

THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION IN SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN AND H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

A promising arena for comparative work in religious studies is the understanding of "religion" in different traditions. Toward that end, the concept of revelation in Hinduism and Christianity may be an illuminating investigation, particularly as expressed in the thought of two outstanding modern spokesmen, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Helmut Richard Niebuhr.

In such a study it should not be forgotten, however, that the term revelation is of Western, not Indian, provenance, and to the extent that language is constitutive of interpretation, there may be conceptual difficulties of considerable magnitude in making such a comparative study. To be sure, Radhakrishnan's usage of the term seems clearly to authorize a study of the concept of revelation in his perspective, and thus such an article in English seems to be a virtually harmless undertaking. But if one asks what Sanskrit word or words are behind Radhakrishnan's presentation of revelation (a matter on which I do not believe he comments), some disturbing questions about the appropriateness of the inquiry arise. Keeping that in mind, but holding it in abeyance, what understanding of revelation appears in the writings of Radhakrishnan and Niebuhr?

Radhakrishnan's Understanding of Revelation

Radhakrishnan gives us no succinct presentation of his view of revelation, but various discussions lead unmistakably to the central point. In religious experience, most frequently characterized as intuition, there is direct and immediate appropriation of the divine, which may be termed revelation. This "awareness" is the ultimate certification of religion, but it is also the occasion of many erroneous or at least inadequate interpretations of religion as expressed historically and institutionally.

We come at once, then, to separating the wheat from the chaff. As contemporary theologians are wont to say, religion is not

“propositional;” the experience of the Absolute which is the occasion of revelation may result in creedal formulations, but these and other aspects of traditional religious institutions are at best derivative. Radhakrishnan says, for example, that creeds are for those who have no first-hand religious experience.¹ Some religious ideas are more edifying than others. The crudest, most immature ones may readily be dismissed, but even the most elevated ones stand in contrast to the primary experience that is denoted revelation. This also corresponds to Radhakrishnan’s view of the historical progression in religion, from naturalistic polytheism to monotheism, and then from monotheism to monism, to become, says Thomas Paul Urumpackal, “a pure spiritual experience of the Absolute.”²

Similarly, there can be no equation of revelation and scripture. Discussing the distinctions of *śruti* and *smṛti*, he writes, “The Hindu tradition discriminates between essential spiritual experience (*śruti*) and the varying forms in which this experience has in course of time appeared (*smṛti*).”³ Elsewhere he distinguishes between direct experience or the primary experiential data (*śruti*) and the traditional interpretations or conclusions of theology as the meaning of “what is heard” and “what is remembered.”⁴ He similarly distinguishes between *dharma* as absolute and its relative historical embodiments: “Though *dharma* is absolute, it has no absolute and timeless content.”⁵ Philosophy also is historically rooted, “embedded in the stream of history like

1. S. Radhakrishnan & J.H. Muirhead, ed., “The Spirit in Man,” in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936; Rev. 1952), p. 502. See also S. Radhakrishnan’s *The Heart of Hindustan* (Madras: G. A. Natesan, 1952), p. 33, and *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939; New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 316; also C.E.M. Joad, *Counterattack from the East* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 159.
2. Thomas Paul Urumpackal, *Organized Religion According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan* (Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1972), p. xviii. Urumpackal’s study of Radhakrishnan contains a significant examination of his perspective on revelation.
3. S. Radhakrishnan, “Religion and World Unity,” *Hibbert Journal* (Vol. 49, 1959), p. 220.
4. S. Radhakrishnan, trans. & ed. *The Principal Upanisads* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 134.
5. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917), p. 114. See also “The culture of India,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 238, May, 1911), p. 20.

any other perishable product of the ages.”⁶ The philosophical enterprise with its works of reason and intellect is an attempt to clarify and explicate, but religious knowledge rests decisively on personal experience.⁷

