

MEETING OF RELIGIONS IN THE CRISIS OF CIVILIZATION

The problem of whether or not religions can meet commands the greatest attention of thinking minds today: recent developments in science and psychology have shown how the old materialistic and mechanistic world-outlook on which the philosophy of the last three hundred years was based and which is still dogmatically followed by the social sciences, has now become totally outmoded giving place to what Oppenheimer calls the "principle of complementariness". We understand that freedom is no less true than determinism. The greatest enemy of religion for the past three hundred years has been the mechanistic method of science; it has resulted in the liquidation of all moral and spiritual values.

The World of Scientists

Scientists no longer give credit to absolute conceptions of space, time, motion, causation and matter. Matter and energy have become mutually convertible terms. Heisenberg maintained the position that it is impossible to determine the position and velocity of electrons, which therefore disposed the possibility of absolute and certain prediction from the field of physics. Scientists are not quite sure if the whole universe obeys a strict law of necessity, determinism and mechanism. Matter is now energy which again cannot be seen but known only by means of its effects. Facts in the world of biology bring the concept of ends and purposes and levels of being whose activity cannot be explained purely in mechanical terms. In fact the nature of living creatures is not of the same kind as that of the laws of physics and chemistry. Scientists do not question that these laws fail to operate in living organisms or that they fail to conform to the laws of physics and chemistry; all the same, they point to "the forward-looking character" of living organisms which are not understandable merely in terms of the laws of physics and che-

mistry. Electrons run "blindly" in the same manner as the inorganic matter, but doubtless they do not run in exactly the same manner. The activity of electrons in living organisms is adapted to the preservation of the organism and of the species to which the organism belongs. Yet the behaviour of living beings cannot be satisfactorily understood without reference to the future course of events which cannot be brought within the scope of observation and measurement. The conclusion to which we are inevitably led is that there is an order of reality which is not amenable to the laws of physics and chemistry and that consequently the factor of mind whose activity is expressed in the adjustment of means to ends cannot be avoided. The relevance of religion to such a conclusion yielded by a modern approach to the problem is that religious and moral values acquire new meaning and sanction in the court of science which has been skeptical of religious values and aspirations. If there is no order of reality different from the mechanical or blind dance of electrons, or if, in other words, everything is but the manifestation of motion, then there is no meaning in calling man a religious animal or even a rational animal. Man is religious because he is rational. We need not multiply confirmatory evidence from the recent biological research pertaining to the validity of the categories of end and purpose always at work in living beings and most conspicuously in man.

Contemporary psychological findings, such as the work of Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung have further brought to light hidden dimensions of the human mind where the real personality sits enthroned. Both Freud and Jung claim that our conscious life is not the whole of our personality; every human mind also contains the repository of man's attitudes, thoughts, emotions and actions which constitute the raw materials of moral and religious life. Modern psychiatry has empirically validated the cure of psychoses and neuroses with the assistance of religious symbols. In fact, the truths which Freud and Jung emphasize are complementary rather than contradictory if we take into account the polarities of human nature, the brutal and the divine, the creative and the aggressive, the possessive or destructive impulses of human nature.

As far as we can discern the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. It may even be assumed that just as the unconscious affects us, so the increase in our consciousness affects the unconscious.¹

1. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, tra. Vintage Books, Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: 1963), p. 326.

In the light of this brief sketch of such significant developments, we see that the religious interpretation of reality is not as sharply opposed to science as it had been in the latter half of the 19th century. These insights seem rather to lend support to a religious world view.

