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## RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND REVELATION

Revelation is always understood in contrast to man's natural religious experience. The problem whether there is real opposition between natural and revealed religious experience is often discussed in the Christian theological tradition, especially in the context of the comparative study of religions. In this paper I propose to examine S. Radhakrishnan's attempt to reconcile the conflict between natural religious experience and revelation. The main ideas of the author are brought under four main heads: 1) Religious experience; 2) Its Nature; 3) The content of Religious Experience and 4) The Relation between Revelation, Reason and History.

### 1. Religious Experience

At the very outset the author reminds us that the problem concerning religious experience exists "directly only for the religious man who has the spiritual intuition or experience and indirectly for all those who, while they have no personal share in the experience yet have sufficient belief that the experience does occur and is not illusory."<sup>1</sup> The attempt of psychologists to reduce religious intuitions to psychological factors cannot be justified. "To trace the psychological conditions of a belief is not to determine its validity. To say that our sense-perceptions answer to reality, while spiritual intuitions do not, is for psychology a gratuitous assumption."<sup>2</sup> The sceptics dismiss the experiences of saints and mystics as due to unsoundness of mind or psychological tricks. They are perhaps justified by the history of religious experience where it has often been confused with emotional thrills and edifying feelings. . . . Simply because religion has been often mistaken for what it is not, and got mixed up with fantastic notions and wanton cruelties,

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1. S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1951), p. 84 (Hereinafter referred to as *Idealist View*).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

we cannot disregard the entire field of religious experience as baseless.<sup>3</sup> But he agrees that this fact reminds us of the need for careful scrutiny and examination of what claims to be religious experience.<sup>4</sup>

For him it is an established fact: "there is also an ancient and widespread tradition that we can apprehend the Eternal Being with distinctness and immediacy. When the *Upanisads* speak of *Jñāna* or gnosis, when Buddha speaks of *bōdhi* or enlightenment, when Jesus speaks of the truth that will make us free, they refer to the mode of direct spiritual apprehension of the Supreme on which the gap between truth and Being is closed."<sup>5</sup> Concerning the nature of this knowledge we read: "Spiritual certainty is conveyed by spiritual knowledge, which is not merely perceptual or conceptual. This knowledge is not a-logical but super-logical. It is called integral insight or intuitive knowledge."<sup>6</sup> And he shows that according to the Hindu scriptures this experience of God seems to be the destiny of man on earth. "Whoever O Gargi, without knowing this Imperishable departs from this world, he is poor or to be pitied; on the other hand, whoever having known the imperishable, departs from this world, is a Brahmin."<sup>7</sup> Again: "If we know him here, then is fruition of life; if we do not know him here, that is the greatest calamity."<sup>8</sup> But this knowledge has to be attained through an inward intuition of truth: "Intuition without reason is blind; reason without intuition is ungrounded. Only when they are held in balance does man attain wholeness."<sup>9</sup>

3. S. Radhakrishnan and J.H. Murisheed (eds.), "Spirit in Man," *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966), p. 494. (Hereinafter referred to as "Spirit in Man").

4. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5. S. Radhakrishnan, "Fragments of a Confession: The Religion of the Spirit and the World's need," *The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan* (ed.), Paul A. Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing House, 1952), p. 6. (Hereinafter referred to as, "Fragments").

6. S. Radhakrishnan, "My Search for Truth", *Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, Robert A. Modormott (ed.), (Delhi: Jaico Publishing House, 1972), p. 36. (Hereinafter referred to as "My search for truth").

7. Quoted in S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1956), p. 45.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

9. S. Radhakrishnan, *Fellowship of Spirit*, p. 9.

## 2. Nature of the Experience

### i) *An Integral Experience*

In the words of the author this is an integral insight in which "we have knowledge by identity... we are put in touch with the actual being. This highest knowledge transcends the distinction of subject and object... the subject is not opposed to the object, but is intimately united with it... the inward realization of the truth of spirit transcends all intellectual verification, since it exists in an immediacy beyond all conceivable mediation."<sup>10</sup> It is said to be "a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries broken and ordinary distinctions transcended."<sup>11</sup> Here he refers to the *Enneads* where a description of such an experience is given. The privacy of the individual self is broken into and invaded by a universal self which the individual self feels as his own.<sup>12</sup> This seems to be "a fusing of the finite and the infinite, of the surface consciousness and the ultimate depths," which gives the sense of a new creation. Religious experience is an integral and undivided consciousness. But such wisdom cannot come except to those who are pure not only in heart but also in the intellect, which has to rid itself of all preconceptions. As Radhakrishnan himself puts it, "unmediated apprehension of the primordial Spirit is the knowledge of God." And he continues, "it is achieved by a change of consciousness, the experience of a new birth. It means an illuminated mind, a changed heart, and a transformed will."<sup>13</sup>

"If the substantial quality of the human soul abides in that quality which we call spirit, growth or spiritual life means conscious realization of the fundamental truth."<sup>14</sup> It is this truth that is emphasized when he says that the great principle of our religion is that "the Divine is in us, in all of us, operative and alive, ready to come to the surface of the first suitable opportunity. The light which lightens everyman that cometh into the world<sup>15</sup> this *antar-jyoti*, cannot be put out. Whether we like it or not the divine is in us, and the end of man consists in attaining union with the

10. *Fragments*, p. 61.

11. *Idealist View*, p. 92.

12. *Enneads*, quoted in *Idealist View*, p. 92, footnote 2.

13. S. Radhakrishnan, *Education*, p. 182.

14. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 96. (Hereinafter referred to as *Eastern Religions*).