The experiential stress is found repeatedly in Radhakrishnan’s writings. For example, he writes: “This intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of mind with reality. It is knowledge by being and not by senses or by symbols. It is awareness of the truth of things by identity. We become one with the truth, one with the object of knowledge. The object known is seen not as an object outside the self, but as a part of the self. What intuition reveals is not so much a doctrine as consciousness; it is a state of mind and not a definition of the object.”⁸ The Vedānta quest to overcome the disparity between subject and object is well-known, leading to a distinction between lower knowledge where objects are cognized and higher knowledge where the limitations of lower knowledge are transcended in direct, immediate or unmediated experience. Radhakrishnan takes the experience of realization to be a fact and argues that Western psychology has in the narrowness of its parochial outlook refused to consider the study of this form of demonstrable consciousness within the perimeter of its concern. He says that we may dispute theories, such as the theory of reality which is an inference, but we cannot deny facts, such as realization.⁹

Intuition is alternately termed religious experience, wherein at the highest there is present a unity of the Absolute and God. Intellectually there may be a problem of combining immanence and transcendence regarding the Absolute, but this is overcome in the experience of the totality of being.¹⁰ Intuition is not against intellect but it transcends the limits of reason. He also says,

6. S. Radhakrishnan, ed. *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952-53), vol. 2, p. 439.
7. See Urumpackal, *Organized Religion*, pp. 53-64.
8. S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 138. See also *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 29.
9. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 23. See also “Asia’s Spiritual Vision of Man,” *East and West* (Vol. 6, April 1955), p. 7.
10. “Spirit in Man,” pp. 197, 501. See also P.T. Raju, “The Idealism of Professor S. Radhakrishnan,” *Calcutta Review* (Vol. 76, Ser. 3, 1940), pp. 176-177; and Chap. 3 on “Revelation and Reason” in Radhakrishnan’s *The Brahma Sūtra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life* (New York: Harper 1960), pp. 103-118.

"Intuition completes and transforms reason."¹¹ There are many subtle differences in emphasis that have baffled Radhakrishnan's interpreters. He can say, "Hindu systems of thought believe in the power of the human mind to lead us to all truth."¹² But he also insists, "Man is not saved by metaphysics. Spiritual life involves a change of consciousness."¹³

We may turn now more directly to the concept of revelation. An important issue is the character of the revealer and the role of the human person in revelation. Sometimes he speaks of a God who reveals, a God with whom the self communes. At other times the unity of the self and the Absolute comes to the fore so that the categories of revelation (revealer, revealed) are left behind in an experience of unbroken unity. To the extent that this awareness or intuition is intermittent rather than continuous or continuing, the experience yields as an aftermath what we may deem revelation. Says Radhakrishnan, "Religion is founded on illumination. It is knowledge revealed to us in our highest consciousness."¹⁴

Urumpackal's investigation of Radhakrishnan's thought about the experience of revelation leads him to ask, in the light of "man's consubstantiality with the divine nature," whether man attains these experiences by "his own natural powers" or by the manifestation of divine will. There are many expressions of the idea that revelation is the product, one might say the reward, of zealous human action, particularly in the employment of man's intuitive powers.¹⁵ One might conclude from the statements made that revelation is a religious name for human discovery, at the more sublime spiritual levels of human existence.

Some care is needed in interpreting Radhakrishnan, because on his own terms, to cite the human in revelation is not to exclude the divine. Radhakrishnan does speak of revelation as divine disclosure, but notes that it must be received by humans with all the attendant limitations. He says "Revelation is divine-human," and that "the Creative Spirit is ever ready to reveal Himself to the seeking soul provided the search is genuine and the

11. *Brahma Sūtra*, p. 105.

12. "Spirit in Man," p. 484.

13. *Brahma Sūtra*, p. 107.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

15. Urumpackal, *Organized Religion*, pp. 67-68; in this section he cites a number of Radhakrishnan's pertinent statements.

effort intense."¹⁶ Here the divine element has become a repository to be claimed by valiant human seeking; it is discovery more than disclosure. Yet in other passages he speaks of seers who experienced revelation that was not predicated on human effort, but was "said to be a direct disclosure from the 'wholly other,' a revelation of the Divine."¹⁷ Perhaps no final resolution of these strains in Radhakrishnan's thought is possible, to the extent that they reflect the experienced awareness of God as other as well as of the unity of God and the Self, but it does cause considerable perplexity in fathoming his views of revelation.

