Martin Kaempchen
Santiniketan, W. Bengal

Stages of Development in a Holy Life

Introduction

The "Holy" has been a subject of discussion since the epoch making work by Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*. It investigates the existence of the "Holy" as manifest through the different cultural expressions of man. Otto's main contention is that the "Holy" is a quality which evokes irrational reactions in man. It cannot be entirely integrated into his consciousness, rather it will always stand apart as the "other", as a strange phenomenon which inspires "fear and trembling", but simultaneously attracts and fascinates. This is true for the Holy which manifests itself in places and auspicious times, in rituals and sacred scriptures, but also in persons. The recognition of holiness in a person is due to a man's peculiar faculty of "divination"; this, according to Otto, is man's faculty to intuitively "know" once he comes face to face with a holy person that he is, indeed, holy. Recognition of holiness depends on two conditions, namely, the recognizer must have an obscure *a priori* cognition of holiness; it should be implanted in him as a "category" of the mind.[1] Secondly, the holy person must project a definite aura of holiness around him which is, as Otto writes, the "peculiar power of his personality, the special impression he makes on the bystander".[2] Holiness thus is normally a discovery followed by "spontaneous responses of feeling,"[3] and a certain sudden awe. Otto goes to the extent of supposing that the recognition of holiness necessitates a kind of "congeniality"[4] of the person perceiving holiness and the holy person.

Otto makes great efforts to establish holiness as an objective fact. It can be recognized like other facts and even "proven", the difference

---

1. *Vide* Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Transl. by John W. Harvey. (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1959), p. 177.
2. Otto, *op. cit.* p. 174f.
3. Otto, *op. cit.* p. 175.
4. Otto, *op. cit.* p. 177.

being that normally facts are established by sense-experience and mental cognition, while the recognition of holiness, though not dispensing with the evidence supplied by sense–experience and the mind, depends heavily on the irrational, namely, personal emotive experiences which cannot be communicated easily to others; still–to the perceiver-they are no less real than other experiences.

Although divination of holiness needs a prepared person, holiness *is* cognizable directly by coming face to face with the holy person. In support of this it may be argued that any kind of cognition, particularly one of a sublime nature, needs some kind of preparation. Otto emphasizes that had Jesus Christ not been recognized as a man endowed with holiness–not only by a few individuals, but by large crowds – he would not have been able to spearhead a movement which crystallized itself immediately after his death into many small communities. Holiness inspires discipleship, the disciples from communities, and thus gradually a written and living tradition evolves around the saint. Such reactions by society to the manifestion of holiness are proof enough of its cognizable objective quality.[5]

Mircea Eliade's work *Das Heilige und das Profane*[6] takes up Otto's ideas on holiness and attempts to show the transcultural and transreligious uniformity of the manifestations of holiness with the help of evidence culled from the mythology, legends and the holy scriptures of peoples all over the world. Otto implicitly assumed that holiness has a common expression in various religions and among different peoples; Eliade shows this by means of abundant evidence and clearly characterizes the basic features which are common in most cultures and religions.[7] As Eliade points out, these basic features of holiness do not manifest themselves necessarily together in one particular scriptural text, or in one individual. Their occurrence varies depending on religious temperament, religious culture and the individual life–history of the person in question. So it may happen that certain features of a saint's life exclude a particular trait or several traits of holiness which are evident in other saints. Nonetheless, as

5. Otto, *op. cit.* p. 175.

6. Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und Das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen. (The Holy and the Profane : About the Essence of Religion)*, Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1957.

7. One chapter is devoted to the *homo Religiosus*, viz.,"Existenz des Menschen und Heiligung des Lebens" p. 95-126.

Eliade assures us, there are enough common traits of holiness to form a general pattern.

Hero and Saint

Do these common traits of holiness cover the successive stages of development in a saint's life? In other words : Can we assume a necessary and commonly observed sequence in which holiness manifests itself in a person's life irrespective of his time, culture and religion? Eliade mentions several stages of development without, however, organizing them into a definite, spiritually logical sequence. For example, the "rituals of passage" he mentions, indicate a particular stage in the spiritual development of a person, namely, his "second birth" or "spiritual birth." Symbols of this passage to a new birth is the bridge, or, as in the *Katha–Upanisad,* the "edge of a razor" (III, 14), or, as in the Gospel of St Matthew, the "narrow gate" (7, 14). Eliade mentions several such passages to and initiations into a new life-stage. They mostly mark stages in the natural development of man; such initiations are performed at birth, at puberty, during marriage and after death. These "rites of passage" are characteristic of archaic, mythical religions. They are, within their context, the traditional means of sanctification.

Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*[8] has attempted to delineate the various successive life–stages of a mythic hero basing his scheme on overwhelming mythical evidence from every continent. Before giving an account of Campbell's scheme, a distinction between a mythical and a "developed" religion requires to be drawn. The hero of mythical religion sanctifies his life by communicating with the cosmos around him, by becoming aware of the forces, rhythms, and qualities of the cosmos, and entering into them as fully as he can. Ideally, he expands his life to cosmic dimensions thus going beyond the earth and body–bound human existence.

To the saint of a "developed" religion even the cosmos is a limitation, and a hindrance to his desire to be free. He wishes to go beyond the cosmos to reach perfect sanctity as his idea and experience of God or of the Divine with whom he desires to unite or to whom he desires to draw near, is supra–cosmic or a–cosmic. For the mythic

---

8. Joseph Campbell: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Bollingen Series XVII, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2nd edition, 1968.

hero, transcendence extends up to the farthest limits of the cosmos, while the saint of a "developed" religion experiences transcendence of an unconditioned and absolute kind.

The *homo religiousus* of a mythical religion experiences the rites and initiations as the ultimate means of sanctification, while the saint of a "developed" religion, too, realizes the importance of rites (as the Hindu saint will perform the *saṁskāras*, and the Catholic saint will devoutly receive the sacraments): however, sanctification is not exhausted with these objective means; rather they are meant to *help* him in making an *interior effort* to reach holiness. To the saint of a "developed" religion, external signs, like sacraments and rituals are important as a help and guide the Divine offers to man, and it is up to man to refuse this help or to use it profitably for spiritual ends. Partaking of rituals never in itself constitutes holiness. In fact, the saint will renounce as much of externality as is humanly possible in order to concentrate all the better on his spiritual efforts. This renunciation of the "world" is the watershed between the hero of a mythic religion and the saint of a "developed" religion.

The hero of mythology and the saint of "developed" religions are parallel figures. The saint, like the hero, lives within the cosmos and participates in the cosmic life, although he also transcends it. Hence, the stages of development in the life of a mythic hero and of a saint cannot be totally dissimilar. It may rightly be assumed however, that the typical stages of development in a saint's life do not coincide with the natural events of his life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Rather, they arise from a more interior level, in fact from the very level at which he tries to unify himself with God and sanctify his life. They arise from this deep level, but as the saint lives in the phenomenal world, they are bound to find expression in the saint's daily actions. Most saints have striven to keep secret their inner states; however, an ever so slight expression of them must be revealed to people around them; otherwise, how could he have become known as a saint to his contemporaries or to posterity ?

Stages of a mythical hero's life

Campbell makes an effort to reconstruct what he calls the "composite monomyth." It is constituted of the common elements of the whole body of known mythology of all continents; these elements are placed in their logical sequence. Each myth has a hero as its central

figure. He makes a spiritual journey indicated by external events which form a pattern basic to all myths. Campbell does not claim that each myth unfolds the entire pattern; rather, generally one myth emphasizes two or three segments (or stages) of the composite monomyth. Campbell distinguishes three main stages of a hero's spiritual journey :

1. Separation or Departure
2. Trials and Victories of Initiation
3. The Return and Reintegration with Society[9]

In short, the hero gives up his ordinary mundane existence in quest of "something higher." In the process he undergoes trials of strength and endurance. They purify and strengthen him to such an extent that he is worthy to "possess" the "higher realm" of existence. The final step is to return to the ordinary life of society. Yet, the hero returns to society not as an ordinary member; his experiences set him apart from his fellow–men. He lives with them to impart a "mission." Henceforth his life is devoted to service and guidance. Grouped under each of these three life–stages, are a number of intermediate steps, defining more closely experiences the hero encounters at each stage. Here we give a summary of Campbell's scheme :[10]

First stage : *Separation and Departure*

(a) The Call to Adventure

The hero feels called to undertake his spiritual journey; he begins to understand his vocation.

(b) The Refusal to the Call

Many heroes shrink from the call they have received, refuse to respond to it, or even flee from it fearing the perils and strains of the adventure.

(c) Supernatural Aid

The hero who overcomes his initial hesitations and begins to separate from his former life with courage and resolution, is aided by supernatural forces.

---

9. Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 36.
10. An abbreviated version of the scheme given in Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 36f.

(*d*) *The Crossing of the First Threshold*

This marks the first decisive spiritual experience in the hero's career. With this he has definitely left the plain of "ordinary existence."

(*e*) *The Belly of the Whale*

The psyche is not yet attuned to the laws and logic of the spirit. Therefore, after his first spiritual experience, the hero passes into a state of crisis and inner conflict.