15. Jn. 1, 4: 9.

Divine."<sup>16</sup> This, he says is the "experience of a pure and unitary consciousness."<sup>17</sup> In his paper on 'Reason and types of Intuition in Radhakrishnan's philosophy, Robert Browning quotes him saying, "intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of mind with reality. It is knowledge by being and not by senses or symbols. It is awareness of the truth of things by identity. We become one with the truth, one with the object of knowledge."<sup>18</sup>

George Congar sums up some aspects of the author's views on religious experience as follows: Intuition is direct knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Compared with intellectual process, it is another manifestation of the spirit.<sup>20</sup> In this experience, there is an extension of perception to regions beyond sense, an awareness of real values which are neither objects in space and time nor universals of thought . . . . Intuition is integral experience, the exercise of consciousness as a whole,<sup>21</sup> the response of the whole man.<sup>22</sup>

## ii) *An Immediate Experience*

Intuitive consciousness or religious experience is called in Indian terms '*pratibha*' or '*arsa-jnana*' or '*parasamvit*' and "has the characteristics of immediacy and clarity."<sup>23</sup> He says, ". . . ideas manifest themselves in different stages of development and we can understand these stages only in the light of the full development. It is the perfected product that gives us the key to the understanding and interpretation of the imperfect. The full stature of man, his completion as man, is reached when he becomes a Godman."<sup>24</sup> And one reaches this stage precisely in the religious experience.

16. S. Radhakrishnan, *Occasional Speeches*, p. 285.

17. *Fragments*, p. 63.

18. *Idealist View*, p. 146; quoted in Robert Browning, "Reason and Types of Intuition in Radhakrishnan's Philosophy," p. 76.

19. Cfr. *Idealist View*, p. 144.

20. Cfr. S. Radhakrishnan, *Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1920), p. 196. (Hereinafter referred to as *Reign of Religion*).

21. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

22. Cfr. Congar, *Radhakrishnan's World View*, p. 86-111.

23. *Idealist View*, p. 92.

24. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra: The Philosophy of Life*, (London: George Unwin Ltd, 1971), p. 103-104. (Hereinafter referred to as *Brahmasutra*).

Explaining the so called process of intuitive consciousness, Radhakrishnan remarks that, when mind, by gradual training, is freed from the influences of the concepts and memory-images of the past, it immerses itself in the object and is absorbed and pervaded by it. "The nature of the object is then fully revealed. When we develop yogic intuition we have direct knowledge of objects past and future."<sup>25</sup> This experience which our author calls intuition or integral insight, is different from sense-observation, mathematical and logical reasoning. It is creativity. "It reveals the central feature of the intuited object. The subject and the object in intuition tend to coalesce. We thus gain an unmediated, immediate knowledge and not the mediated, inadequate and always uncertain cognition or ideas derived from the sense perception or logical reasoning. . . It lies at the basis of sense and logical knowledge."<sup>26</sup>

But it is mixed up with interpretation and tradition.<sup>27</sup> Revelation is not found outside some mind. The superhuman wisdom which transcends time is given to us in time. Therefore he insists that "even though spiritual experience arises with a self-evident certitude, the interpretation we give to it require rational scrutiny."<sup>28</sup>

This religious intuition is an "all-comprehending one, covering the whole of life. While the spirit in man fulfills itself in many ways, it is most completely fulfilled in the religious life."<sup>29</sup> Here he observes that arguments give us only assurance; experience on the contrary produces certainty.<sup>30</sup> As he himself puts it, "it is felt to be sufficient and complete."<sup>31</sup> In other words, this experience does not look beyond itself for meaning and validity. It does not demand completion by something else; "It is sovereign in its own rights and carries its own credentials."<sup>32</sup> But he is aware of the necessity for the religious seer to justify his inmost convictions in a way that satisfies the norms of the age. Where this intellectual confirmation is lacking, the seer's attitude is regarded as one of trust. In this sense religion rests on faith. But this must be distinguished from a mechanical faith which depends on authority and wishes to enjoy the consolations

25. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

27. *Idealist View*, p. 98-99.

28. *Brahma Sutra*, p. 115.

29. *Idealist View*, p. 201-202.

30. S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, p. 151.

31. *Idealist View.*, p. 92.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

of religion without the labour of being truly religious, from the truly religious faith which has its roots in experience.<sup>33</sup>

During the experience, it seems that the tension of normal life disappears, giving rise to inward peace, power and joy. And this seems to be implied by the very word *santi* used by the Indians to denote the mental state of the self during religious experience. As different from the greek word *atarxy*, the word *santi* connotes a positive feeling of calm and confidence, joy and strength in the midst of outward pain and defeat. In other words, one can legitimately say that "the experience is felt as profoundly satisfying, where darkness turned into light, sadness into joy, and despair into assurance."<sup>34</sup> He finds support for his ideas in the writings of A.N. Whitehead who held "Self-evidence," "is the basic fact on which all greatness supports itself. But proof is one of the routes by which self-evidence is often obtained."<sup>35</sup>

Radhakrishnan is more emphatic on the characteristics of intuition as 'sufficient and complete' in itself when he says that "intuitive knowledge is the only kind of absolute knowledge."<sup>36</sup> He remarks that direct knowledge is incapable of growth because it is individual and hence incommunicable. He goes further to say that "we cannot verify it and therefore cannot dispute it. It transcends the partial truths of the divided mind, the intellectual or the sensuous. Intuitive knowledge is proved on our pulses. It is the only kind of absolute knowledge.... Intuition is the ultimate vision of our profoundest being."<sup>37</sup> And it is from this depth of his conviction that he dares to say that this kind of a religious experience is "self established (*svatassidha*), self-evidencing (*svasamvedya*) and self-luminous (*svayam prakasa*)."<sup>38</sup> He is quite consistent with himself when he writes that the experience itself does not argue or explain but it 'knows and is.' It is its inherent, transcendental quality which puts it beyond the bounds of proof demanded by the intellect.<sup>39</sup> It comes to us with a constraint that brooks no

33. Cfr. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957) p. 14 (Hereinafter referred to as *Hindu View*).

34. *Idealist View*, p. 93.

