a contemplation of the Three in One or the One in Three existing as it were "outside" himself: he will experience the Father and the unity of the Spirit in the "Thou" of the Son—in the "Thou" which the Son hears and the "Thou" of his response to the Father: "lost" more completely than he ever was at the time of his Vedantic immersion in being, and he will yet be utterly and incommunicably himself in total truth, because now he has found himself in the very depths of God. At the level of thought and consciousness he will be incapable of grasping and expressing this mystery of knowledge and love which is being revealed at the roots of his being, but this intimate experience cannot fail to penetrate the whole of his life and activity. In him will be revealed the Spirit who revealed Jesus, in a fulness of love which will rediscover even in the heart of indivisible unity a wholly transformed relationship with other men. It is in this renewed contact with his brethren that the Christian *Jñāni* will live the mystery of his face-to-face with the Father in a dependence on the Spirit which has become adoration.<sup>1</sup>

### An Invitation

One of those present said one day: "Theoretically one may admit that the Advaita does not constitute a real danger for Christian faith, and even that it could eventually prove an incomparable aid in penetrating more deeply into the secrets of the Spirit. 'Everything is holy to the holy—to the pure all things are pure'. Anyone who has by grace been given one intuition of truth—the unction which reveals everything from within, (1 Jn. 2, 27) seizes upon truth wherever the same Spirit has hidden it, like the bee who knows by instinct where to find his booty. But does this not presuppose a particularly solid foundation in the Christian faith, and a faith which is a living and existential experience of the God of life and of truth?"

We all agreed that this deep rooting in the Christian faith is absolutely indispensable for anyone who seeks to enter, either by personal choice or by his mission in the

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1. These ideas are more fully developed in "Sagesse Hindoue Mystique Chretienne" Paris, ed. du Centurion, 1965.

Church, into close contact with Hindu thought. It would be the extreme of folly to involve anyone in such study and such experiences without first making sure that he possessed the necessary intellectual and spiritual formation. If scholasticism can be transcended, it must first be assimilated. It alone can provide the solid categories of thought which will later allow the mind to launch out on its own without too great a risk. Does the writer not have to begin by learning syntax, and the musician counterpoint? It sometimes happens, it is true, that India restores the sense of the sacred to Westerners who have lost it, or never experienced it, thus helping them to recover the true values of the Christianity they had abandoned or never known. It is impossible to ignore such cases, and one should thank the Lord for them; nevertheless they should not be taken as the norm for a personal decision.

The Hindu himself, in fact, is not invited to enter upon the path of the Vedanta until he is sufficiently prepared. According to the tradition of the masters, the guru should reveal its final secret to his disciple only at that precise moment when he has become capable of hearing it directly in the depths of his own heart. Similarly, before allowing the aspirant to begin the effort of concentration which will lead him to the void of all thought, even before teaching him the preliminary muscular and breathing exercises (*āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*) the traditional Yoga demands of him the practice of the basic virtues of patience, control of the senses, truthfulness, non-attachment, freedom from desire, etc. Experience shows that this is wise, and it is extremely dangerous to play the yogi or jñāni before one really is such.

The Christian should not be less well prepared when he feels that he has the right or the duty to let himself be drawn into this privileged experience of non-duality which is at the same time both the most lofty experience accessible to human consciousness and supreme openness to the action of the Spirit. Throughout the Nagpur session we insisted again and again on the necessity for the Christian in India, and above all for the minister of the Church, to begin these preparations both in himself and in the Church.

The fact remains that to be strongly rooted in the faith and the love of Christ of itself excludes all fear, for as St. John

reminds us, perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn. 4, 18). The sole condition is that our confidence must be in Christ and not in ourselves (2 Cor. 3, 5). Christian faith is essentially security, *parrhesia* (Heb. 10, 19).

There are at bottom two classes of people for whom the Advaita means anything, both among Hindus and among Christians: those for whom it is a magnificent idea, and those for whom it is an inexorable experience of the depths of the soul. For the first Advaita is made all the more attractive by the fact that one can discuss it indefinitely, as it defies all conceptual definition. Christians can develop an equally passionate enthusiasm for a theoretic confrontation of advaitic and dogmatic formulations. This kind of interest always remains rather superficial, like problems of pure mathematics, all the more fascinating in that nothing outside the conceptual order is at stake. But is an Advaita such as this the genuine Advaita? Advaita is essentially an experience... Can an experience of which one speaks really be an experience? "Is the *tao* of which one speaks yet the *tao*?" to borrow the question of Lao Tse, the "Old Sage" of China.

Problems of the soul can never be reduced to intellectual problems, and the real problems that God presents to men through nature, events, revelation or the action of His Spirit in the depths of their hearts are essentially problems of the soul, existential problems. Everything that is seen, heard or even thought remains in the order of signs. They are the means by which we liberate the deepest centre of our nature and our personality and live our radical adherence to God, the holocaust of our being to Him from whom we come and to whom we are returning. Faith is the ultimate problem God has posed to the heart of man. Like the word of God of which St. Paul speaks (Heb. 4, 12) faith is a two-edged sword which pierces to the most secret recesses of our being. As a preparation for faith, or its purification, the Advaita is also a problem of the soul. That is why no understanding will ever be possible between those Christians or Hindus for whom Advaita is simply a philosophical system engaged in debate on the level of concept and those to whom it poses vital problems of fidelity to themselves and to God.