Second Stage : *Trials and Victories of Initiation*

(*a*) *The Road of Trials*

God is experienced by the hero in His terrible and dangerous as well as benign and gracious aspects. First, the hero encounters God as the Terrible, as a punishing father who inflicts upon the hero manifold trials. Thereafter the hero experiences God as a loving Mother who rescues him from the terrible Father. Then the scheme is reversed : The Mother appears as the all–possessive, all–devouring Mother while the Father is forgiving, and provides clarity and strength.

(*b*) *Apotheosis*

This dual experience of God as Mother and Father leads to the experience of God as neither female nor male, but as the undifferentiated Absolute.[11]

(*c*) *The Ultimate Boon*

This signifies the ultimate fulfilment through Grace. The hero's desire which made him set out on his journey, is fulfilled.

Third Stage : The Return and Reintegration with Society

(*a*) *Refusal of the Return*

The hero may initially refuse to leave his blissful "higher" realm of experience. This bliss may annihilate all recollection of, and interest in the sorrows of the world.

(*b*) *Obstructions and Rescue*

There is a possibility that the hero's wish to return to society is resented by "the gods", perhaps because he has received a boon which may prove to be dangerous to them. Often the hero is brought back

---

11. Campbell employs categories of C. G. Jung's Psychology.

with the help of society itself either because he refuses to return or because the gods are unwilling to let him go.

(c)   *The Crossing of the Return Threshold*

This marks the hero's re–entry into society.

(d)   *Master of Two Worlds*

The hero is master of both the inner world of the spirit, and the outer world of society and matter over which he has, due to his extra–ordinary experiences, uncommon authority.

Stages of a saint's life

There is ample evidence to show that Hinduism views life as an evolutionary process which leads man from *avidyā* to *mokṣa* along several well–characterized intermediate steps. The *puruṣārtha*-system with its four values of life, the five *kośas* of man, the *aṣṭānga–yoga* of Patañjali, the *kundalinī–yoga* with its six *cakṛas*, and the *catur-āśrama–dharma* point to the fact that Hindu philosophy views spiritual life as an evolution from lower to higher; the intermediate steps build upon each other, and thus each one is necessary for the process to continue and reach its aim.   No step must be circumvented, none should be anticipated or postponed.

The *catur–āśrama–dharma* and the *puruṣārtha*-system define the social dimension of spiritual evolution, thus postulating that each stage in the devolopment of a man's spiritual life be expressed and *is* expressed in terms of social life as well.   The life of the spirit must give outward expression to its inner secrets, as mentioned above.   In other words, each stage in the development of spiritual life has its own appropriate social environment which aids man not to lapse back into an inferior stage, but to give him firmness and strength in what he has already achieved, and ultimately to climb higher the "ladder of perfection."

This leads us to assume that the evolution of a saintly life follows a uniform pattern of successive life–stages, and that this pattern is cognizable.   We have so far, with the help of Campbell's scheme, considered mainly the life–stages of a mythical hero.   We had earlier indicated that the mythical hero and the saint are not mutually exclusive figures, but similar insofar as they both live within society. The difference between hero and saint lies mainly in the fact that the

saint tends to turn away from external signs and expressions as far as possible finding his proper fulfilment in the Imageless and Formless, while the hero is bound to external events which to him are the correct and simple symbols of his internal experiences. Sainthood as Campell himself suggests[12], goes beyond the sphere of images, and thus of myth. Myth may be called the penultimate step in the description of spiritual evolution, while the life-story of saints is the ultimate step going beyond, in Jungian terms, the archetypes of life and death which appear in myths, dreams and in the experiences of the subconscious mind. The ultimate experience of the saints is "deeper" or "higher" than the archetypes.

While we proceed to formulate the life–stages of saints two restrictions must be kept in mind : First, when speaking of sanctity, we do not mean "the sanctity acquired entirely by objective means such as rites of purifications, and initiations, assumption of a sacred office (as that of a priest), and performance of religious functions. Rather, we have in mind the subjective sanctity acquired through asceticism, prayer, moral conduct and through the grace of the Divine. And the second restriction is that we exclude from our scheme the phenomenon of child saints. Certain saints in Hinduism are said to be "ever-free" and hence do not pass through the expected trials and conquests of spiritual life. These *īśvarakotis* or the *vidvat-sannyāsis* (who have "renounced the world" in childhood) are subject to spiritual laws which are probably outside the scope of our discussion. To understand them, we would have to consider the idea of reincarnation which can be accepted only "in faith."

In discussing the stages of a saint's life, we shall refer only to Hindu and Christian saints as examples; we do believe, however, that saints of other religions would support this scheme in equal measure. These are the five life–stages :

1. Worldly Life
2. Conversion
3. Withdrawal
4. Spiritual Fulfilment
5. Return to Society

---

12. Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 355.