35. A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, p. 66.

36. *Idealist View*, p. 144.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

39. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

denial. All religions call upon us to renew those great moments and make the experience of the spirit the centre of our lives.<sup>40</sup>

In his own words: "this is the immediate awareness itself. It is experienced by participation.... We apprehend it with all sides of our being, *sarvabhavana*.... Truth is the vision of reality which satisfies one's whole being. It is grasped by the complete man."

### iii) *A Revealing Experience*

This experience which is immediate, all-comprehending, complete and self sufficient, "is felt as of the nature of a discovery or revelation,"<sup>41</sup> and not a mere conjuncture or a creation. At this point one has to admit that in most cases Indian writers do not make as much use of the term 'revelation' as is generally made in Christian circles. They speak rather of "a spiritual intuition '*drsti*' or vision"<sup>42</sup> into the reality of God.<sup>43</sup> But the word 'vision' however is employed here more in a passive sense rather than in the sense of an active 'look.'

Radhakrishnan observes that the creative insight is not the final link in a chain of reasoning; nor is it a construction "out of the sources of our mind."<sup>44</sup> When the insight occurs, it is found to contain in living unity the properties previously isolated in dead notation and many others previously unnoticed. The idea goes beyond all formulation and schematism. It arises out of profound experience.<sup>45</sup> The insight does not arise so much as the solution of a problem, but as the perception of something true. He writes "The most valuable part of our heritage comes not from logical proofs, but from the prophetic souls who announce their deepest convictions, not as their discoveries or inventions but as the self revelation of God in their souls."<sup>46</sup> The famous 'ontological argument' of St Anselm, for example, is not founded on anything external or accidental, but, is felt, is experienced, is perceived by or is manifested to the spirit in us. And that is the only reason why it has value and not on any other ground.<sup>47</sup> The experiences comes in a flash as distinct from patient obser-

40. *Fragments*, p. 63.

41. *Idealist View*, p. 95.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

43. Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 152.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 219-20.

47. Cfr. *Idealist View*, pp. 220-21. The ontological argument is a report of experience.

vation or logical analysis. We cannot foresee it or consciously prepare for it... It reveals the central feature of the intuited object."<sup>48</sup> We thus receive an immediate and integral knowledge of Reality.

It is characteristic of Indian thought that it speaks of revelation or intuition as if God makes himself so transparent or luminous that he be apprehended by the soul in the vision. Difficult though it is, Indian thought tries also to express revelation in terms of intersubjectivity rather than in subject-object relation. This point is well brought out by the author. He remarks that, Transcendent Being is never given as an object. It is experienced directly in the very failure of discursive reason to reach it. It becomes transparent in illumination.<sup>49</sup>

Religious experience is generally capable of revealing the complete reality, but it does not mean that every experience is always transparent illumination. Radhakrishnan recognizes this limitation. Commenting on the author's position George Arapura, in his book *'Radhakrishnan and Integral Experience'*, writes: "Complete revelation of complete reality belongs to the ideal possibilities of religion. But there are practical limitations to conjure with. If we were to realize the ideal possibilities of religion as a secure and continuous experience, then there would be no need for a theory of such experience."<sup>50</sup>

### 3. The Content of Religious Experience

The problem to be discussed is raised by the author himself. "If religion is experience, the question arises, what is it that is experienced" ?<sup>51</sup> First of all he explains the difficulty and complexity of the question and suggests the method of keeping silence on metaphysical questions as in

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We cannot have certain ideas without having had the experience of the objects of which they are the ideas. In such cases it is not illegitimate to pass from the ideas to the objects referred to by them. We should not have had an idea of absolute with it, if we had not been intuitively conscious of it. The proof of the existence is founded on the experience. The ontological argument is defective if it is treated as a logical inference. To have the idea of a most perfect being is certainly different from affirming the existence of such a being. The meaning which the ontological argument seeks to convey is that the idea of God is an underived and self-evident one.

48. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *Brahma Sutra*, p. 107.

49. *Idealist View*, p. 161.

50. J.C. Arapura, *Radhakrishnan and Integral Experience* (London : Asia Publishing House, 1966) (Hereinafter referred to as *Integral Experience*).

51. *Hindu View*, p. 19.



the case of Buddha. Since this could not satisfy the human mind which is inquisitive, an attempt is made to answer the question, but still in negative terms. To satisfy the mind which demands an answer as positive as possible an attempt is also then made to give some positive explanation of the content of the experience.

i) *Description in Negative Terms*

Along with a long standing mystical tradition Radhakrishnan also takes the view that, "the unquestionable content of the experience is that about which nothing more can be said."<sup>52</sup> The famous Indian religious poet Kabir subscribes to the same tradition when he sings:

"There is an endless world, O my brother, and there is the nameless Being, of whom nought can be said.

Only he knows it who has reached that region: it is other than all that is heard and said.