Complementariness of religions

The question of the meeting of religions consequently is not a matter merely of practical importance. Before it be possible for us to understand how significant it is for us at the present time, it is necessary to inquire into some theoretical considerations relating to it. The mind of man is not a divided house, and both the theoretical and practical aspects of the problem have to be squarely dealt with. The principle of complementariness which modern science has furnished, has spiritual meaning as well, in as much as it provides us with basic standpoints in the light of which we will see if there can be such a thing as the meeting of religions. But apart from this aspect of the matter, the additional support that we can perhaps get in the confirmation of our conclusion is what is available from a historical perspective. Our approach to the problem therefore will be partly historical, partly theoretical, and partly practical. In this connection a few words of caution may be said. When we talk of the meeting of religions we really mean religions as principles rather than deviations from such principles or mere counterfeits passing for religions compromising with temporal ends. We are concerned here with what we mean by religion. All of us understand what religion is, although we cannot define it due to its complexity. However, we may set forth the simplest formula under which we can include all religions except the so-called contemporary religions of humanism and communism which do not conform to the principle of viewing things *sub specie aeternitatis* rather than *sub specie temporis*. Humanism and communism view things from temporal points of view and not from the eternal and therefore, they cannot be called religions. Again, there are some forms of religion which lay stress on the impersonal although they are not quite insensible to the claim of the personal in the determination of the nature of the ultimate reality. I cannot compromise the claim of the personal over the impersonal because the latter logically leads to materialism. In spiritual matters it is the personal that counts and not the impersonal. Those religions which are impersonal in character, as the history of religions so clearly reveals, have been forced to

compromise the impersonality of the ultimate reality on which they claim to rest their creed.

With this introduction to my bias for personalistic forms of religion, we have to consider the question whether religions can meet or not. Once again we must be alive to the basic fact that the question of the meeting of religions would not have any meaning if such a meeting carried that implication of reducing them to mere sameness. Any question of the meeting of religions can be relevant and meaningful only against the background of individual differences and as I have pointed out above, historically considered, the answer to the question is so decisive and unambiguous that it becomes tautological. We need hardly add against the present futile controversy of the status of analytic and synthetic propositions that truths contained in axioms are so rich that it is by means of such tautologies that we advance from knowing less to knowing more; then to call them tautologies is another way of saying that they are completely and certainly known.² The phrase, therefore, namely meeting of religions, is a tautological truth and just because it is axiomatic and tautological we must declare that religions so far as our knowledge of them in the past records of history is concerned, have always met and lived, grown and prospered in a spirit of mutual harmony and friendship. We might here make reference to the mutual interchange of ideas between the different religions in such great centres of culture in the past as Alexandria. Much can be said also about the mutual interactions and interrelations of Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Historical Perspectives of Religious Interactions:

There is hardly any religion which has not deepened itself by its penetration of other religions. Christianity, for instance, has a large share of Persian religion which it incorporated into itself through Judaism which in its turn had been under the influence of Zoroastrianism. Christianity itself is an innovation and a continuation of Judaism. The influence of Hinduism on Neoplatonism is a historical commonplace. Gilbert Murray writes that the philosopher Plotinus, so his disciple tells us, was united with God in a trance four times in five years.³ The Jews did not believe in the devil before they were taken into captivity in

2. C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (Lodon: Fontana Books, 1974), p. 24.
3. *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London: Watts & Co. 1943), p. 148.

Babylon in 586 B.C., three years before the death of Zoroaster. "Since the Zoroastrian religion of that time strongly emphasised a chief among evil spirits called "The Adversary", and since the post-exilic Jews called their devil "Satan", which means "The Adversary", there is only one possible inference."⁴ Bertrand Russel is of opinion that the Christians are indebted to the Jews for their doctrines of morality and history and that their doctrine of salvation can be traced to the religions of the Near East and to Orphism.⁵

The Buddhist Jātakas testify to the travel of Indian to Babylon. Records have been found of trade-routes between India and Greece and India and Persia. As far back as 606 B.C. Babylon was the important centre of the meeting of the different cultures of the East and the West. Communications between Persian and Indian Courts were very frequent. Scholars, soldiers and philosophers of India adorned Persian Courts. It was reported that Darius had both Greeks and Indians as his subjects; Indian troops formed the light division of the army of Xeres (fifth century B.C.); they might have marched through the bloody defiles of Thermopylae, and their usefulness caused them to be retained by Mardonius after the retreat of the king, to take part in the Boeotian Campaign which ended so disastrously at the Asopus. Ionian officers in Persian employ, and, probably Ionian traders, visited the Punjab.⁶ The circumstance that the Greeks, Indians and Persians were in frequent contact with one another is historically so established a fact that it needs no documentation. In third century B.C. the whole of Northern India was under Persian rule and it is only natural that not only the Persians but also the Indians should have travelled to Greece. Plato and Aristotle were well aware of the prophet Zoroaster. According to Ghurye who cites Frank Knight, the ascetics and adherents of different religions lived together in peace and harmony in accordance with "rules laid down by Indians" in Egypt in 340 B.C. He further maintains that the Greek Stoicism was not an indigenous Hellenic product, but rather an infiltration via Egypt of beliefs derived from the Buddhist priests of India.⁷ In the Hindu Puranas, Egypt is called the *Mishra desha* because it was the centre of different religions. People from different parts of the world gathered there for

4. Charles Francis Potter, *The Great Religious Leaders* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1958), p. 79.