First Stage : Worldly Life

There is a proverb which says : "There is no saint without a past, and no sinner without a future." Never does a saint begin his life as a saint; he develops into a saint gradually. In normal circumstances, childhood and early youth are incompatible with holiness, as it pre-supposes an emotional and spiritual maturity which a child and an adolescent, given a normal psychological progress, are unable to possess. Also, at least a minimum of "experience of the world" is needed as a point of departure towards holiness. A conscious resolu-tion is needed by the saint "to become holy", or, as the Hindu would prefer to say, "to become free", or else, "to seek salvation." This presupposes a state when the future saint is still non–holy, non–free, non-saved. Only experience of the world is able to give knowledge of the world, that is, the knowledge "This is worldly life." Only after having this knowledge, can a person strive to "renounce", "to be free" (from the world), to be holy as opposed to worldly. This experience of the world may involve committing grave sins, but it need not; it may also occur on the level of an average virtuous, moral life.

The life of the Buddha illustrates this point in a striking way. Siddharta's father, in an attempt to give perfect happiness to his son, kept all painful aspects of the world away from him. He was made to believe that the pleasantness of youth, the pleasures of marriage, the comforts in his father's palace were the only realities that existed. He did not experience the world with its mixture of pleasure and suffering; he lived in a man–made paradise. In fact, it was an attempt on the part of Siddharta's father to impose a kind of equilibrium and peace into a man's life, right at its beginning, which can be obtained only after a long struggle and its consequent emotional, intellectual and spiritual maturity. Only after the Buddha came face to face with the world as it is, namely, after he had his famous three encounters with an old man, a sick man and a dead man, could he mature to the state in which he was ready to renounce and seek the holy life.

Basically, we may differentiate between a worldy life of conven-tional piety which finds its fulfilment in the ritual, moral and social observances as taught from childhood and which the would–be–saint has accepted unquestioningly on the one hand and a worldly life of conscious or habitual lack of faith, of religious indifference, possibly

even of disgust for religious faith and hatred of God and the devotees of God on the other.

While the transition from conventional piety to making a conscious effort to be holy seems natural and easy to understand, we nonetheless know from the history of both Hinduism and Christianity about saints who in their first life-stage have been "great sinners." The best-known account of a life rising from sin to holiness, is St Augustine's *Confessions* which describes his life until his spiritual conversion. Christ's disciple, St Paul, is probably the prototype of the sinner–become–saint. Initially he persecuted Christians putting them to death if he could, until, on a trip to Damascus, he experienced a sudden illumination, a direct call from God, which at once converted him to Christ.

Often the would–be–saint maintained his worldly life for many years until he had his conversion–experience, or in other words, until he had matured enough to understand the conversion–experience when it came. Many future saints were married, raised families, successfully pursued careers, were high worldly dignitaries, possibly even kings or queens, they loved wealth, power, and sensual pleasures, intellectual learning, until the Higher Reality broke into their lives.

Second Stage : Canversion

Unlike in myths, it is not always very clear from the biographical accounts of the saints' lives exactly when their conversion took place. The world around them may not have noticed their conversion and, hence, may not have been able to record it. At a later stage, the saint might be unwilling to speak about his conversion, since saints are on the whole averse to talking about themselves. In myth the inner conversion is generally expressed through external events and images which symbolize the hero's conversion–experience.

Yet, conversion is a stage which is vital in the evolution of sanctity, and no saint can have by–passed it. At one particular time, conventional and religious practices, or the beliefs the child had accepted from its parents and teachers, are bound to give way to a conscious effort to "experience", "realize" or "taste" the essence of these teachings. What has been, so far, a matter of intellectual and emotional cognition is now sought to be more existentially integrated into one's life through spiritual cognition. It is either this desire for spiritual knowledge which causes conversion, that is, the desire for the new,

the real, the essence, or it is caused by the realization of the futility, sinfulness, evanescence, incompleteness of the things one perceives, the actions one has done and the thoughts which have given satisfaction so far. It is repentance, the casting away of the old.