No form, no body, no length, no breadth is seen there: how can I tell you that which it is?"<sup>53</sup>

The famous dictum of Lao Tze was, 'he who knows the Tao may be recognized by the fact that he is reluctant to speak of it.' The prophetic souls, the religious geniuses intuit cosmic truths which, according to Radhakrishnan, cannot be communicated except imperfectly. That is why the intellectual creeds seem to be such imperfect expressions which consequently appear to be in conflict with one another. For instance, some christian mystics declare that they see in the highest mystical vision the blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Orthodox muslim mystics deny this triune conception. Karl Heim, for his part, declares that for the mystic, "at the peak of ecstatic experience, all thoughts of the person of Jesus are lost and the soul sinks into the ocean of the divine unutterable." But this variety or apparent conflict of visions in religious experience does not lead him to the conclusion that in religious experience we ascribe objective existence to subjective suggestions. On the contrary, he explicitly affirms that, "spiritual experience is not a subjective impression but cognition of an object. Spiritual experience has this in the common with perceptual experience that in both there is the recognition of something given. It is an experimental knowledge of the things of

52. *Idealist View*, p. 96.

53. Quoted in Radhakrishnan, *Idealist View*, p. 96, footnote 2.

God."<sup>54</sup> However, this discrepancy of views about religious experience shows that our notions of God are not perfect. To say that our ideas of God are not true is not to deny the reality of God to which our ideas refer. We might perhaps say that "refined definitions of God as moral personality, and holy love may contradict cruder ones which look upon him as a primitive despot, a sort of sultan in the sky, but they all intend the same reality."<sup>55</sup>

The conceptual substitutes for ineffable experiences are not adequate. They are products of rational thinking. The classical Indian philosopher Sankara would say that all forms contain an element of untruth and the real is beyond these forms.<sup>56</sup> Any attempt to describe the experience falsifies it to an extent. He is like light, making things luminous but himself invisible. "The mystery of the divine reality eludes the machinery of speech and symbol."<sup>57</sup> But at the same time symbolism is an essential part of human life, which seems to be the only possible response of a creature conditioned by time and space to the timeless and spaceless reality. St Thomas Aquinas seems to agree with this idea when he remarks in his *Summa Theologica*:

"it is agreed that whatever is received into anything is therein after the mode of the recipient; and consequently the likeness of the divine essence impressed on our intellect: and the mode of our intellect falls short of a perfect reception of the divine likeness; and the lack of perfect likeness may occur in as many ways as unlikeness may occur."<sup>58</sup>

Hence the seers speak of the 'Divine Darkness,' 'that of which nothing more can be said' etc., when they attempt to describe their consciousness of direct communion with God. And the author remarks that this reverent agnosticism is a more fitting attitude than the flippant vulgarity with which some dogmatists speak of divine mysteries.<sup>59</sup> Indian scriptures abound with similar descriptions of the experience: "there the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor mind, we know not, we understand not, how one

54. *Brahma Sutra*, p. 242.

55. *Hindu View*, p. 20.

56. Cfr. *Idealist View*, p. 96.

57. *Hindu View*, p. 20.

58. St Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III q. 92, a. 1., quoted in Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions*, p. 318.

59. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions*, p. 318.

would teach it," says the Upanisad.<sup>60</sup> The 'neti,' 'not this,' of Yajnavalkya, the *nescio* of Ruysbroeck, the negative descriptions of Dionysius the Aeropagite, Eckhart and Boehme,<sup>61</sup> try to elucidate in different terms the same reality of the ineffable experience.<sup>62</sup>

Radhakrishnan recognizes that there is a danger in these negative descriptions. By denying all attributes and relations we expose ourselves to the charge of reducing the ultimate being to bare existence which is absolute vacuity. But we have to bear in mind that the negative account is intended to express the soul's sense of the transcendence of God, the 'wholly other,' of whom naught may be predicated save in negations. The negative descriptions in the Scriptures are intended not to demonstrate him, but only to bear witness to him. The very fact that the self of man is able to know it indicates its kinship with the deepest in man. The Supreme is not an object presented to knowledge, but is the condition of knowledge.

#### ii) *Description in Positive Terms*

It is extremely difficult for the human mind to resign itself to absolute silence or negative description alone. Although the completely other, the absolutely unlimited, seems to be akin to the utterly indefinite, the human mind craves for something definite and limited and so uses its resources for bringing down the Supreme to the region of the determined. This is transmitted to us in the form of myths and metaphors which, as the author remarks, "do not have any fixed meaning and therefore can be interpreted as life requires." In other words, "our apprehensions of the life of spirit, the symbols by which we express it, change with time."<sup>63</sup> "The identification of this power or spirit with the historic figures of Buddha, or Christ, the confusion of the simple realization of the universal self in us with a catastrophic revelation from without, is an interpretation, a personal confession and not necessarily an objective truth."<sup>64</sup> What we may say without any hesitation seems to be that "something is directly experienced." And this something seems to be "unconsciously interpreted in terms of the tradition in which the individual is trained. The frame of reference which each

60. *Kena Up.* 3.

61. Cfr. *Hindu View.*, pp. 20-21.

62. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions*, p. 30.

63. Radhakrishnan, *Principal Upanisads*, p. 24.

64. *Idealist View.*, p. 29.

individual adopts is determined by heredity and culture."<sup>65</sup> The content of this something, the "that" of the "that-what" which is experienced, "is merely the affirmation of a fact, or a self-existent spiritual experience in which all distinctions are blurred and the individual seems to overflow into the whole and belong to it."<sup>66</sup>