Is it not in fact a problem of the existential order with which the Advaita confronts the Church—a providential

purification offered to her by God at the very moment when her encounter with the modern technological world of the West makes her more than ever aware in her inner most being of the "burden of history" and the need of a return to the sources?

However, the Advaita does not demand of Christianity a transcendence, a "going out" towards something beyond itself, any more than Christ's revelation asks the Vedanta to empty itself of itself in order to pass beyond itself and be transformed into Christianity. If there must be a transcendence it is an inner transcendence that is needed, an ever-deeper penetration by both Advaita and Christianity of their own living and essential sources, an ever-growing awareness of self, a discovery by each of the presence in the other of its own most intimate secret. These are doubtless bold sayings, but their truth will become evident to anyone who is willing to experience the depths to which the Christian tradition invites us no less than the Hindu.

The Vedanta both in its welling up in the hearts of the sages and in its irradiation of the whole of the thought and life of India is a reminder from God to Christians of the treasures which he placed in their hearts when he called them to the faith, and which he is now patiently waiting to bear fruit. It is an invitation to the Church to turn her attention to certain fundamental dimensions of Christianity which have perhaps been less emphasized (without ever being wholly neglected or absent) in the mental and cultural milieu in which she first developed.

The Upanishadic formulations sometimes appear crude to one who is not accustomed to this way of approach to reality. The rishis and gurus, apparently heedless of the mental and spiritual weakness of the disciple, batter away violently at their paradoxes without allowing any plea for mercy, until at last the awakening is achieved, the opening, or rather the explosion, the "fission", one might dare to say, that frees the consciousness. It is the same kind of thing on the level of thought as the physical slaps and blows with a stick to which the old Chinese masters of Zen were addicted in order to lead their pupils to *satori* or illumination. That was the one thing necessary at first. The indispensable nuances and distinctions would come later, at the proper

time—by way of bonus, as it were ; the important thing was to reach the kingdom. The rest would follow, as Jesus himself promised (Mt. 6, 33).

In their very abruptness, indeed, these utterances awaken an echo in souls prepared for them—an echo which persistently returns to consciousness as though from its own essential depths, intimate, vibrant, personal in the extreme, however vigorously reason may seek to disown it. It is like a bell whose tolling imperceptible at first, gradually undermines the tranquillity of our sleep, growing ever more powerful as it awakens stronger and stronger echoes in the depths of our being until at last it awakens us and leaves us no choice but to leap out of bed and stand face to face with the rising sun, or like the experience of a woman made gradually aware, by vague and ill-defined signs and sensations she has not known before, that she has become a mother : At last the day comes when the child stirs in her womb. It has happened ! Those who are not yet mothers may try to guess what she is experiencing and describe it after their own fashion : only those who have felt their own child leap within them *know*. Who can contradict them ?

### A Duty

The Advaita compels the Christian to become far more consciously and attentively aware of the interior dimensions of his own spiritual tradition.

Some have thought, and still think, that the New Testament provides only a “functional” theology of God and of Christ. The natural conclusion is that participation in the Kingdom belongs only to the functional, and not to the ontological and existential order. This sort of theology taken for granted by those Christians who are “anti-mystical”, is certainly not in keeping with authentic Biblical inspiration and tradition.<sup>1</sup> However it represents a tendency still too widespread in the Church, in theory if not in practice. Too often Christian preaching and the formation of priests and religious—remains at the level of morality, the commandments, the “law” from which St. Paul, like the Lord himself,

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1. Cf. J. Mouroux, “Le Mystère du Temps”, p. 248, n. 5.

worked so hard to free the infant Church, or at least at the level of sentimental devotion and a merely affective piety, the Christian equivalent of the lower forms of Hindu *bhakti*.

Even when spiritual formation is given at the theological level, the underlying theology is generally far too deeply influenced by the Greek intellectualism in which it first took root and developed. It gives the impression of consisting merely of a series of logical deductions which reduce the loftiest intuitions of the prophets and the apostles to clear but terribly limiting concepts, which not infrequently empty them of all their mystery. Such a theology forgets that if philosophy is "the handmaid of theology" theology, scholastic, patristic or Biblical, can itself never be more than a servant. Its first task is to prepare the soul for an existential encounter with the living God, beyond all forms, images or concepts. Its validity will be all the greater the more it succeeds in integrating into itself the values and dimensions of interiority and of negation which are demanded by the data of revelation. Only so will theology fulfil its function and efficaciously lead the Christian towards that experience of the depths of God to which he is entitled by his baptism, his re-birth in God and of God.

This is why the reading and study of the great mystics should form an essential part of the formation of priests and religious. Otherwise how will they be able to make anything of, for example, chapters 14 and 17 of St. John? No one has the right to make cuts in the Gospels and take from them only what suits him. The study of the mystics naturally presupposes a thorough intellectual, moral and spiritual preparation, but is it possible to have a complete Christian formation at a lower price?