A final observation will call attention to what is well-known by anyone familiar with Radhakrishnan's work: the view that all religions are one has its obvious counterpart in the idea that revelation is fundamentally the same in all religions, although there is a process of historical development and there are "levels of revelation" which represent institutional and historical factors.¹⁸ Revelation is the common spiritual experience at its highest level; religious differences reflect not different revelations but different appropriations of the experience of the Absolute which is the highest human attainment in all cultures and all ages.

Niebuhr's Understanding of Revelation

When one turns to the discussion of H. Richard Niebuhr one is aware of entering a different conceptual world. Niebuhr holds that because we are historical beings our thought about revelation must be historical in character: "We are in history as the fish is in water and what we mean by the revelation of God can be indicated only as we point through the medium in which we live."¹⁹ The focus initially is not on the soul's intuitive experiences but on history as understood by Christians, on revelations as "The Story of our Life" — a chapter title in his book, *The Meaning of Revelation*. In this work Niebuhr is responding to what he con-

16. S. Radhakrishnan, "Fragments of a Confession," in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 66-67. See also pp. 810 of his "Reply to Critics."

17. *Principal Upaniṣads*, pp. 22-23.

18. Schilpp, ed. "Reply to Critics," *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, pp. 807-808.

19. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 48.

siders to be the justified insights of historical relativism, which he says has set the problem and the dilemma: "What has made the question about revelation a contemporary and pressing question for Christians is the realization that the point of view which a man occupies in regarding religions as well as any other sort of reality is of profound importance."²⁰ Our relativity is spatial and temporal in character, for the spatio-temporal point of view of an observer enters into his knowledge of reality. Further, "our reason is not only in space time but space-time is in our reason," so that our thoughts like ourselves are creatures of history and time, historicity being a problem not only of the object of knowledge but also of the subject in knowing.²¹

For many, the acknowledgement of relativism is tantamount to a pervasive agnosticism. Not so for Niebuhr: "It is not evident that the man who is forced to confess that his view of things is conditioned by the standpoint he occupies must doubt the reality of what he sees." Because our concepts are not themselves universal does not mean that they are not concepts of the universal, and to say that all experience is historically mediated is not to say that nothing is mediated through history.²² To these problems Niebuhr relates the theology of revelation wherein one may be confident in the independent reality of what is experienced, even though the assertions about that reality are meaningful only to those who look upon it from the same standpoint.²³ And that stand point is itself the produce or fruit of revelation. Theology inevitably has a beginning point; we begin with faith as mediated in our historical communities of experience so that theology is understood as the explication of that faith which has been revealed in a particular historical tradition (and is thus frequently denoted "confessional theology").

In viewing revelation in history, a crucial distinction for Niebuhr is that between outer history and inner history, between history as contemplated externally and history as lived by persons in communities.²⁴ He acknowledges the background distinction

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; see also his *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), p. 234.

21. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 7, 10-13.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 60. Martin Buber's categories of "I" and "Thou" are noted by Niebuhr; there are also other important antecedents.

of pure and practical reason resulting in "a somewhat Kantian point of view in reconciling independent objective history with a valid religious history."²⁵ Only the bare out-line of this cardinal distinction in Niebuhr's thought can be given here. The contrast is between the study of objects and the encounter of subjects; between the active subject confronting a passive object and one subject being confronted by another; between the category of individuality and the category of personality; between a descriptive and a normative knowledge of history. These are always bound together, but neither can be reduced to the other.²⁶ We do not have here a distinction between true and false ways of viewing history but a reference to differences of perspective which cannot be separated even though they must be distinguished. Niebuhr insists that revelation is not to be confused with the objective work of external history, but neither is revelation seen as separated from or superior to external history. Internal history is not a parallel history but involves personal appropriation in meaning of what is one history that may be viewed externally or internally.