Conversion may occur all of a sudden or gradually. Sudden conversion is normally caused by a striking external or internal event which disrupts the course of one's customary life. In many cases, conversion was caused by illness. Ignatius of Loyola was wounded as a soldier, and it was during his convalescence that he experienced his conversion; similarly, Francis of Assisi began to change his life after he returned from a battle as a sick young man. Again, the South Indian saint Appar changed his course of life, abandoning the Jain religion, after severe attacks of colic.[13]

Other saints took to spiritual life after the death of their parents, their husband or wife, or after some mishap around them. Some reached such a high degree of readiness for conversion that a trifling negative experience made them renounce the world. So it is told of Nijaguna Siva Yogi, a saint of Karnataka, who was a king, that he renounced his kingdom after he had heard that a hungry beggar had been given only stale food to eat by the queen.[14] Theresa of Lisieux's conversion was, similarly, caused by a very insignificant negative experience. As is customary on a Christmas evening, her parents had put a shoe filled with sweets inside the fire–place. Returning from the midnight service in church, her father made a passing remark chiding her for still insisting on this childish practice. Theresa overhearing this remark, did not burst into tears as she would have done ordinarily, instead she went to empty her shoe and showed all the things she found to her father with a happy heart. As she writes in her autobiography: "Jesus had transformed her heart." [15]

Another external factor which brought about such a conversion as can be seem from the lives of many saints, is the meeting of the *guru*. Coming face to face with one's *guru*, the sudden realization,

---

13. Life-sketch of Tiruāavukkaraṣu (Appar) in : T. M. P. Mahadevan : *Ten Saints of India.* (Bombay : Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), pp. 23-33.

14. Life-sketch of Nijaguna Siva Yogi by R. K. Joshi in : *A Seminar on Saints,* edited by T. M. P. Mahadevan. Madras : Ganesh & Co. 1960), p. 83-90.

15. The autobiography appeared in original French under the title : *Sainte Therèsè de L' Enfant-Jesus : Manuscripts autobiographiques.* Carmel de Lisieux, 1957.

"He, and none else, is my *guru* !" has had its impact particularly on Indian saints. The finding of the *guru* is normally preceded by an intense yearning and search for a *guru*. In fact, unless the would–be saint has intensely longed for his *guru*, he will not be ready to recognize him and profit by his teaching. Search for the *guru* is a preliminary act of self–purification, a readying of one self for a radical spiritual life.

As recorded in the biography of the South Indian saint Māṇikkavāsagar, coming face to face with one's *guru* can completely reverse the course of one's life. Māṇikkavāsagar was the chief–minister to a Pāṇḍya king in Madurai. Once the king asked him to buy horses at a sea–port. As Māṇikkavāsagar approached the sea–port town, "he heard the sound of Vedic chant. He proceeded in the direction of the sound and came to a grove where he saw a teacher seated beneath a sacred tree and surrounded by devotees... The chief-minister recognized his *guru* at once, and surrendered himself unreservedly to Him, forgetting all about the kings's commission... The officers of state who had accompanied the chief–minister waited for a few days.... but their chief showed no inclination to return to Madurai either with the horses or without them." [16]

Similarly, the woman saint Bahinābāī of Maharashtra, had longed to meet the saint Tukārām and declared him her *guru* without having met him, induced by a dream she had of him. When she finally met Tukārām, "her emotions were transformed. Everything seemed changed. The idea of duality disappeared. Her mind became concentrated, sight fixed, tongue speechless, heart passion–free. She says of this moment, 'My pride and the burden of the sorrows of worldly life were removed when I met Tukārām'." [17]

Third Stage : Withdrawal

Now the *sādhanā* proper begins. It is marked by a withdrawal from human company and from such activities which are considered incompatible with spiritual life. This withdrawal is either external and internal, or only internal, when circumstances bind a person to a life within society. It is at this stage that the Christian saints

16. T. M. P. Mahadevan : *Ten Saints of India.* p. 51f.
17. *Women Saints of East and West,* edited by Swamy Ghanananda and Sir John Steward-Wallace (London : The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1955), p. 68.

entered monasteries, went into the deserts as hermits, lived alone in woods or near monasteries, left their homes, their families their possessions. Similarly the Hindu saints took to the mendicant life of *sannyāsa* and began to live in caves or temples, in *āśrams* together with a *guru* and fellow–disciples, to choose the insecurity of a homeless, spontaneous existence. Where this was not possible, as was the case with many Hindu woman saints who could not be released from their family obligations, the necessity to continue a "worldly life" created strong inner tensions which ultimately had to be resolved by a break with the family. There are just a few examples where a saint could fully evolve his sanctity in the context of a happy family situation.

The saints have a strong psychological need to express their separation from society externally; this is a safeguard against the temptations and distractions which societal life provides; it is, however, also a self–assration, a constant self–reminder to society as well, that the life the future saint is going to lead, is totally different from conventional social norms. Ideally, separation does not express disgust for society, but only that a life among men is—at the beginning of *sādhanā*—incompatible with an intense spiritual life; the impact of society is so strong that the still feeble spiritual faculties of the future saint would succumb to it and he would relapse into the mediocrity of other believers.