In speaking of mysticism, it is surely unnecessary to say that there is here no question of those phenomena of the parapsychic order which the ignorant frequently take for mysticism. The Spirit doubtless makes use of these at times to reveal His presence and His action, especially in the case of more susceptible or less well-balanced temperaments, but these are never more than accidental manifestations essentially secondary in character. It is to the great mystics themselves that one must go in order to be initiated into the secrets of intimacy with God, for they alone can testify to

these secrets who have known, beyond all sensible experiences (visions, auditions and similar phenomena) the spiritual contact which constitutes the experience stripped of all forms which St. Thomas calls the experience of wisdom or conaturality. Such are, for example, among the moderns, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Marie of the Incarnation, and also the Rhineland mystics of the Middle Ages, Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck and others, whose mysticism is especially akin to that of India in that they expressed it rather in terms of essence rather than in psychological categories. One could also cite Evagrius, Gregory of Nyssa and many others in the ancient Greek tradition.

Nevertheless, it must always be remembered that whatever forms of expression these masters give to the total experience of Christian faith, they are all limited by the social and individual conditions of those who uttered them. We must therefore always seek to transcend them. The one thing we must grasp and assimilate from their teachings is the fundamental attitude of soul they reveal to us. Man must certainly use his intelligence to draw near to God. Intelligence is a gift of God : grace transforms it and the Spirit by his action carries it beyond the limits assigned to it by nature. It is the intelligence that receives revelation, assimilates it and is at the root of its influence on the will and the whole life of man. Nevertheless the Spirit murmurs to the heart of man that it is even deeper than anything that can be conceived by the intelligence or experienced at the level of consciousness, and that it is in the depths of the heart that the ultimate mystery of God is at once hidden and made known. Then at the extreme limit of the human intellectus transformed by grace, He invites the attentive and docile soul of men to recognise and contemplate in the depths of the self—in the bosom of the Father—that very Glory of which Jesus spoke.

The constant reading and study of the mystics by an increasing number of the faithful will reveal more and more clearly within the Church the latent but essential contemplative dimension of Christian faith. Her rules, her institutions, her utterances and the lives of her members, in a word her whole “epiphany”, the whole “apocalypse” or revelation

of the Lord, which she is in the midst of the world by her very vocation, will be more and more impregnated by contemplation and interiority. Only at this depth of interiority will the Church be able to solve in a realistic and efficacious way the problems presented to her today by the world, by her own sons, and by the irresistible desire of all believers in Christ to form one single flock.

To turn now to the mission of the Church in India, there is no doubt whatever that the radiation and acceptance of her message will be in direct proportion to the depth of her mystical and contemplative life.

The essential adaptation must take place within: if this essential interior adaptation to the fundamental demand of India, is lacking, the external and sometimes spectacular forms of adaptation of which we hear so much today will inevitably prove vain, with the *vanitas* of which the Bible speaks. It is not by adopting vestments, rites, musical tones and dance-steps that the Church will win a hearing in India. All these things are certainly good and must be used : "*haec oportuit facere et illa non omittere*", as the Gospel says (Mt. 23, 23). But they can never be more than a sign, and a sign draws its value only from what it signifies ; otherwise it remains irremediately empty, salt without taste and without use, a sham which deceives only those who want to be deceived. Only a Church which has none but attained by the full actualisation of her own faith-experience to that inner depth where the authentic spiritual life of India is lived will be capable of entering into true religious dialogue with her. The Christian apostles of India should therefore prepare themselves for this dialogue by serious study of the thought of India and personal contact with her living spirituality. They should prepare themselves even more by a life in which prayer and contemplation hold pride of place. In doing this they should not neglect the means offered by Indian asceticism for the calming of the senses and the spirit.

The question of a Christian Yoga is too complex to be dealt with in a few lines. It will be enough to recall here that true Yoga cannot be reduced to the physiological exercises with which it is too often equated in the West. The essential purpose of Yoga is to free the mind from its tendency to dispersion by concentrating it on one point. It aims at



achieving a total void of thought, a void which alone permits complete inner relaxation and therefore total openness to that life-force which dwells in the heart of being and which the Christian calls the Spirit. It goes without saying that one cannot play with these things, and that normally no one should embark on them except under the direction of a competent master, for once the beaten paths of conceptualisation and the empirical consciousness are left behind, who can decide for himself whether he is truly tending towards the "fine point of the soul" or rather allowing himself to be drawn down into the unexplored world of the subconscious ?