As already noted, for Niebuhr to speak of revelation is to involve almost immediately the meaning and role of the Christian community, in whose inner history is disclosed a key, or an image, that guides and directs the understanding of the whole of history. Christian theology does not have some universal or neutral beginning point; it must "begin with the faith of the Christian community and so with revelation."²⁷ This faith is historically mediated and focuses more on events than on ideas, as was true of the proclamation (*the kerygma*) of early Christianity; and says Niebuhr: "despite many efforts to set forth Christian faith in metaphysical and ethical terms of great generality the only creed which has been able to maintain itself in the church with any approach to universality consists, for the most part, of statements about events."²⁸ Niebuhr's attention to the community is in part an acknowledge-

25. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-67; See also Libertus A. Hoedemaker, *The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), pp. 98-103.

27. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 36.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 45; see also *Christ and Culture*, p. 238. The omission of consideration of the events that comprise the Christian story limits the present study largely to an examination of formal components of Niebuhr's view. Any full discussion would attend to many specific aspects of Christian theology not treated here. A brief discussion will be found in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 38-48.

ment of the process of transmission of faith as well as a recognition of the presence of community in the genesis of faith. He also finds individual experience more relative than that of the community, although the community is also not beyond distortions in its interpretations. Part of "verification" in regard to revelation comes as social confirmation when our experience is tested by companions who stand with us and who look from the same standpoint in the same direction. For Niebuhr the individual never stands apart from a community of life and thought; rather revelation comes in and through communal life. The appearance of revelation in the relations of subjects does not mean subjectivism or ineffability. Our internal history can be communicated and we can criticize each other's memories of what has happened in our common life. The only esoteric element is the simple fact that the meaning of revelation in internal history can be confessed only by members of the community in which revelation has taken place.²⁹ Here Niebuhr wishes to acknowledge our relative standpoint in history and faith. We appeal in discussing revelation not to a common human experience, yet not to merely mystic or private experiences, which are not subject to the criticism of the community, to confirmation or correction by those who stand at the same place and look in the same direction at the same reality. Assurance is not to be gained without social corroboration, but it is not possible on the part of others who occupy a different point of view and "look in a different direction and toward other realities than we do in our history and faith."³⁰

For Niebuhr revelation means that something has happened. He describes it in many ways. It is the meeting with a Thou in which the I is changed. It is the receipt of the gift of faith, the removal of our fear of being and the replacement by trust. A self which knows itself to be known becomes a committed self and achieves self-knowledge; acknowledging what it is, it can accept itself. He writes, "When we speak of revelation we mean that moment when we are given a new faith" and he speaks

29. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 72-73.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 141. Niebuhr devotes a great deal of attention to validation or verification of revelation in personal and communal experience, although the evidence would not be persuasive outside of the community of revelation, and Niebuhr's perspective makes it inadmissible to seek to establish the "superiority" of the Christian revelation. For Christians, the evidence is inescapable; for others, it is understandably inadmissible because it is not a part of their own life, their inner history.

of the "definition of religion as divine self-disclosure". Revelation means the revealing of the relative as relative, in its relation to the Absolute. When we find ourselves to be known and valued prior to our knowing and valuing, that is revelation.³¹ In this revelation which appears in personal encounter, the primary result is in responsive acts of a personal character. When the final source of life's being and value has revealed itself, the religious need for that which makes life worth living has been met.³² Writes Niebuhr, "As revelation...means the event in which the ultimate unity is disclosed as personal or faithful, so the human response to such revelation is the development of integrated selfhood."³³

Along with the explication of revelation, Niebuhr discusses what is not immediately present in and not to be confused with the revelatory event. Revelation does not yield new or special information about historical events that would be unavailable otherwise. It is not propositions about the character of reality although it may issue forth in many statements, even creedal ones. Images which come to us in a personal manner can neither be exhausted by nor definitively transposed into concepts and propositions. He writes, "Concepts and doctrines derived from the unique historical moment are important but less illuminating than the occasion itself. For what is revealed is not so much the mode of divine behaviour as the divine self."³⁴