This is the period when the different stages of spiritual development, as described by the mystics of India and of Christianity, are passed through. These are internal developments, such as purification; acquisition of mental, emotional, and spiritual strength and balance; a gradual self-surrender to the Divine and subsequent removal of selfishness ; the experience of the "dark nights" of the senses and of the spirit (in the words of John of the Cross), and its subsequent internal transformations.

In Indian tradition it is insisted that such spiritual developments are undergone in a controlled manner; asceticism is regarded as a "science"; it is governed by a series of interrelated laws which must be observed if results are to be obtained. The *guru* is initiated in these laws, and he teaches them to the disciple one by one, as he proceeds to apply them. In Indian tradition, the guidance of a *guru* is regarded as indispensable for the attainment of sainthood. The biographies of

Indian saints reveal that virtually every one did have a *guru,* though often he appeared only for a short time in the life of a saint, possibly for a brief moment to give a decisive spiritual jolt to the disciple. In other cases, the saint has learned at the feet of several masters successively or even simultaneously.

In Christianity this insistence on a *guru* is absent. It is the function of Jesus Christ to mediate between man and God (the Father, that is the Absolute Godhead), hence Christ is *the guru* of Christian saints, and another contemporary human *guru* is not essential. There are, however, a number of "father-figures" who have given decisive help to the would-be-saints, particularly in the initial stages of *sādhanā;* they are abbots of monasteries who guide their young monks, or "spiritual guides", such as Francis of Assisi was to Clara of Assisi, Francis of Sales was to Francesca de Chantal, or Peter of Berule was to Vincent de Paul. It would be facile to equate them with the *gurus* of Indian disciples. The Indian *guru* is a representative of the Divine, its embodiment to the disciple who is to accept the word of the *guru* as God's own command. The *guru* is empowered to confer upon the disciple the *śakti* of God by giving the *mantra* at initiation, through touch and other sacramental or everyday actions. The spiritual guides of Christianity have never made claims to such functions and powers, nor was such a role expected of them, as this would have meant assuming powers which belong to Jesus Christ alone. The archetype of this strictly subservient role is found in the Acts of the Apostles where the disciples of Jesus Christ, after their attainment to holiness (marked by the Pentecostal Descent of the Spirit), healed, exorcised and worked other miracles expressly "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Mk 3 : 15; Acts 3 : 6).

Fourth Stage : Spiritual Fulfilment

By "spritual fulfilment" we mean the establishment of sanctity within a person. Spiritual fulfilment is described in various ways in both religions. A Hindu normally associates it with attainment of the *mokṣa* (liberation) and the spiritual fruits ("union with God", "nearness to God", "dissolution in *brahman*" etc.) associated with it in different denominations and philosophical schools.

Christian theology has no concept which can be equated with *mokṣa* directly. The term "salvation" which may be offered as a comparable concept, cannot be associated with what we here call

spiritual fulfilment. *Mokṣa* operates on two levels ; many schools accept the idea of *jīvanmukti,* that is liberation while living "in the body." This is distinct from *videnamukti,* liberation immediately after shedding the body. The person who has attained *jīvanmukti* has reached the stage of spiritual fulfilment. The actuality of his liberation and relationship with God is the same while being alive as after death. Even the schools rejecting the idea of *jīvanmukti* for example, Dvaitati Vedaānta) accept a certain state after which the saint cannot or need not do anything else to achieve *mokṣa* after his death (*videhamukti*). "Salvation", by contrast, is reached neither while being alive, nor immediately after death, but "at the end of times", that is after the dissolution of the world, when Christ comes for the second time to sit in judgement on the dead.

In Christianity, no person can be considered and revered as a saint while still alive. Until the moment of death, the saint's sanctity is jeopardized by a possible downfall. Actually speaking there are no "living saints" in Christianity. Sanctity can be attained only post-humously. So, a Christian struggles for spiritual perfection until the end of his life.

Does this, then, mean that the stage of spiritual fulfilment does not apply to Christian saints ? Not quite. Inasmuch as Christian spirituality accepts the idea of total spiritual transformation (*metanoia*), of the New Man who is born anew in Christ, the spiritual fulfilment is a reality to Christion saints, too. However, this stage is not clearly defined and supported by theological discussion, as in Hinduism. It is a state which, as grace, the principal giver and supporter of sanctity is intangible. The saints themselves generally did not claim to have reached "the goal of life", or to be *certain* of salvation at the end of times. Spiritual fulfilment may be rightly described as a total (unwaver-ing and continuous)self-surrender and confidence in Christ's grace. The bliss derived from this attitude is comparable to the bliss Hindu saints experience with the advent of *mokṣa*. A second criterion of Christian spiritual fulfilment is the external actions of the saint, namely, whether or not he proceeds to the final stage. Return to society, abandoning, by a spiritual compulsion, his withdrawal from society. And thirdly, the spiritual authority with which he acts, and the "aura of sanctity" which surrounds him giving a special ambience to his every action, are a sign that his spiritual fulfilment has been achieved.