It should perhaps be repeated that there is no question of teaching Christians non-Christian ways, or implying that the revelation of the Gospels is insufficient. Whether he likes it or not, the Christian cannot ignore the Vedanta. The Church necessarily encounters it on her earthly journey: the Church of India first of all, and in and through her the whole Christian world. She discovers in it potentialities of the human spirit hardly suspected anywhere else ; she also discovers the astonishing possibilities of the Indian soul, able to attain to such heights even before it has been touched by revelation. The Church's duty is clear : she must do all in her power to make it possible for the Christian soul, to develop such capacities to the maximum. She must, however, see that the faithful achieve these results by the use of specifically Christian means, and not by some round-about path. With this in view she should commission at least some of her children to plunge into the Indian experience of the depths of the self, for the benefit of their Christian brethren. Strong in their faith and their hope, the *parrhesia* already referred to, they will put themselves at the school of ancient India as the Greek fathers sat at the feet of the rhetoricians and philosophers of classical antiquity. They will return with their faith strengthened and enriched by a new depth of experience. A kind of osmosis will have taken place in their souls between the Hindu experience of the depths of the Self and the Christian experience of the depths of the Heart of Christ. Then they will be able to show their brothers the royal way of interior life, teaching them to lay

themselves wholly open to the action of the Spirit, the Spirit who searches hearts and communicates to them the life of God, waiting only for the consent of the elect to introduce them into the secrets of the divine life.<sup>1</sup> (Apoc. 3, 20).

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1. "The Unknown Christ of Hinduism" by R. Pannikar. (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964)

## VIII. IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MYSTERY

Spiritual experience, in whatever setting it occurs, should be approached only with the deepest reverence. It is the *mysterium tremendum*, the numinous *par excellence*, the burning bush which Moses was allowed to come near only after he had unfastened and removed his sandals. It is the meeting-place of the known and the not-known, the seen and the not-seen, the relative and the absolute or, in Christian terms, of the creature with his Creator and the Son with his Father. It is the holy dwelling-place of the divinity to which no *deva* has access, neither Agni nor Vayu nor Indra, not the senses nor the will nor the reasoning mind. Brahman is beyond all these things. The *tremendum*, the numinous, is the mystery of God himself.

To approach with reverence means first of all that one refuses to judge, to apply one's over-simple categories and *a priori* opinions to something which clearly transcends all ordinary powers of understanding. Who indeed art thou, O man, to judge? "Only the *Jñāni* can judge the *Jñāni*." A man can pass judgement only on what is below him, or at least on the same level.

Reverence also means humility : that is to say, we must very humbly seek to understand and give to each individual the credit for his own beauty, as one of the Nagpur group excellently expressed it. This supposes that we at least try to enter into the psychology, the habits of mind and the cultural background which explain the great variety of forms of religious and spiritual experience : and this again supposes that we accept the possibility that there are paths of which we know nothing.

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Christian revelation teaches that this *divinum* and *tremendum* is a "Thou" for me, or rather that I am a "Thou" for this divine Reality, and that this Reality therefore addresses me : this "*tad*," or "That", is an "I". Indeed it is in the "Thou" that He addresses His Son, and in His Son to me, that the "I" of the Father awakens Being to self-consciousness.

But perhaps we Christians too quickly forget that this knowledge is a pure gift of God. The substantial personality of God and of myself, the confrontation of Being between the two poles of Father and Son—and also of Creator and creature, God and myself—are truths beyond our understanding which the human mind cannot grasp. To know them fully, we need a direct and explicit revelation from God. If man ever comes to suspect something of them before that revelation is given, it can only be in a far-off and provisional way, through a kind of hesitant extrapolation of his empirical experience of “otherness”. And if such a man has ever been caught up into the experience of the Atman-Brahman, or at least learnt its secret from his masters or his sacred books, how can he attribute any value to such an extrapolation?

We have no right to forget that the mental climate of both the Semitic and the Greco-Roman worlds was quite different from that of ancient India, and that the theological formulations of Christian faith were therefore evolved on a completely different level of the psyche from that on which the Upanishads developed.

It is the reverence with which we should approach this experience that demands of us the *epoche* already mentioned in earlier chapters. We must provisionally bracket, as it were, everything that is not the experience we are trying to understand, going straight to the very heart and essential principle of that experience, in itself and for itself, to discover there the message it contains for us. We must free ourselves from our own mental preconditionings, refusing to judge in the light of our own philosophies—even, at least up to a certain point, of our own theologies. The moment of confrontation will come, but only when dialogue has been established on the right wave-length. We must first have the patience to gather the harvest: it can be sorted afterwards. This is the way of doing things recommended by the Lord himself in the parable of the net which draws everything out of the sea indiscriminantly, and even more in that of the cockle and the good seed. The man who is too eager to root up the cockle runs a serious risk of pulling up the good grain at the same time.

We are strongly rooted in our faith in Christ. That is the fundamental datum and the basis of the wonderful freedom of the Christian, making it possible for him to ignore nothing and reject nothing, as the Isha Upanishad puts it.