In this experience of shattering profundity, we are filled with light and environed by the presence of spirit; we acquire a wonderful clarity of mind and feel ourselves to be parts of a friendly universe. This seems to be supported by Plotinus who speaks in similar terms about the spiritual experiences which he himself had: "Many times it happened that I have been lifted out of the body into myself, becoming external to all other things and self-centred beholding a marvellous beauty; more than ever assured of community with the loftiest order: acquiring identity with the divine."<sup>67</sup> Many passages in St Augustine's writings seem to indicate that in great moments of his life he arrived at 'That which is,' and in one flash, one leap, touched that eternal wisdom which abides for ever. Radhakrishnan would say, "whenever the soul comes to itself, in any land or social boundaries, whenever it centres down in its inward deeps, whenever it sensitively responds to the currents of deeper life that surround it, it finds true nature and lives joyously, thrillingly, in the life of the spirit."<sup>68</sup> He would remark in unambiguous terms that, "in *samadhi* or ecstatic consciousness we have a sense of immediate contact with ultimate reality, of the unification of the different sides of our nature. It is a state of pure apprehension in which the whole being is welded into one."<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere he remarks that the experience consists in the realization that one is the self of pure consciousness free from all pain. Pain is the result of alienation from reality and when that is removed, pain disappears.<sup>70</sup> Again, he notes that in this transcendental consciousness, where the body is still, the mind attains quiescence, and thought comes to rest, we are

65. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

67. *Enneads*, IV, 8, 1, quoted in Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1956) p. 46 (Hereinafter referred to as *Religion and Society*).

68. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

69. *Eastern Religions*, p. 51.

70. S. Radhakrishnan, *History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western* (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1957) p. 275. (Hereinafter, *History of Philosophy*).

in contact with the pure spirit of which the states of waking, dream, and sleep are imperfect articulations.<sup>71</sup>

In the final analysis, one might be able to say that, "in the moment of its highest insight, the self becomes aware not only of its own existence, but of the existence of an omnipotent spirit of which it is, as it were, a focussing. We belong to the real and the real is mirrored in us. The great text of the Upanisad affirms it - '*Tat tvam asi*' (That art Thou),"<sup>72</sup> which is a simple statement of an experienced fact. This self-disclosure of God in the self of man could also be called man's contemplation of the Absolute in himself. Thus "God's revelation and man's contemplation seem to be two sides of one fact."<sup>73</sup>

### iii) *Interpretation of the Experience*

In the various accounts of mystic experiences Radhakrishnan finds a graduated scale of interpretations from the most 'impersonal' to the most 'personal.' The religious seer seeks the help of the imagination to express his vision. The consequence is a spectrum of descriptions about God. Every view of God from the primitive worship of nature to the Father-love of St Francis and the Mother-love of Ramakrishna represents some aspect or other of the relation of the human to the divine spirit. Each method of approach, each mode of address answers to some mood of the human mind. Not one of them gives the whole truth, though each of them is partially true.<sup>74</sup>

Now, in the attempt to interpret one's own vision, "the highest category we can use is that of self-conscious personality. If we analyse the concept of personality, we find that it includes cognition, emotion and will and God is viewed as the supreme knower, the great lover and the perfect will . . . (Brahma, Visnu and Siva according to the Hindu concept of God.) These three are not three independent centres of consciousness, as popular theology represents, but three sides of one complex personality.<sup>75</sup> Elsewhere he remarks that, attempts to rationalize the mystery, to translate it into the language of concepts that which is inexpressible in concepts,

71. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

72. *Idealist View.*, p. 104-105.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

74. *Hindu View.*, p. 22.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

have resulted in different versions. We may use the trinitarian conception to unfold the nature of the Supreme Being; the Brahman, the Absolute, is the first person, the second is Isvara, and the third is the World Spirit. The three persons are different sides of the one God who hides himself,<sup>76</sup> and reveals himself in various degrees.<sup>77</sup> Although we attribute personality to God, we do not do this in the same sense as when we attribute it to human persons, for instance. In the author's own words, "God is regarded as a Supreme Person. He is certainly higher than anything he has created. He is personal but not in the sense in which we define personality. He has all the good qualities which men have but in a different sense. He is good and wise but not good and wise as we are."<sup>78</sup> He alludes here to the Psalmist who asks himself whether God who has implanted hearing in us could be deaf, or he who has given us eye-sight could be blind?, to mean that we attribute the same perfections of man to the Absolute, but in a different manner.<sup>79</sup>

Radhakrishnan observes that "the three noteworthy features of spiritual experience are reality, awareness and freedom."<sup>80</sup> This awareness, this consciousness to which all experience is present in its own immediacy, revealedness and freedom from anything which is not itself, is the divine consciousness. This is considered to be "a glowing fire, a lucid flame of consciousness ever shining and revealing itself. . . . There is nothing which is not gathered up in its being, nothing which is not revealed in it, and there is utter absence of all discord."<sup>81</sup> In his positive interpretation this reality which is revealed to us, is its own immediate witness, its own self-awareness, its own freedom of complete being. In other words, "it is perfect being, perfect consciousness and perfect freedom, *sat, cit* and *ananda*. Being, truth and freedom are distinguished in the divine but not divided."<sup>82</sup> He further notes that the Supreme is real, not true; perfect, not good. Its freedom is its life, its essential spontaneity. The content of the spiritual experience is described as an experience wherein the human self encounters the Supreme, wherein the individual self realizes its fundamental unity with the Absolute which is interpreted as perfect being, perfect consciousness and perfect freedom.

76. Cfr. Ps. 103.

77. *Fragments*, p. 64.

78. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961) p. 91.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

80. *Idealist View*, p. 102.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

This revelation does not seem to be something coming from without, a catastrophic revelation from without, but it appears to be a discovery of the fundamental nature of the individual self, that is to say, an evolution of the very self of man which culminates in such a discovery, provided it is prepared to go through a long, troublesome and austere path. It is the perfection of human living, the ceaseless straining of the human soul to pierce through the crushing body, the destructing intellect, the selfish will, and to apprehend the unsheathed spirit. It is intent living, the most fruitful act of man by which he tries to reach reality behind the restless stream of nature and his own feelings and desires. The destiny of the human soul is to realize its oneness with the Supreme.<sup>83</sup> The Upanisadic seers believed in the possibility of a direct intercourse with the central reality, intercourse not through any external media such as historical revelations, oracles, answers to prayers, and the like, but by a species of intuitive identification in which the individual becomes in very truth the partaker of the divine nature. But for Radhakrishnan, "the soul is led through a succession of states until in the depths of its own being it experiences the touch of divinity and feels the life of God. By breaking through the entanglements of created things, the veils of sense and of intellect, the soul establishes itself in the nudity of spirit. The seer no longer distinguishes himself from that which is seen. He is one with the centre which is the centre of all . . . God ceases to be an object external to the individual and becomes a consuming experience."<sup>85</sup>

He is of the opinion that the philosophers with their passion for unity emphasize the immanent aspect, that there is no barrier dividing man from the real. The unity of man and God is the fundamental thesis of the great philosophic tradition which has come down to us from the Upanisads and Plato. Aristotle, Plotinus, Sankara, Spinoza and a host of others are witnesses to this tradition.<sup>86</sup> They would argue that each individual has to achieve insight by his own effort after long and persistent practice. When the veil of intellectual knowledge, *avidya*, is swept aside, a flood of light breaks upon the awakened soul and a vision of the Universal Self is achieved. This self is present, real and concrete even as a physical object is present to the physical eye. They might say that the Supreme is not so

83. *Eastern Religions*, p. 96.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

86. *Idealist View.*, P. 106.

much an immanent God as an experienced God, felt as an inward principle of power and new being in life.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, those who insist and emphasize the transcendence of the Supreme to the human insist on the specifically religious consciousness, of communion with a higher than ourselves with whom it is impossible for the individual to get assimilated. Devotional religion is born of this haunting sense of otherness: We may know God but there is always a something still more that seems unknown and remains unspoken.<sup>88</sup> The two however are not exclusive of each other. While in the moments of insight the individual is impressed by the community of nature between the soul and God, when he lapses from them a feeling of unworthiness, the desolation of a separate life, disturbs his soul to its depths. The seer shudders before the lawful majesty of the great God, quivers in anguish, prays for forgiveness of sins, for aid and protection. That is why he explains that the ascent to the supreme light and the prayer for pardon, the joy of the blessed union with the infinite God and the stern, harsh mood of penitence, represent two sides of mystic life. He would add that, "the superpersonal and the personal aspects of the Supreme may be distinguished in thought but cannot be separated in fact...When personality is denied to him, it is only in the interests of super-personality."<sup>89</sup> True to his fundamental principles and tenets he would also hold that, "what we accept of revelation depends on our piety and intellectual conscience." The question is not with regard to a particular item of belief but the way in which any part of the content of religion is arrived at and justified. He says that it is not a question of the articles of belief but of intellectual habits and methods.

Although he affirms that this revelation is of the nature of a 'self-discovery' or a 'self-becoming,' he maintains in the meantime that this "spiritual attainment is not the perfection of the intellectual man, but an energy pouring into it from beyond it, vivifying it."<sup>90</sup> He writes further in clear terms that, "the truths revealed to the seers are not mere reports of introspection which are purely subjective. The inspired sages proclaim that the knowledge they communicate is not what they discover for themselves. It

87. Cfr. Radhakrishnan, *Principal Upanisads*, p. 142.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

89. *Eastern Religions*, p. 292.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 23.



is revealed to them without their effort. Though the knowledge is an experience of the seer, it is an experience of an independent reality which impinges on his consciousness. There is the impact of the real on the spirit of the experienter. It is therefore said to be a disclosure from the 'wholly other,' a revelation of the Divine."<sup>91</sup>

The fundamental truths of spiritual religion are that our real self is the supreme being, which it is our business to discover and consciously become. And this is the aim of man according to him. Human life has no meaning if it is not inspired by an unquenchable yearning for contact with the eternal. Life remains unfulfilled until there is a vision of the Supreme and the seeking for our highest and inmost self is the seeking for God. Self-discovery, self-knowledge, self-fulfilment is man's destiny."<sup>92</sup> He would also add that, when the Upanisads speak of 'That thou art,' they do not mean that we are divine in an easy and obvious way; they assert that divinity is the manifest destiny of man. The death of the rebellious ego is the condition of the birth of the Son of God. That is why he would say that religion is born in agony. According to him, the one cry of the man who has an apprehension of the Absolute and his own distance from it is that he is a sinner, '*papo ham.*' When he feels this utter isolation, he is miserable. But this tragedy is also the glory of man. Even at the moment when he feels the utter transcendence of the divine, he is affirming its immanence. The very ability of man to receive and retain an impression of God's revelation, his struggle to give visible expression to the divine life is the proof of the God in him.

#### 4. Revelation, Reason and History

A question naturally arises as regards the role of reason and history in the development of religious experience, when it is depicted as an intuitive experience. This problem is taken up in this section.

##### i) *Revelation and Reason*

Radhakrishnan believes that it is essential in this age of science to show that religious belief is reasonable. Yet he thinks that reasoning is not all. There is a realm where it has no sway. "There are limitations of scientific knowledge. Moral values, wisdom and the life of the spirit are

91. *Principal Upanisads*, pp. 22-23.