Fifth Stage :   Return to Society

Especially for Christian saints, the ultimate return to society is imperative. Never does a Christian saint live in isolation; essentially, Christian living fulfils within the community of Christians. Although individual salvation is possible, and each Christian is expected to strive for himself to reach spiritual fulfilment, salvation of *one* person is "complete" only with the salvation of all those who are chosen to be saved.   In the background of this concept is the biblical idea of the totality of believers as the "body of Christ" with Christ being the head, and the believers the members (1 Cor. 12 : 12-31).   This concept expresses the interdependence of Christians among themselves and also with Christ.   As a result, besides striving for their own salvation, all Christians must help all other believers of God in their struggle for salvation.   The Christian's salvation and that of others is intricately interwoven.   Prayer, love of his fellow-man, and the works of love are the principal means by which each Christian is to further the salvation of others.

In Hinduism, the concept of community is not only different from that of Christianity, but it also varies from denomination to denomination, hence, a precise general statement is not possible.   It may be said that much emphasis is placed on individual salvation as each person is to work out his own dharma.   Moreover, the *sannyāsī* who is a principal prototype of the Hindu saint, has formally renounced his links with society and is freed, according to scripture, from all obligations towards it.   The experience of *mokṣa* does not curtail this freedom, but rather sanctions it.   The "realized" saint is free to live according to the dictates of his intuitions.

The biographies of Hindu saints, however, provide evidence to show that they, too, have felt spiritually obliged to serve mankind after their "God-realization."   This service is mostly a spontaneous response at the sight of need, misery and moral degeneration.   The *bhakta* saints particularly were moved by the misery of unenlightened mankind.

For the Christian saint, remaining in isolation and enjoying the sweetness of spiritual life has always been considered a temptation, and succombing to it is regarded as a weakness indicative of an inferior spiritual state.   Already during the time of withdrawal, the Christian saints as well as the Hindu, must not simply "forget" the world, but

while remaining physically alone and absorbed in spiritual exercises, they remain also deeply aware of their fellow-men, particularly of their physical and spiritual suffering and their desire for salvation; they "interiorize" this awareness and make it part of their *sādhanā*. In the fifth stage of their development, the saints realize the possibility of helping fellow-men in another, even more practical, way than by just being aware of them and praying for them.

The biographies of Hindu and Christian saints reveal that after spiritual fulfilment an urge arises in most of them to communicate the spiritual knowledge they have received, to manifest the love or power that spiritual fulfilment has generated in them, to share their joy. Well-known is the episode in Sri Ramakrishna's life when, after his *sādhanā*-period was over, he, intensely yearning for disciples, used to stand on the banks of the Gaṅgā crying out: "Come to me, my boys! Where are you? I can't bear to live without you."[19]   The Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, also referred to this urge to communicate in one of his sermons.   He says: "Even if nobody had been here, still I would have felt urged to give this sermon to the alms-box."[20]

Even the great Christian hermits in the desert did not seal themselves off from society, but accepted disciples and offered extensive hospitality to brother-monks and pilgrims. In Hinduism, the readiness to serve one's fellow men finds its typical expression in the acceptance of the *guru*-role; the saint generally accepted disciples and taught them. As the *guru* is expected to be a "realized" person, a saint, it follows that many saints have returned to society as *gurus*.

The Christian saint, according to the New Testament, is open to a large variety of services, or apostolates; he follows in the foot-steps of the apostles of Jesus Christ who were sent out to work among men, each one in a capacity best suited to him.   Each man has a special "charism", or "spiritual gift", such as preaching, healing, prophesying, working miracles, speaking in tongues, leading and administering a community and so on.[21]   This catalogue of charisms set up by the

---

19. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and his Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1969), p. 167.

20. Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, übersetzt von Josef Quint, (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969, 3rd edition), P. 273, "Wer diese Predigt verstanden hat, dem vergönne ich sie wohl. Wäre hier niemand gewesen, ich hätte sie idesem Opferstocke predigen müssen."

21. *Vide* 1 Cor 12 passim.

early Christian church, has changed and also enlarged in keeping with the changing needs of time.