5. *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1955), p. 328.

6. Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western world*, 1926.
7. Indian Sadhus, 1953, p. 11.

cultural and commercial purposes. Some of the customs of the Egyptians were "essentially Aryan". The discovery by Sir Flinders Petric of statues and other Indian relics at Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt, led that famous British Egyptologist to believe in the existence of an Indian colony in ancient Egypt about 500 B.C. Madame Blavatsky in her book, *The Secret Doctrine* says:

If Egypt furnished Greece with her civilisation and the latter bequeathed hers to Rome, Egypt herself in earlier antiquity received laws, her social institutions, her arts and her sciences, from India. Similarly the Babylonian civilisation was neither born nor developed in that country. It was imported from India and the importers were brahmanical Hindus.⁸

It is even alleged that just because Christianity was under the influence of Hinduism, the Jews rose in revolt against Jesus. There is a view that this impact of India upon Israel had much to do with the rise and growth of Christianity and that it was one of the reasons why Judaism became hostile and remained so ever afterwards, to the new faith as something outlandish.⁹ The late Dr. Radhakrishnan would say in the same stream of thinking:

Alexandria lay open even more than Syria to the ideas of the East. A strange mingling of ideas belonging to the different traditions, Greek, Babylonian, Buddhist and Zoroastrian, was taking place in the century before the Christian era. About this period there was long-range trade between Rome and India in amber, ivory, incense, pepper and silk, articles which could not be got from within frontiers.¹⁰

Dean Inge also writes:

It is well known that Alexandria was at this time not only a great intellectual centre, but the place where, above all others, the East and the West rubbed shoulders. The wisdom of Asia was undoubtedly in high repute about this time. Philostratus expresses the highest veneration for the learning of the Indians. Apollonius of Tyns went to India to consult the Brahmanas. Plotinus himself accompanied the Roman army to Persia in the hope of gathering wisdom while his comrades searched for booty and the Christian Clement has heard of Buddha. It is,

8. Sisir Kumar Mitra, *The Vision of India*. (Bombay and Calcutta: Jaico Publishing House), p. 180.

9. *Ibid.* p. 174.

10. Radhakrishnan, *East and West, Some Reflections* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1954), p. 68.

therefore, natural that many scholars have represented it as a fusion of European and Asiatic Philosophy.¹¹

It is interesting and instructive thus to remember that, in order to answer the question whether religions can meet, it is necessary to acquire some historical perspective, for history is not a meaningless procession of events forced on us but the product of individual initiatives. Whether religions can meet or not is an issue which depends solely on the education and the cultural level of individuals concerned or the followers of the different faiths. Religions as mere abstract universal principles mean nothing unless they find their embodiment in the individuals themselves.

The above account of the fusion of the different religions that I have offered in the light of the accredited evidence and proofs attest the possibility of such minglings; for if they have met sometime in the past, there is no reason why, if religion is allowed to be psychological and not merely social and when secular and spiritual interests are not identified, there ought not to be a hearty mingling of different religions. The spirit of isolation or insularity or cultural solipsism or apartheid was relatively unknown in the past history of mankind. We have also observed that any religion is a product or the end result of an assimilation. Judaism developed in Babylon and shows a good deal of sharing of Zoroastrian concepts. Again, Judaism itself has not been exempt from the influence of Indian religions. The Alexandrian Jews shared ideas with Brahmins and received from the Greeks their philosophy by means of which they expressed their ideas. Christianity was in direct line of development with Judaism for Christ came to fulfil and not to destroy the religion in which he was born. Much of the charm and attraction of the Christian religion is due to the foreign concepts it so liberally incorporated into its fold. We have already referred to the concept of the Satan as an objective and real cosmic force or "Evil" in Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity. In Islam too the force of evil is not subjective but objective. Islam, Christianity and Judaism thus come under the same principle of classification and it is not without reason that they are grouped under the common classification of Semitic religions. In the Gospel of Matthew 2:1,2, reference is made to the "wise men from the East" and "His star rising in the east." The wise men are the Zoroastrian priests. The star unmistakably points to the Zoroastrian belief in the spiritual double, called *fravashi* which every man has and which grows