Similarly, revelation is not to be equated with scripture, although the scriptures are not unrelated to the process of revelation. Scripture is not a superhistorical word of God from which to contemplate history; to communicate, it must be interpreted through history. Taken at face value, scripture reveals nothing save the state of the culture of the men who wrote its parts. One must participate in the same spiritual history out of which the scriptures came. Writes Niebuhr, "The Scriptures point to God and through

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 153-155.

32. "Value Theory and Theology," in *The Nature of Religious Experience: Essays in Honor of Douglas Clyde Macintosh*, ed. J.S. Bixler, R.L. Calhoun, H.R. Niebuhr (New York: Harper, 1937), p. 115.

33. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 47. Niebuhr also calls attention to the role of the remembrance of our past in achieving the unity of the self, for which he finds an analogy in psychoanalysis. See his *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 117. See also Hoedemaker, *The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, p. 100.

34. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 130. See also Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 42.

Scriptures God points to men when they are read by those who share the same background which the community which produced the latter possessed, or by those who participate in the common life of which the Scriptures contain the record."³⁵

Revelation does not create a new structure in life so much as it discloses the eternal structure present in life, from which men may build. Revelation is not the communication of new and better truths, nor the supplanting of our natural religion by a supernatural one; it is rather the fulfilment and radical reconstruction of our knowledge of deity. It is not a "development of our religious ideas but their continual conversion," as our religious truths and behaviour are transformed and transfigured by repentance and new faith.³⁶ A central ingredient in faith, to which we are called by the experience of revelation, is repentance (*metanoia*), which he finds to be the permanent revolution that is the consequence of faith. He says that "revelation is the beginning of a revolutionary understanding and application of the moral law rather than the giving of a new law" and "revelation imparts no new beliefs about natural or historical facts (but) it does involve the radical reconstruction of all our beliefs."³⁷ He understands this to be the message of radical monotheism, forbidding the absolutizing of the relative but conveying to the relative the blessing of the Absolute.³⁸

Revelation changes our life not as the self-disclosure of an unknown being but as the unveiling of a known being. What is revealed is not being as such but rather its deity-value; not that God is, but that God loves, judges, and makes life worth living. This is stressed in various contexts; revelation imparts confidence, trust, faith. These embody the dynamics of our inner history.³⁹ Since revelation means being apprehended in and by the self-disclosing of the eternal knower, we find ourselves to be valued prior to valuing, with all our values transvalued by the activity of a universal valuer. "When we find that we are no longer thinking him but that he first thought us, that is revelation." When God

35. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 49-51.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183; see also pp. 183-191, viii.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 172. Niebuhr's paramount interest in ethics is here reflected; the present study largely ignores that component of his work.

38. Niebuhr *Radical Monotheism*, p. 52; *Meaning of Revelation*, p. viii; *Christ and Culture*, p. 240.

39. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 77.

becomes person rather than object, "What this means for us cannot be expressed in the impersonal ways of creeds or other propositions but only in responsive acts of a personal character."⁴⁰

We may bring our discussion to a focus, and for the present section to a conclusion, on Niebuhr's understanding of revelation and reason, of the relation between the images given in revelation and the total framework of human knowledge. Revelation is characterized as the special occasion which gives an image which makes all our life intelligible; "Revelation means the intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible."⁴¹ When one asks of the relation of revelation and reason, Niebuhr is quick to insist that the revelatory experience is not contrary to reason but is the unfolding of the pattern of rationality in our existence.⁴² He thus cites St. Augustine with approval: "The life of reason above all is reoriented and directed by being given a new first principle" for one whose reasoning begins with faith in God.⁴³ Clearly revelation is no replacement for or substitute for reason; rather "the illumination it supplies does not excuse the mind from labour; but it does give to that mind the impulsion and first principles it requires if it is to be able to do its proper work."⁴⁴ Again, he writes, "Without revelation reason is limited and guided into error; without reason revelation illuminates only itself."⁴⁵ That revelation or the gift of faith has among its consequences not only reasoning in faith but behaviour in faith is a strain of Niebuhr's work as a Christian ethicist that is beyond our present purview. Revelation restores and enriches the mind and the heart so that the lives of persons in their communities may be enabled to know in history the presence of the Eternal.