This mystery of faith must itself be approached with equal reverence. In this context it is natural to think first of the soul which has not yet received the Lord's revelation and is groping its way towards the full light, but the same principle applies to one which has already received the gift of faith and yet is still sometimes in anguish of mind. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at his neighbour, as Jesus said, and dare to reproach him, with insincerity or infidelity to grace ! It can never be repeated too often that a genuine encounter between God and the creature, God and me, me and each of my brothers, is a pure gift of faith. It should never be confused with a rational conclusion which we would have the right to impose on others in the name of logic. We must always be on our guard against our spontaneous reactions when faced with anything new to us which challenges our ingrained habits of thought. Are our "Christian" reactions always so pure ? Are they really the reactions of a Christian, or merely those of one accustomed to a different intellectual background ? We all know how easily we condemn anything novel or unpleasing to us, and on the other hand how quickly we find some good excuse or favourable explanation for persons or ideas which naturally arouse our sympathy. Most of the judgements we pass on Hindus and their religious and spiritual tradition depend on our affective and emotional approach to them and so too, unfortunately, does our ease or difficulty in understanding and assimilating that tradition. We have for instance no right to reproach Hindus for not appreciating the nature of sin and man's need for redemption. The knowledge of sin and of the need for redemption essentially depends on revelation, because it takes for granted a real encounter, person to person, between man and God. This is something quite different from a rational demonstration.

If in our study of the Upanishads we stress at each step the absence from these texts of truths known to us only through revelation we invalidate our whole line of approach. The problem of this apparent ignorance of man's fault and

need of reconciliation should be studied in the wider light of the intuition which underlies Upanishadic thought as a whole, not a propos of each verse taken as a separate unit. And here again, it is not enough merely to observe and condemn. We should try to understand the reason for this fundamental attitude and see whether we could not learn something from it.

We must always bear in mind the difference in cultural atmosphere between the Eastern world and the world in which Christianity developed. Allusion has already been made to the projection of the *tremendum* as it were "in front of" and "outside" the self characteristic of the classic religious approach of the West and the "integration" of the worshipper with the numinous which characterises that of the East. These approaches are no doubt equally valid in themselves : humanly speaking, and setting aside the evangelical revelation which came to bring both to their perfection, the spirituality of the East even seems to surpass anything of which the Western mediterranean world was capable in the religious sphere. It was it is true, in the cultural and religious setting of that world that God chose to reveal Himself, yet one should not confuse the receptacle with what is poured into it. Let us then try to shed our own religious and cultural limitations, or at least to realize and transcend them, before we call our Hindu brothers to account for theirs.

Before we impose on Hindus our conceptions of God, sin and redemption, we would do well to purify these concepts in the pitiless light shed by the Vedantic experience on every attempt to conceptualize the Mystery they signify. In my personal experience of God as "other" or of myself as a sinner, has my ego, my "I", really been stripped of its selfishness, its *ahamkara*, as Indian tradition calls it, or is not this setting of God over against me, a creature and a sinner, at least sometimes simply a more subtle way of asserting my ego and fortifying my *ahamkara*, proclaiming my "I" in spite of all, whereas this experience should really have been for me one of total surrender and annihilation in the presence of the majesty of the Lord? Illusion in such cases is all the easier in that the context is a holy and religious one in which very few would suspect the lurking possibility of what psychiatrists would describe as "substitution" or "transfer".

First of all, then, let us receive the message of the Upanishads with the heart of a child, free, open and full of trust, allowing it to act upon us "there where the power of Ish, the Lord, dwells" in the depths of our being, temples of the Spirit as we are, enriched by His wonderful gifts which, from fear to wisdom, adapt themselves to all situations, setting us wholly free for the service of God. Let us trust the Spirit.

The Christian cannot expect the Hindu to be any freer than he himself is from natural conditionings and attachments ; moreover his conditionings will frequently be diametrically opposed to ours. It must also be said that the Hindu is no less mortally afraid than his Western Christian brother of feeling his superficial ego eluding him, in spite of his vehement proclamation of the need to sacrifice it. Hindus and Christians must accept each other as they are, in their concrete historical situation. This is the essential prerequisite for all dialogue. The Christian who hoped to find in every Hindu a *Jñāni*, a wholly liberated and pacified soul, would be as sadly mistaken as a Hindu who, after reading the Gospel, expected to find in every Christian a living embodiment of the Sermon on the Mount.

We may proclaim for ever to Hindus that man truly encounters God as creature, son and sinner. India will never take this message seriously until it is freed from the dualistic presuppositions which too often colour our conceptualization and expression of it. She will not accept as genuine the "I" we claim to share with Christ until everything in us cries aloud that this "I" is wholly freed from the superimposed "hylic" and psychic "I" of our empirical consciousness. Only when his ego is fully purified and renewed in the Spirit is the Christian capable of preaching with authority the Personal nature of God and the reality of human personality.

This is impossible without an uncompromising renunciation. The transcendence of the ego is as inexorable in its demands in Christian asceticism as in that of the Vedānta. It exacts a "conversion" at the very roots of one's being. At the heart of every experience of the divine mystery there must be an essential *metanoia*. Without this there can be no entry into the "inwardness" of that mystery. It is

precisely here, as we have already seen, that the saving value of the experience of non-duality lies.