11. Swami Ashokananda, "The Influence of Indian Thought on the Thought of the West," *Prabuddha Bharata* (May 1931), p. 241.

when he grows and is united with him when he dies. It is the guardian of the man and its brightness is in proportion to the greatness of the man. Belief in Paradise¹², similarly, to which Jesus refers as his abode after dying on the cross seems to be a Zoroastrian borrowing by Christianity. Paradise as the abode of the good is different from the Hebrew Sheol which is meant for both the good and the bad people. Paradise is exclusively the abode of the good and is different from the garden of Eden. The Hebrews began to make use of "Paradise" in their eschatology only after they took both the idea and the word from Zoroastrian sources. Both the birth and the death of Jesus take us back into a Zoroastrian atmosphere. Other doctrines common to Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity are those of the resurrection of the dead, the existence of evil spirits, the day of the Last Judgment on which the virtuous will be separated from the sinners, the final triumph of the good over the evil, the coming of the Messianic Son of Man, and finally the belief in guardian angels. All these Christian articles of faith are characteristic features of post-exilic Judaism from which they were imported into Christianity. The doctrine of the Church as the Secret brotherhood was present also in the Greek mysteries. The cult of the mother goddess and Mithraism had already taught the doctrine of a redeeming god. Beliefs in miraculous cures, baptism, fast and the purification vigil were all adopted from pre-Christian Mediterranean cults. Even Mithra's birthdate December 25, was also accepted as the birthday of Christ.¹³ Pagan gods received new forms. Christianity could not dispense with Stoicism which was in vogue in Tarsus, the place where Paul lived. Belief in an eternal Reason, immanent in the universe with which the Gospel of St. John begins, is a typical Stoic contribution. Hence Hopkins affirms:

In general it may be said that early Christian theology was a mixture of Stoic, Gnostic, and Platonic elements incongruously welded upon the old Jewish idea of a Spirit of God or Wisdom of God working in the Son of God, interpreted as Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Hinduism and its historical Process

That Hinduism has a composite character and that it is the

12. *Luke* 23:43

13. *The Great Religious Leaders*, p. 469.

14. E.W. Hopkins, *Origin and Evolution of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 338.

result of the fusion of diverse cultures during the course of its development are facts too well known to need any fresh treatment. It cannot be set down in a cut and dried formula inasmuch as it includes within its broad sweep all types of faith and suits all tastes. Hinduism does not believe in the dogma of a chosen people or of an elect. As it is not a tribal religion like Judaism, it developed from the very beginning the spirit of charity and love for all mankind, accepting the principle of inner growth rather than that of coercion or forced conversion for political ends; such coercion confuses the eternal with the transient ends. Hinduism rather has preferred the principle of religious reform by means of education which insists on spontaneous growth in spirituality; it has adopted the axiomatic psychological truth embodied in **Adhikari Bheda** (adapting the teaching to the relative maturity of the student) and **Arundhatidarsana nyaya** (method of leading the students to the intended truth by suggesting and excluding other possibilities) in solving the problem of the conflict of different cultures. It is not without reason therefore, that Max Müller rightly remarks that India is the most apt place for the study of Comparative Religion. We have just seen how the principle of synthesis and assimilation has been at work in Christianity. Hinduism has given expression to its synthetic genius and power of absorption and assimilation by providing room for various creeds and faiths such as the **Vratyas**, (fallen, probably alien races), and the immigrants like **Sakas**, the **Yavanas**, **Hunas**, the **Gurjaras**, **Kiratas** in a manner that their absorption became imperceptible and the characteristic feature of the faiths they professed became part and parcel of the growing organism of Hinduism. It is perhaps redundant to declare that its attitude towards Islam, barring a few instances of hostility occasioned by political misunderstanding has been one of deep sympathy and appreciation. Sir John Woodroffe tells us that "in India the differences between Hindu and Mahamedan are commonly said to have increased since the recognition of separate electorates and the struggle for Government patronage. So dominant are politics, now-a-days that even religion is made to serve their purpose."¹⁵ Even at the present time we hear of thousands and thousands of Hindus visiting "the shrine at Pirano or the **dargah** of Nizamuddin Aulia or the tomb of Lal Shahbaz and of a Syed and a Brahmin reciting the Kalma together three times daily."¹⁶