92. *Eastern Religions*, p. 35.

beyond it."<sup>93</sup> Heraclitus was of the opinion that there was a mystery which the human mind cannot comprehend, an incomprehensible and unfathomable element which human thought cannot fully penetrate. Knowledge of the mystery is not derived or derivable from any empirical observation or rational analysis of the facts observed. Socrates was a great advocate of reason, but yet a profoundly religious man with mystical feeling.<sup>94</sup> The meaning of existence, the nature of the spirit of man lies in a realm of mystery and we can live human lives only by a commitment of faith.<sup>95</sup> Aquinas distinguishes between intellect and reason; but he means by intellect intuitive knowing; and by reason discursive thinking. "Intellect and reason are not two powers," he says, "but distinct as the perfect from the imperfect . . . The intellect means an intimate penetration of truth; the reason enquiry and discourse." The spiritual apprehension of the real is not an act of service or of devotion or for that matter, of cognition, however much these acts may lead up to it.

In his book, *Recovery of Faith*, he says in clear terms that "intuition is supported by reason and does not contradict it. Wisdom and knowledge go together."<sup>96</sup> He would also add that, "spiritual insight is not anti-rational. It may go beyond reason, but it is not against reason. It is the deepest rationality of which we are capable. In it we think more profoundly, feel more deeply and see more truly." As he had already pointed out, we can distinguish between intellect and intuition only in thought but cannot separate them in reality. For him, intellect and integral insight are related as part to the whole. Integral insight for its part discloses to us eternity, timelessness in which time and history are included. He does not consider Truth to be the reflection of reality in sense and intellect. On the contrary, it is a creative mystery experienced by the soul in its deepest being.

Explaining the difference between reason and revelation or intuition he remarks: "if there is no higher faculty than those involved in ordinary knowledge if the truths of religion or the validity of religious experience

93. *Brahma Sutra*, p. 104.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

95. *Recovery of Faith*, p. 105.

"Kierkegaard's hostility to Hegel was due to the latter's conception of truth as an elaborate speculative system claiming objective validity. For Kierkegaard, truth is to be obtained not by intellectual effort but by personal commitment."

96. *Recovery of Faith*, pp. 106-107.

is to be established as reasonable inference from discursive knowledge about the world, human history, the soul with its faculties and capacities, above all from knowledge of the interconnections between such items of knowledge, then it will be difficult for us to be certain about God."<sup>97</sup>

He is also of the opinion that purely speculative theology which cut itself off from premises which are held to be universally valid cannot serve as an adequate philosophy of religion.<sup>98</sup> The proofs of God's existence from premises of a general character yield not the God of religion, but a supreme first cause or being who can be construed into the object of religious experience only if we start with the latter. Speculative theology can conceive of God as a possibility; it is religion that affirms God as a fact.<sup>99</sup> Hence Radhakrishnan is not inclined to accept "proofs," because God is not an object. The intuitive knowledge is not non-rational, but it is non-conceptual. In these rational intuitions both immediacy and mediacy are comprehended. Even if intuitive truths cannot be proved to reason, they can be shown to be not contrary to reason, but consistent with it. According to him, "intuition is neither abstract thought and analysis nor formless darkness and primitive sentience. It is wisdom, the 'nous' of which Aristotle speaks, the 'all-pervading intelligence' of Dante."<sup>100</sup> "While divine wisdom is eternal and is always possessed by God, intuitive consciousness is brought into existence by a mental process."<sup>101</sup>

The following text is a synthetic note on Radhakrishnan's view on reason and intuition: "Perfection, 'moksa', "is won through '*jnana*' or wisdom, '*bodhi*' or enlightenment. Jesus said, 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth will make you' free'. *Jnana* of the Hindus, *bodhi* of the Buddhists, and truth of the Christians do not mean dialectical fireworks, logical ingenuity. It is not playing intellectual ping-pong, but it is growth

97. *Education*, p. 162.

98. Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 220: "It is interesting to note how he values the famous Ontological argument of St Anselm. "The value of the ontological argument as well as the moral proof lies in this fact that our deepest convictions give us trustworthy knowledge of ultimate reality, perhaps the only knowledge possible. The validity of divine existence is not founded on anything external or accidental but is felt by the spirit in us. The Ontological argument is a report of experience of the objects of which they are the ideas. We should not have had an idea of absolute reality if we had never been in immediate cognitive relation with it, if we had not been intuitively conscious of it. The proof of the existence is founded on experience."

100. *Idealist View*, p. 153.

101. *Brahma Sutra*, p. 105.

in insight, increase of awareness, extension of consciousness, evolution of soul. It is attained, not by sharpening our wits but by steadying our mind. The function of true philosophy is to see the truth and we cannot see unless it be by unfettered contemplation, where eager wishes and yearning anxieties are stilled, where the mind becomes a transparent medium which mirrors the object without distorting it. We then become what we behold. India has always emphasized the need for spiritual illumination. Unless we are illuminated from the heights above, earth-born intellect cannot take us far. . . Not that in India we neglected the logical. The Upanisads and the Gita are examples for that. . . . It is the Indian tradition that intellect is to be satisfied but not surrendered. Freedom and not slavery of the mind is the pre-requisite of spiritual life. But intellectual fruition is in intuition, *vidya* ends in *anubhava*.<sup>102</sup>

ii) *Revelation in History*

The question of the interrelation between revelation or intuition and history is not very explicitly treated by Radhakrishnan, although he does make a few comments on history and on 'historical' religions:

Comparing and contrasting the origins and content of the great currents of Religion and Culture, he discovers and recognizes the role of history in them. Whereas the famous Greek thinkers and philosophers did not have a conception of history as a process with a purpose, the Jewish people had this faith in the purpose of the world-process. He writes, "while for the most spiritual of Greek thinkers God was the 'Idea of the Good,' 'The First Mover,' 'the Ruling Principle,' 'Reason or Logos,' for the Jews and the Christians, God is a supreme person who reveals His Will to His lawgivers and prophets. . . Again while the greatest of hellenic thinkers had no conception of history as a purposive process with a direction and a goal, but believed it to be a cyclic movement, the Jews had faith in an historical fulfilment. The Jewish consciousness lived in the intense expectation of some great decisive event which will be the definitive solution of the historical problem. The Messianic idea which is the determining factor in the Jewish history, survived in Christianity."<sup>103</sup> According to him the Christian view represents a blend of the Greek and the Jewish conceptions of the historical.