The experience of the repentant sinner is in the last analysis not different: its roots are in the same soil. If however it seems to be even loftier, and to offer a yet greater revelation of the infinity of God, this is because it involves a *metanoia* which penetrates even more deeply into the heart of man and the heart of God. It makes a man enter into the deepest recesses of his own being and he finds in this abyss no longer only a cloud, however luminous, through which the Mystery shines, but the living presence of the creating and redeeming God. Then his is drawn into the ultimate mystery of Being which is communion of love, the divine *koinonia*, inseparably both unity and multiplicity, the non-dual outflowing of being within the depths of itself.

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In the Johannine *Mahavakhya* or Upanishads we have the highest human expression of the experience of the mystery of God. This absolute, or *tremendum*, dwells within us. It is also the origin and end of the cosmos, as of the whole of creation. In Him lives all that lives: in Him thinks all that thinks. In Him awakens to itself all that comes to self-awareness.

It is certainly in meditating on these texts and sentences of the Gospel that the Christian grasps the value and the providential role of the Hindu's experience of Atman-Brahman in the spiritual development of man and of humanity as a whole. This experience is in itself natural, like the act of thinking and reflecting on one's thought. Neither man's first achievement of conscious reflection—the philosophic age—nor his arrival at the pure experience of the self—the Upanishadic age—dependent on any special intervention by God. Nevertheless one cannot help seeing the secret influence of the Spirit in the preparation and realization of these stages of human development and their ever wider diffusion among the children of men. The Spirit is everywhere, guiding all things to their final consummation in the pleroma of Christ. It therefore seems incredible that in sincere souls who have totally surrendered themselves this "concurrence" of God should not become "grace" in the



strict sense of the word and open out into the supernatural order. Nor should we forget that in reality there is only one order, and that in the total plan for creation as seen and willed by God the *amrita* or immortality of the Upanishads is the eternal life both promised and given to us by Christ. The penetration of man into the ontological depths of his own being in the Vedantic experience certainly seems to be the final preparation possible to the human spirit on the natural level for entry into the depths of God and the revelation of the ultimate secret of its existence.

It was to enable man to attain his end, which is to see him, that God gave the power of knowing which he exercises at these different levels—that of the external senses and sense perception, which is the lowest ; then, of a higher order, but still dependent on the senses, intelligence and conceptual awareness of the self and of the universe : and finally, and highest of all, the possibility of a pure and non-reflective self-awareness. In the course of his evolution man has gradually become less immersed in the matter from which God caused him to emerge, reaching new and higher degree of knowledge, reflection and consciousness. India has been chosen by God for her own sake, as well as for that of humanity and of the Church, to lead the human spirit to the highest peak of consciousness.

Greece had received from God a different mission : she was to provide the new-born Church with the means of expressing in conceptual terms the existential message she had received from the Lord. Only thus could the faithful transmission of that message be assured until the end of time. The Church was wonderfully enriched by this osmosis of hellenistic wisdom and Biblical revelation. From age to age, the Spirit of understanding will continue to reveal to the faithful the treasures of knowledge enshrined in these formulations.

It is rather the work of the Spirit of wisdom that the Vedantic experience is destined to prepare for. Older in time than the Greek discovery of the world of concepts, it has been called later in history to bring its contribution to the Church and so enter into the plan of salvation. This is fitting, for it opens up to the action of grace depths of the human psyche which seem to represent the culmination of

all that man is capable of discovering and realising in himself. In the design of God it is certainly the final preparation for the Gospel, for it disposes man to grasp its most sublime secrets in their definitive splendour.

In all this there can be no question of the Christian trying to add to the Vedanta an impossible "something else", some truth of a higher order which would transcend it, or to "superimpose" something on it, to use the Indian technical term. What he must do is to discover and set free, with the help of the Advaitic experience, the fulness of the treasures contained in the Christian faith-experience. It is at this point of contact between the Advaita and the knowledge of faith that the Christian, "a son in the Son", attains in the unity of the Spirit to the *experience of the Father*, the experience of that "Glory" which Jesus both promised and communicated to His own. Naturally this will mean first of all his own experience of being a child of the Father, a creature, a reconciled sinner, but through this primordial experience of being a child of God, he will also know the very experience of the Father Himself, His Joy and His Bliss, for as son and heir he has a right to all His goods. This experience of the Father, if one may dare so to express it, is alone eternal life, Principle and Source of all that is and all that lives. It is in His communication of it to me, in my communion with God, my Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that I myself am and live. But this communion with the Father transcends all the duality of thought. It is only in the primordial experience of Being, in the awakening of Being to itself, that I stammeringly utter my loving response to the Father's eternal invitation of Love, or rather that He utters it in me when He utters it in His Word, in the very act by which He is Himself.

Here there is certainly an ineffable "I" and "Thou". But there is also, and inseparably a no less ineffable "ekatvam". Only awareness of this *ekatvam*, the unity of the Spirit, gives entry into the mystery of the communion of Love at the heart of that unity, and it is the Spirit of Wisdom, the divine *Pneuma* in the very depths of our own *pneuma*, who makes us experimentally aware of this through a co-natural knowledge. This indivisible mystery of *koinonia* and *ektavam*, of simultaneous communion and non-duality,

is found everywhere in being : between the divine Persons, between men, between men and God. It is in Jesus, the man-God, that it is most fully revealed on this earth, because the fulness of the divine "being" is bodily present in His very flesh (Col. 2, 9). Communion is non-duality, unity in self-communication : such is the law of being.