15. *Is India Civilized?* (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Publishers, 1919), p. 89.
16. Sisir Kumar Mitra, *The Culture of India* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951), p. 24.

According to the same author, the "broad-minded" Spiritual outlook of Persian poets, saints like Hafiz and Rumi powerfully influenced the thoughts of Indian devotees in the Afghan and Moghal periods of Indian history.¹⁷ "At Pushkar in Ajmer a place of Hindu pilgrimage where Muinuddin lived and passed his last days, there is even today a class of people who call themselves Husaini Brahmins who are neither orthodox Hindus nor orthodox Muslims having belief in Hindu customs and rituals along with Islamic ideas and practices."¹⁸

A brief reference to Sufism seems necessary. Islam belongs to the Semitic group and it is quite natural for it to accentuate the difference between God and man and the distance that separates God from man. God in Islam is more an object of fear than of love: "Thou shalt fear the Lord, thy God." The introduction of love as an element in the character of God is definitely the Sufist contribution. The doctrine of "Fana" or the "annihilation" of the Ego is only the logical corollary of the sentiment of love, for love matures in proportion to the annihilation of the Ego. Sufism believes, like Yoga, in the existence of the different centres of spiritual apprehension in the body. These are called "Lataif". They are the same as the Chakras in Yoga. According to the Yoga system, there are six such centres in the physical body. The Sufis believe in five such centres called **Qualh**, **Sirr**, **Ruh**, **Khafi** and **Akkfa** to which the sixth one, **Nafs**, may be added. In many respects, Sufism resembles Vedanta, and regards the achievement of identity consciousness as a fulfilment of its whole spiritual endeavour. The Sufis are well known for their catholic outlook and for the exalted moral and spiritual values to which they held fast as well as their deep respect and veneration of both Hindus and Muslims. Indian history is replete with such instances of harmony and peace between the Hindus and the Muslims because of the ideological affinity between the Hindus and the Sufis.

One might feel surprised to find the problem of the meeting of religions being dealt with in the above paragraphs in the light of Indian history making no explicit reference to any philosophical discussion of such an interesting subject. My apology for the reference to this historical account is to be found in the Hegelian dictum that history is concrete philosophy. We cannot divide history from philosophy especially in matters where our concern is with spiritual values which find

17. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

18. Sisir Kumar Mitra, *The Vision of India* (Bombay & Calcutta: Jaico Publishing House, 1949), pp. 229, 230.

embodiment in the course of events shaped by human wills. It is such concrete exemplification of abstract truths that lead us to a consideration of the theoretical foundations of collective behaviour which is important not only nationally but also internationally. A method for bridging cultural differences between the East and the West might hopefully be expected to emerge from it.

Theoretical framework

What then, is the theoretical framework which can supply the method whereby we can approach the problem? Of the three principal attitudes which have so far been reflected in the history of the conflict of religions, the first is rooted in the spirit of an uncompromising antagonism or hostility, or of staggering contrast so that all religions except the one intended to be imposed on others appear false; the second attitude is dogmatically and imperiously entrenched in the belief that all other religions are preparations for and approximations to it, while the third one is one of mutual appreciation, sympathy, understanding and sharing of ideals. Thus, there was a time when, because the different religions were not objects of serious sympathetic and dispassionate interpretation and understanding, one could not think of any point of contact between them. The world was then split at this period between the Christian and the non-Christian divisions. Christianity alone was considered the true religion and all other religions were looked down upon as examples of nothing but barbarism. At the second stage, however, the impulse to study, understand, interpret and evaluate the different religions stemmed from a consideration that other religions deserved to be closely examined with a view to assessing their spiritual strength and potentiality for meeting with their fulfilment in Christianity. The third stage is marked by a spirit of mutual giving and taking and a sympathetic understanding with a view to fostering a spirit of cooperation.