102. *Education*, pp. 182-183.

103. *Eastern Religions*, pp. 8-9.

From the common root of biblical tradition of the Jews arose the religions of Christianity and Islam. "These three religions," he says, "which originated among the semitic peoples are said to be historical in the sense that they claim to rest on a revelation at some particular point in time and space. They are related to events in history, events of a special character which disclose the nature and interest of the Divine in history."<sup>104</sup> According to him, for these religions, God is an absolute subject, who is not in this world because it is His creation. God speaks to men and reveals Himself. By faith we participate in God's life and become co-workers with Him. In Judaism God addresses the Jews as His chosen people. In Christianity the chosen people form the Church of all those who believe. So also in Islam all those who believe are God's chosen people. While for the Jews, God spoke through the prophets, for Christians, His Word became flesh. Christians believe that God took the form of a man and led a human life on earth. The virgin birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are essential parts of the revelation of God according to them.

The author holds the view that, 'while such a belief gives definiteness, conviction and urgency to the ethical message, which no abstract logic could give, it at the same time shuts the door against all change and progress.'<sup>105</sup> He also thinks that, "the Jewish emphasis on the historical and the Christian doctrine of incarnation are difficult to reconcile with the absolute and non-historical character of the Godhead."<sup>106</sup> Although the vigorous intellectual life of the Middle ages was devoted to the explication of this problem and the *finding of credible justifications* for the other doctrines of faith, the problem still remains unsolved.<sup>107</sup>

He has, however, a positive view of history. "Human history is not a series of secular happenings without any shape or pattern; it is a meaningful process, a significant development. Those who look at it from the outside are carried away by the wars and battles, the economic disorders and the political upheavels, but below in the depths is to be found the truly majestic drama, the tension between the limited effort of man and the sovereign purpose of the universe."<sup>108</sup> Man cannot

104. S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967), p. 70.

105. *Eastern Religions*, p. 10.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

107. *Eastern Religions*, p. 9.

108. *Ibid.* p. 1.

rest in an unresolved discord. He must seek for harmony, strive for adjustment. His progress is marked by a series of integrations, by the formation of more and more comprehensive harmonies. He sees this course of history as "the translation of one specific possibility of the Infinite spirit, (where) the latter is envisaged by us as the Divine principle controlling the course of this historical succession. God is not the silent sea of infinity in which the individuals lose themselves, but the Divine person who inspires the process first, last, without ceasing."<sup>109</sup> In this connection he notes that, to say that God created the world seems to be an understatement. He is creating now and for all time. "History is in this sense, the epic of the divine will, a revelation of God. The divine works and shines through the earthly medium."<sup>110</sup>

This does not mean that we can subscribe to any particular view of history as the alternative. As we have already seen, according to Radhakrishnan Being as such is uncharacterisable and hence our descriptions and translations are in the forms of objects which are less than Being, and consequently are inadequate. Therefore these abstract ideals and intellectualisations do not deal justly with Being which "is given to us as Absolute presence in adoration and worship."<sup>111</sup> Surrendering ourselves to the self, and opening ourselves to the Supreme, we realize the holy in religious contemplation. This realization is not contingent on any events, past or future. And no scientific criticism or historical discoveries can refute it, "as it is not dependent on any impossible miracles or unique historical revelations." Its only apologetic is, according to him, "the testimony of spiritual experience. It is not committed to the authenticity of any documents or the truth of any stories about the beginning of the world or prophecies of its end."<sup>112</sup> It is 'God who said, light shall shine out of darkness,' God, who 'has shown within my heart,' who is the only testimony, the 'testimony of the spirit.'

According to him the purpose of human living or human history is, "to be inspired in our thoughts by divine knowledge, to be moved in our will by the divine purpose, to mould our emotions into harmony with divine bliss, to get at the great self of truth, goodness and beauty to

109. "My Search for Truth," *Basic Writings*, p. 40.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

111. *Fragments*, p. 63.

112. *Eastern Religions*, pp. 294-95.

which we give the name of God as a spiritual presence, to raise our whole being and life to the divine status."<sup>113</sup> And he recognizes that there are some such exceptional individuals who have achieved this status and harmony. They are considered by him as the highest type of humanity yet reached and this indicates the final shape which humanity has to assume. They are the forerunners of the future race.<sup>114</sup> These men with wisdom and vitality, constant awareness and unremitting social effort, are not members of limited groups based on blood and soil but 'citizens of a world yet unborn, still in the womb of time.'<sup>115</sup> They are not, however, to be regarded as unique and absolute manifestations of the Absolute, because there cannot be a complete manifestation of the Absolute in the world of relativity. Each limited manifestation may be perfect in its own way, but is not the Absolute which is within all and above all. He is of the opinion that the life of a Buddha or a Jesus tells us how we can achieve the same unity with the Absolute to which they had attained and how we can live at peace in the world of manifested being. He maintains that, "everyone has in him the possibility of this spiritual freedom, the essence of enlightenment. The divine sonship of Christ is at the same time the divine sonship of everyman. The end of the cosmic process is the achievement of universal resurrection, redemption of all persons who continue to live as individuals till the end of history."<sup>116</sup> It is in this divine sonship of everyman Radhakrishnan finds the reconciliation of all dualities.

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113. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

114. Cfr. *Rom* 8, 29.

115. *Eastern Religions*, p. 57.

116. *Fragments*, p. 68.