Notes Concerning Continuing Comparative Study

In examining the perspectives of Radhakrishnan and Niebuhr on the concept of revelation, one must not forget that in both Hinduism and Christianity alternate perspectives on revelation may

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 91.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

43. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 214.

44. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 109.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 121. See also Hoedemaker, *The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, pp. 101-102.

be found. No assertion or assumption is made here that these are "representative" although each is a significant representative of his religious tradition. Whether either Hinduism or Christianity could be shown to embody a single fundamental outlook on revelation would have to be demonstrated by careful attention to common and divergent elements in each community of interpretation. To the extent that these two thinkers express significant currents of their religious heritages in relation to modern problems one finds sufficient justification for a comparative study, but conclusions should not be drawn that would require a much wider compass. Indeed it is difficult to extract a segment from each of these thinkers for our study, but we may ask on the basis of these directions and principal emphasis what points of comparison emerge. These may be arranged as (a) immediately noted (and sometimes superficial) similarities; (b) divergences in basic thrust or basic perspective, and (c) points of contact for further scrutiny in comparative work.

Both writers accept the view that religion in its deepest or highest or most fundamental expression encompasses dimensions of personal existence that can not be faithfully reproduced in conceptual form; revelation is not propositional. And whatever the positive role of scriptures, they are to be understood as derivative from revelation rather than to be equated as the essence or perfect embodiment of revelation. The focus for each is on experience, and then on the interpretation of experience by means of the processes and tools of reason. Both are against dogmatism, but in different senses or perhaps for somewhat different reasons. Each is a critic of tradition, seeking to be a force to "liberate" religious life and thought from narrow or shallow elements, yet each has an appreciation of the positive role of religious forms and traditions, although perhaps to different degrees and with a significant divergence, to be noted presently. The interest on the personal rather than the propositional is also reflected in the existentialist elements that may be detected in each, where the principal religious concern is for self-transformation, for the achieving of integrated selfhood. And this integration reaches out to encompass in the life of faith all of human existence; there are no enclaves of sacred and secular to be regularized, but rather the religious intuition is all-encompassing for Radhakrishnan,⁴⁶ and what Niebuhr calls radically monotheistic faith is exhibited (or denied) in all human

46. Radhakrishnan, *Idealist View of Life*, p. 201.

cultural spheres. The common to both is the level of thought, although reason and Revelation is understood but in the light of reason remains the same in its processes.

Yet here we find a divergence. For Radhakrishnan revelation is not a special revelation. Niebuhr revelation begins with the historical process, for Niebuhr sees revelation or by a special inner histories. The divergence. For Niebuhr, the historical process, of, the historical process, to occur in spite of, although Radhakrishnan argues against the view of special revelation as a divine intrusion, he tends to make the experience of revelation a gap in the historical process; whereas Niebuhr who argues for the special character of revelation insists that the medium of revelation is history, that revelation occurs in the historical process, that inner history is not a ghetto within outer history but involves the response of living selves to the common or universal phenomenon.

A caution needs to be given at this point concerning Radhakrishnan, because there is another strain in his thought which involves a more integral view of the historical process in relation to spiritual realization. He does occasionally speak of, for example, "the meaningful pattern we discern in history."⁴⁸ This seems to run counter to the idea of the self in its essential nature as beyond the limits and vicissitudes of historical existence in *samsāra*. He writes, "Activity is a characteristic of the historical process, and perfection is not historical. It lacks nothing and it cannot have any activity in it."⁴⁹ On the other hand he insists that

47. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 111, *et passim*.

48. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, p. 49.

49. Radhakrishnan, *Kalki, or the Future of Civilization* (London: Keagar Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929), p. 64.

society is not alien to men and says that there is "a profound integration of the social destiny with that of the individual." Human society is spoken of as "an attempt to express in social life the cosmic purpose."⁵⁰ Other passages reflect a dichotomy between the temporal and the eternal. If that is significantly modified in some passages, it does not seem to affect Radhakrishnan's view of revelation. Where for Niebuhr revelation must be historical in character, for Radhakrishnan, whatever tutorial role religious traditions may bring out of historical experience, revelation connotes the moment of supraconsciousness, above and beyond our historical framework.

Parallel distinctions appear when one examines the concept of God, the revealer. While for Niebuhr God is the Absolute, for Radhakrishnan there is an experience of God as well as the Absolute, and God related to the world is not the Absolute. Again, in their views of human nature, of the recipient of revelation, for Niebuhr the gulf between the divine and the human is emphatically maintained, whereas for Radhakrishnan the human condition which in some respects diverges from the divine in others manifests its true origin and destiny in its unity with the divine. For Niebuhr the idea of a God-man represents an exception, a surd; for Radhakrishnan an *avatār* represents what is ideally and potentially the estate of every human. For Niebuhr the historicity of the self is basic; for Radhakrishnan it seems to be an accidental characteristic rather than constitutive of the self's existence.

Also at odds is the portrayal of the relation of person and community (or communities). While neither disparages the community, and each places ultimate focus on the personal, Radhakrishnan's approach is generally to view revelation as a process that focuses primarily on the individual, however much aided by historical or social prompting, while Niebuhr focuses on events by which persons understand and interpret their communal life. Niebuhr's confessional stance argues that every person has a beginning point in a social history. Radhakrishnan would agree, but would posit as a goal the transcending of the departure point. For Niebuhr the temporal terminus is the enhancement of the starting point. Thus for Niebuhr revelation in the Christian sense is not a common or universal human experience, but one that occurs in re-

50. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 355. See also pp. 83-90, a passage which expresses both dimensions of Radhakrishnan's thought.

lation to communal life. (On revelation in other religious traditions, he insists that he has no credentials for speaking.) For Radhakrishnan revelation is not only universal but identical in all traditions, because revelation transcends the particularity of cultural traditions. Each sees a universal thrust, but the basis for universality diverges.

Finally, what clues may be discerned from this introductory exploration for further study? One possibility would be the consideration of how each one's explanation of revelation would and would not apply to the other. Is Radhakrishnan's view an exercise in the response to events in the inner history of Hindu culture? Is Radhakrishnan's perspective an instance of the special process explained by Niebuhr's confessional theology? Or, is Niebuhr's view an instance of the general process of revelation which Radhakrishnan describes, but one which has not lost the limiting communal and historical characteristics and thus remains only implicitly universalistic in its outlook? Just how each one's view fits the other's work would be an illuminating study.

To the extent that each focuses on dimensions of personal experience, much intercultural understanding might be gained from a further analysis of the modalities of religious experience. What is present in the intuitions and images that constitute revelation that may confidently be affirmed as something other than individual, even idiosyncratic, in its import? What prospects of verification or validation are offered? What is the difference between experience of an event and of a being?

One result of these and other further investigations might be to throw light on the question of the appropriateness of a category that comes out of one cultural tradition being used in another. Would Hindu themes be more authentically (whatever this may mean) expressed by the exploration of the concept *anubhava*, for example? Does revelation suggest a distance between revealer and the revealed which obscures the sense of identity of Brahman-Atman? To what extent is the Hindu element of *ānanda* in realization suppressed when the category of revelation is utilized? Might revelation more fruitfully be compared and contrasted with the Hindu sense of *darśana*? Such questions suggest that much remains to be done in order to determine the usefulness of the concept of revelation as a universal category in comparative studies.