In spite, however, of the last approach to this problem there are to be found estimates of Eastern and Western religions which are not quite sincere but prejudiced, and which arise from an inadequate and misinformed and misguided understanding of the terminology peculiar to the language of religious traditions. Three fourths of such conclusions and distortions have thus arisen from a failure to get into the very spirit of the religion and from ignorance of the language and terminology in which the different faiths are expressed. Thus it is said that differences between the different religions whether they are Eastern or Western are so palpably obvious that the possibility of the meeting of religions is liable to

be dismissed out of hand. These differences have been emphasized over and over again ever since the treasures of the Eastern lore infiltrated to the West. Thus it has been held that whereas the Eastern religions are monistic, pantheistic, and mystical, Western religions are monotheistic, humanistic, realistic and antimystical. In Western religions one meets with an extremely pronounced sense of zest for life and the appreciation and recognition of the mundane values which appear lacking in Eastern religions. Whereas Western religions are thought realistic, Indian religions are described as idealistic. Optimism is the outstanding character of Western religions whereas Indian religions are pessimistic. Whereas Semitic religions emphasize a perfection of the body and spirit, Indian religions accent escape from physical embodiment as the supreme goal of human existence. Western religions are life and world affirming while Indian religions are life and world denying. While Hinduism is predominantly contemplative in character, Western religions are active. Hinduism is the religion of eternity which despises the temporal course of history and lacks a philosophy of history, while Western religions are religions chanting the glory of God's action in time and history, its Bible being an eloquent testimony to the sacramental character of the world. The God of the Semites is **self-conscious** while the Absolute of the Hindus as Atman is not very much different from the exalted state of the **subconscious** of man. There is place for the individual in Western religions while Hinduism questions this assumption. Western religions give recognition to the reality of the will as an indispensable element in the human personality, while Hinduism conceives of the self after the fashion of a photographic camera in so far as it lays stress on pure consciousness alone as the essence of the self, will and action being relegated to the domain of non-intelligent matter. Western religions are mythical whereas the religions of the East are mystical.

According to Soderblom, there are religions of culture and religions of revelation. Christianity and Judaism on the one hand belong to the latter category and all other religions on the other pertain to the former. There are religions which make the transcendent relevant to the historical and those which think the transcendent has no concern for the historical. Eastern religions adopt the concept of manifestation as contrasted with that of creation on which rests the Western conception of religion. Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Islam maintain the position that evil is a positive and objective cosmic force operative in the world and

in man while Oriental religions hold to the view that it is illusory or is part of the good. The logical corollaries of this way of looking at the nature of evil are the inherently sinful character of man in the Semitic religions and the intrinsic purity and perfection of the finite individual in the Oriental religions. There are, again, divisions arising from the unitarian and trinitarian conceptions of the Deity. Some religions emphasize predestination while freedom is the chief focus of others. Then there are different types of mystical experience. The late Professor Zaehner distinguishes four types of mysticism: Accordingly the highest experience is either one of isolation of the self from everything else, or of identification with all reality, or of merger in the Infinite so that the highest destiny of the individual is the annihilation of personality as of a drop in the infinite ocean, or of communion with a personal God leading to belief in the doctrine of personal immortality. Finally, Hinduism is a deeply personal religion of which Whitehead's definition of religion "what the individual does with his own solitariness" is true. But Christianity demands the allegiance of the individual to the Church without whose assistance perfection appears impossible.