The last word of all is the bosom of the Father, pre-figured in the Upanishadic symbol of the *guha*<sup>1</sup>, which is both the most secret place of man's heart and the loftiest and most remote heavenly abode, as the Taittiriya Upanishad says (2, 1) : *nihilam guhayam parama vyoman*. It is the mystery which is inaccessible in its very proximity, quite close and yet transcendent, at once within and without, irreducible to all notions of inside and outside, as the Isha reminds us. But the Father has revealed this inmost secret of His nature only to those whom He has chosen (Katha Upanishad) in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1, 4), the Word made flesh, He who is, uniquely and essentially, as God and as man, the Revelation and Epiphany of the Father.

### In Inseparable Communion

The mission of the Christian in relation to the Hindu is therefore to transmit to him the fulness of the experience of the Spirit given to us in Jesus : to make him realize that there is in man something even more ultimate and profound than the interiority discovered by his sages and mystics, a *guha* more secret than that of the depths of the heart of man—the abyss of the heart of Christ, into which no one can enter save by undergoing a death of the spirit. Was it not the thrust of a soldier's lance that first opened the heart? In order to communicate the message, which can come only from the depths of his own soul, the Christian must begin by himself entering into this essential interiority. Neither words nor speculations are of any help here. What is needed is an inexorable dying to self, a dying to the congenital dualism of the human mind and the enslaving self-assertion of the ego which is the fundamental obstacle to the taking

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1. Guha : Crypt, cave ; in the mystical sense, the depths of the "heart" or the soul.

possession of man by the Spirit of God foretold by the Scriptures. Only on this condition will the Spirit be able to work in complete liberty, and bring to their fulfilment all that was promised in the types and shadows that prepared the way for the Gospel.

Then all the sacrifices of the Gentiles and all the treasures of the nations will find their consummation in the Eucharistic, mystical and sacramental offering of the Christian. In his mind illumined by faith and the gift of wisdom all the veils which concealed the ultimate meaning of the types and prophecies will be rent, and he will understand all that has been written concerning the Lord and his Church in the scriptures of the cosmic alliance. In the transformation of his own being all plenitude will be restored, as he awaits the final recapitulation of all in Christ, in the bosom of the Father and for his glory.

One of the phrases most often heard at Nagpur was "death and resurrection". Every going to God, every passing of Christ, is a Pasch. Every drawing near to God inevitably includes a reconciliation, for man is a sinner; and reconciliation is something wholly given. The whole history of Israel bears witness to the fact that entry into the people of God and belonging to this people involves a separation, from the setting-apart of Abraham and even of Noe to the election of the remnant of Israel. The very concept of holiness, fundamental in the Bible, includes that of a putting aside for God, a choosing out, a separation from all that is profane, in Pauline terms, a snatching away from Satan and the powers of darkness.

But it is not sufficient to remind others, from the lofty heights of one's own belief and settled Christian convictions, that there is no direct passage from the Advaita to Christianity. If we adopt this attitude, our faith may prove to be mere pharisaism and our so-called convictions simply the compensation for a lack of psychic integration—the very antithesis of a gift of God received and kept in fear and trembling (2 Cor. 4, 7 and Ph. 2, 12). Jesus did not content himself with reminding men that reconciliation with God demands the shedding of blood (Heb. 9, 22). He gave his own blood to effect it for them all.

It cannot be denied that there is a night in the passage from the Vedanta to the Gospel—the terrible Paschal night of the crossing of the Red Sea, when only their faith in Yahweh their Saviour gave the Hebrews, the courage to flee before Pharaoh, and the night of the Agony of the Lord. But India will never enter into this night until those who invite and urge her to do so have themselves gone down into it and lived its anguish and its darkness in the anguish and darkness of their own flesh and heart and mind. The Lord himself was the first to do this. He came into the world not only to point out to men the way that leads back to the Father but to go up by that steep path himself as their leader, in their name and at their head. The path was the way of the Cross. The law of substitution is at the heart of the Christian mystery : it is the law of love itself, the supreme commandment. I am myself the price of my brother's salvation (Jn. 15, 13).

The Christian's night will be the painful passage into the depths of the self, in the name of those whom he represents before God. Did not Jesus consent to allow the curse pronounced by Scripture upon the sinner (Gal. 3, 13) to penetrate into his very flesh and the most intimate depths of his heart? For the Christian this will mean the double anguish of the purification of his Christian faith and of his experience of non-duality. Both are essential to him, both are woven into the most secret fibres of his being, both express in him and through him the mystery of God and of the self. His reason cries out to him that there is no passage from the one to the other. But he knows that the gifts of God are without repentance. It is at the deepest centre of his being, at the joint use of soul and spirit, (Heb. 5, 12) that he feels torn apart by this dilemma, in a purification which is decisive both for his experience of the self and for his faith. Since the curse laid upon Eve there has been no transmission of life without pain. The Church herself was born upon the Cross, in the anguish and dereliction of God. The awakening to the glory of the Father in the depths of the soul is the final birth of man. It cannot escape the universal law.