The mythic hero and the saint

Comparing the stages of a mythic hero's career, as outlined by Campbell, with the five life-stages of a saint, we immediately notice their similarity. A myth is basically not interested in the hero's life prior to the events which give rise to his heroism. The author of myths dismisses the first life-stage as an uninteresting, "unheroic" episode. He does not present a biography of his hero with its dictates of historicity, but rather a chain of significant events which are "truer" than biographical life because they are mythified, symbolized and hence significant. Myth is ahistorical, it may happen at any point of history and in any country and culture.

A myth begins with the "Conversion" of its hero from ordinary life to an extraordinary life, or, in Campbell's language, with the "Call to Adventure." By contrast, the hagiographer will take pains to describe the life of a saint from birth to death, and exhibit a special interest in the first life–stage, his "Worldly Life" and the transition from the first to the second stage, his "Conversion." This drastic change of life–style and inner dispositions is a human drama which is edifying to the believer, psychologically interesting, and often shows in an exemplary manner the grace of God in human life.

The second stage of a hero's life, "Trials and Victories of Initiation", comprise the third and fourth stages of the saintly life, namely, "Withdrawal" and "Spiritual Fulfilment." The trials of spiritual life occur during the period of the saint's withdrawal. For the hero, the term "withdrawal" would be inappropriate, as his is a life of action. His trials–though their significance is internal and spiritual—are projected outside and are given shape in battles, conflicts and adventures. In the existential loneliness of his withdrawal, the saint experiences clashes between forces of the will and of the spirit, between unintegrated, conflicting emotions.

Both the mythic hero and the saint return to society after spiritual fulfilment has been achieved or granted; they have become "masters of two worlds" and mediators between the spiritual and the material– human worlds. As myth expresses itself in external events, the hero physically returns to society and lives among his fellow–men. His

return cannot be a "mere" inner opening–up towards the sufferings of mankind, and a spiritual participation in these sufferings, as in the case of many saints.

Āśrama–dharma and saintly life

The *āśrama dharma* which evolved in ancient India before the advent of Buddhism, was meant to serve as a general guide–line for a life which strove both to fulfil man's obligations to society and to develop harmoniously in a spiritual sense. He who combined these two duties to perfection, was considered a saint. In the four *āśramas,* or life–stages, a stage of openness to society alternates with a stage of withdrawal from society. In the first stage, *brahmacarya,* the student, living in the household of his *guru,* remains in relative seclu. sion. It is a period of preparation, of *sādhanā,* for the duties that await him in the next life–stage, as a householder. This preparation includes spiritual knowledge (learning of sacred scripture, and how to perform the rituals) and practical, worldly knowledge (farming, household–duties, proper conduct in society, etc.). When this period is over, the student leaves his teacher, marries and settles down as a householder. In this stage, *gārhasthya,* he is fully open to the influences of society and enjoys the legitimate pleasure of familylife exercising the restraint and moderation which his previous spiritual training has taught him. After raising a family and being fully saturated with the joys and the sufferings of a "life in the world", he gives charge of his family and his work to his eldest son, who is by then grown–up, and leaves his home, alone or with his wife, to live as a hermit in the forest. During this third stage of life, *vānaprastha,* the ancient Indian again withdrew from society living alone or in small colonies of *āśramas,* wholly devoted to *tapas* and meditation. Finally, he gives up the seclusion of his hermitage and, in the fourth stage, *sannyāsa,* takes up the life of a mendicant monk wandering from place to place begging for alms, not staying for a very long time in any one place. The *sannyāsī* is again radically open to the influences of the world, but not to enjoy it; rather, owing to his detachment from the world, which is equally radical, he is free to live in it; the "world" no longer hampers his spiritual life.

Āśrama–dharma was designed as a model way leading one towards fulfilment of religious life, *mokṣa.* It is a way to holiness which many generations of seekers have experimented with and

approved.   It seeks to combine the life of a householder with that of a monk not only for the sake of a healthy and well-founded society, but also for psychological reasons.   It was felt, firstly, that each man must discharge his obligations to society by fulfilling the three traditional duties, namely giving birth to a son, studying holy scripture, and making sacrifices for one's ancestors; and secondly, that only a man who had experienced the joys and sorrows of family life was spiritually prepared to renounce the "world."   According to this thesis, a young man is incapable of renouncing the world because he had no chance to experience it within that brief span of life.   It is impossible to renounce something which one does not know.

Later, this universal acceptance of the *catur–āśrama*-system declined. It was felt that whoever had the desire to renounce was fit for *sannyāsā* no matter whether he had gone through the *gārhasthya–āśrama* or not. Consequently, many young *brahmacāris* have been initiated into monastic life.   As a result the life-stage of "Worldly life" was reduced drastically and confined only to the childhood and adolescence of a saint.