The differences between the different religions can be stretched to any limit or extent with the intention either of proving the self-sufficiency of any one religion or of ruling out the very possibility of such a thing as religious experience as an authentic revelation of reality. The history of religious thought East and West is replete with the samples of both types of attitude held towards religion. The problems concerning religious experience, therefore, that face us today, are of a very complex character. They are both theoretically and practically important. The religious believer need not be afraid of the positivist attack on religious experience seeing that science itself as we have seen, is not opposed to religious experience. On the other hand, no careful thinker can cast aside the contribution of modern psychiatry to religion. We must not close our minds to the critical evaluation of the insights of the schools of psycho-analysis. Nor need we look down on the revelations of parapsychology pertaining to the hidden dimension of the human mind. Even Julian Huxley had the grace to add: "We must follow up all clues to the existence of untapped possibilities like extra-sensory perception. They may prove to be as important and extraordinary as the once unsuspected electrical possibilities of matter."¹⁹ Professor H.J.

19. "The Destiny of Man", *The Sunday Times*, September, 1958, quoted in Leslie D. Westherhead, *The Christian Agnostic* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), p. 8.

Eysenck has commented that to call all psychic phenomena fraudulent is to imply that there is "a gigantic conspiracy involving some thirty University departments all over the world and several hundred respectable scientists in various fields."²⁰ From a practical point of view we have to solve the problem of the meeting of religions for the psychological coherence of mankind. Science and technology have themselves served religion by effecting an external unity for mankind. International cooperation in political, economic and other spheres needs mutual understanding and sympathy. It is religion that has for its sole business the formation and stabilisation of the permanent habits of mind which are expressed in the different spheres of our collective life. We can no longer put up with a cultural apartheid or religious solipsism which is outmoded and anachronistic. How then are we to understand the aforesaid staggering contrasts between the different religions? May I not be accused of partisan attitude if I humbly submit that the solution provided by the Hindu method stands unchallenged and can unfailingly meet the needs of the time. All religions are expressions of the varied responses to the diverse spiritual needs of human nature; whether they are true or false can be judged by the extent to which they have proved their worth and strength for the integration of the human personality. The contradictions and contrasts of religions can be taken to be complementary truths.

The dichotomies and antinomies of religious life as set forth above are all demands of human nature. The polarities, for instance, of action and contemplation, pessimism and optimism, life-affirmation and life-negation, worldliness and otherworldliness, impersonal and personal, of *jñana*, *karma* and *bhakti*, grace and freedom, transcendence and immanence, finite and infinite, time and eternity, intellect and intuition, all illustrate this point. Absolute and God, reason and revelation have been so repeatedly reconciled by able writers in their religious writings that any attempt to expound them afresh will amount to repetition. However, some comment on certain misunderstandings into which even careful writers have fallen seems necessary. Thus Cuttat accuses Radhakrishnan and through him Hinduism, of indifference to truth and consequently, of agnosticism.²¹ In his opinion, Radhakrishnan seems to suggest that the nature of truth cannot be determined. This is not quite true of either

20. *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (Pelican Books, 1957), p. 131.

21. *The Encounter of Religions* (New York, Paris-Rome: Desclée Company, 1960), pp. 23-26.

Hinduism or Radhakrishnan. We cannot altogether discount or discredit the importance of relativity of knowledge in this sphere if we cannot in any case dispense with the category of the Absolute or Ultimate Reality seeing that the human mind cannot fully grasp the infinite dimensions of God's nature. What else will be left over to inspire religious quest? W.R. Inge wrote about the mystical dimension of religion as follows:

To represent eternal truth under the forms of space and time, the universal as the particular, the action of God in the world as miracle, is natural and normal in popular religion. But this movement is in the opposite direction from mysticism, which always views these pictorial presentations of divine truth with impatience, and often tries to dispense with them.²²

Such consideration commands us to adopt the attitude of humility in relation to the description of the nature of Brahman, the unfathomable depth of His Being far transcends human comprehension. No religion, therefore can lay claim to finality and absoluteness. Absolutism in religion amounts to religious imperialism which is the very negation of the Absolute on which it rests. Theism and Absolutism are not so much lower and higher expressions of the experience of God and Absolute but complementary truths. Once we acknowledge that theism and absolutism are equally complementary expressions of the experience of the Ultimate Reality they cannot be rated as higher and lower truths. Much of the confusion and quarrel between *Nirvisheshavadins* and *Savisheshvadins* has its source in confusion of language and misunderstanding and distortion and misinterpretation.