The Christian must experience in his own person the anguish of the Hindu who has heard the call of Christ, but

cannot see how Christianity with its dogmatic formulae, its institutionalism and its ritualism can really be compatible with the profound inner experience of which his gurus have told him and which he may even have known himself. It is not for the Christian to say: "I believe all the same, whatever may be the truth of that experience". This would be to refuse the gift of God and perhaps to fail in the sincerity man owes to God and to himself. Nor may he seek to minimize the value of the Advaitic experience. That would be equally unworthy of a Christian and would reveal a fear incompatible with faith.

Jesus did not escape fear when his hour had come. "Father, save me from this hour!" (Jn. 12, 27). Yet in spite of the shrinking of his nature he allowed himself to be led to the agony and to Calvary. Indeed it was for that hour that he had come.

The "hour" of India must strike first of all in the heart of the Christian. It is only when he had allowed it to strike in and for him that he will have the right to say to his Hindu brother who still hesitates to acknowledge Christ and ask for sacramental incorporation into the People of God: "Enter into this night, into this death".

This anguish of the Paschal night also belongs to the *koinonia*, the ecclesial community as a whole. Salvation is experienced only in common, in the community of the Church and the community of the universe, because there is only one Spirit whose unity preserves all things in being. If one of my brothers is still outside the way of salvation, how can I myself consent to be saved? I cannot be at ease in my faith so long as my brother does not yet believe. It is he and I together who must believe. I am made for communion. My faith cannot be complete unless my brother shares it. I cannot help living his doubt even at the heart of my own belief, like the children who struggled even in Rebecca's womb (Gen. 25, 22). Something of myself bows in adoration in the sanctuary of Shiva when my brother adores there, goes on pilgrimage to Pandharpur or Kedarnath when he mingles with the crowd of pilgrims, and is withdrawn with Ramana into the *advaita* of being. Just as Paul bore in his flesh the thorn of his people who had not yet been led to the source of grace, so the Christian of India must remain a being

out of joint until all his own people have been integrated into the People of God.

A story from the old lore of India will help us to understand all this. The king Vipascit was being taken to heaven by the messengers of Indra, the king of the gods, but on the way the servants of Yama called him to hell for a few moments, in expiation for some fault he had committed inadvertently. The king then saw and even more realised in himself the torments of those detained in hell, not a few of whom had been his friends and relatives on earth. So, when Dharma invited him to leave the place and proceed on his journey, he refused bluntly : "Thousands of people are suffering here. How could I leave them behind?" "They are sinners", explained Dharma, "they have to pay for their crimes, whereas you must go to the abode of the Immortals and receive the reward of your good deeds". But Vipascit remained inflexible. His heart would not allow him to go to heaven *alone* and since hell was unable to keep him, all the others left with him for the city of Indra and in this way hell was emptied . . . .

Is not this just what Jesus did? And does not God expect each one of us to do the same, under pain of being tormented for ever in our inmost hearts by the terrifying question : "What have you done with your brother?"

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## APPENDIX

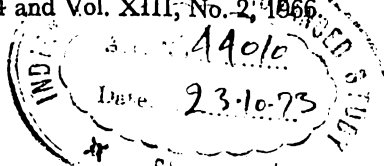
Meetings on Hindu and Christian spirituality underlying the experience recorded in this book :

Shantivanam, 1957, 1958 and 1960  
Almora, April 1961.  
Rajpur, April 1962.  
Delhi, April 1963.  
Nagpur, December 1963.

The participants in one or more of these meetings included the following :

Eugene d'Souza, Archbishop of Bhopal.  
Jacques-Albert Cuttat, Swiss Ambassador, Delhi.  
E. Zeitler, S.V.D., Poona.  
Uma Vesci, Varanasi.  
J. D. M. Stuart, Delhi.  
Abhishiktananda, Shantivanam, now Gyansu.  
Dominique van Rollegheem, O.S.B., Bangalore.  
R. Panikkar, Varanasi.  
C. Murray Rogers, Jyotiniketan.  
F. Mahieu, O.C.S.O., Kurisumala.  
Lazarus Moore, Sat Tal.  
K. Klostermaier, S.V.D., Vrindaban, now Bombay.  
H. Jai Singh, Bangalore.  
L. d Hendecourt, Mysore.  
Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., Kurisumala.  
P. Fallon, S.J., Calcutta.  
R. V. de Smet, S.J., Poona.  
G. A. Deleury, S.J., Poona.  
J. Cole, Jyotiniketan.  
J. Britto Chethimattam, C.M.I., Bangalore.  
J. B. Alter, Rajpur.  
E. Aguilar, Barcelona.  
J. Albuquerque, Delhi.  
Minoru Kasai, Varanasi, now Tokyo.

Two later meetings have taken place in Jyotiniketan Ashram in April 1964 and in January 1966. For these see reports in "Religion and Society," Bangalore, Vol. XI, No. 4, 1964 and Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1966.







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