Just because the different faiths laying hold of the complementary aspects of the Absolute or of God cannot be taken to be in absolute possession of the absolute truth, belief in the final revelation must be abandoned. Toynbee says:

Hinduism was to be found, not at the rear of the procession of living higher religions, but in its van, in virtue of a characteristically Hindu spirit of spontaneous charity towards all revelations—past, present and to come—which was the first spiritual requirement in an age in which the whole of mankind had been united in a single Great Society through 'the annihilation of distance by a Western technology.'²³

22. W. R. Inge, *Mysticism in Religion* (London: Rider & Company, 1969), p. 215.

23. *Study of History*, Vol. 7B, p. 735

Although belief counts, there is a standard by which the character of our beliefs can be evaluated. Hinduism does not undermine or belittle efforts for the progressive revelation of reality, yet surely it must not be something forced from outside. It must be the outcome of spontaneous growth in the power of receptivity and sensitivity. Religion cannot be dragooned into man by force but must be allowed to grow spontaneously through efforts of education and suggestion. Moreover, it is not so much the name of this or that deity, of this or that founder of religion of this or that religion that counts. What matters is the content. Myths and rituals are the external husks that guard the inner core and essence, the kernel that constitutes the soul of a religion.

Unity of Religious experience

Each religion has its own tradition and in the course of its history it has given expression to the multiple dimensions of spirituality and has corrected its own errors. We must learn to respect the uniqueness of each religion. Fulton J. Sheen says: "Every religion in the world, I care not what it is, contains some reflection of one eternal truth. Every philosophy, every world-religion, every sect, contains an area of the perfect ground of the natural and revealed truth; Confucianism has the fraction of fellowship; Indian asceticism has the fraction of self-abnegation: each human sect has an aspect of Christ's truth. That is why, in approaching those who have not the faith, one should not begin by pointing out their errors, but rather by indicating the fraction of truth they have in common with the fulness of Truth. Instead of saying to the Confucian: 'You are wrong in ignoring the Fatherhood of God,' one should say: 'You are right in emphasizing brotherhood, but to make your brotherhood perfect, you need the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ, and the vivifying unity of the Holy Spirit.'"²⁴

Paul Brunton, one of the devoted students of Hindu thought and culture remarks:

I am not a member of any religious faith, in the conventional sense, not a Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu. And I will frankly confess here that I was born with no particular leaning towards religion, while the splitting of theological

24. *Go to Heaven* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 93-94.

hairs aroused my amusement. But I am a believer in most of the great faiths according to the interpretation which, I hold, their own Founders gave to them. I am a Christian to the extent that I concur with Saint Paul in saying, 'And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not love, I am nothing'. (I Cor. 13:2). I am a Buddhist to the extent that I realize, with Gautama, that only when a man forsakes all his desires is he really free. I am a Jew to the extent that I believe profoundly in the saying, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One'. I am a Muslim to the extent that I rely on Allah above all else. And finally, I am a follower of Lao-Tse to the extent that I accept his perception of the strange paradoxes of life. But I will go no further into these faiths than the points indicated; they are the boundary-posts at which I turn back.²⁵

The spiritual visions of man confirm and illumine each other. We have the cosmic greatness of Hinduism, the moral issues of Zoroaster, the joy in Truth of Buddha, the spiritual victory of Jainism, the simple love of Tao, the wisdom of Confucius, the poetry of Shinto, the One God of Israel, the redeeming radiance of Christianity, the glory of God of Islam, the harmony of all poetry, and the spiritual vision of man come all from One Light. In them we have lamps of Fire that burn to the glory of God²⁶

Moreover, there are parallels of similar experiences in the different religions. Much work still remains to be done on the basic unity of the spiritual outlook of Christianity and **Vaishnavism**. There is very little to distinguish **Taoism** from **Advaita** respecting the ineffability of the highest experience: just as the advaitin insists on the figurative or metaphorical and not the literal exactitude, of experienced truths at higher altitudes of spiritual experience, his sole intention being one of directing the mind to the experience of Brahman, so also the Taoist is keen on awakening our interest in the Divine Mystery, by abandoning literal exactness of language. For a very long time, Hindus and Christians have sharpened their teeth on the concepts of **avidya** and **Sin**. Hindus chastise Christians for their doctrine of Original sin which amounts to an acceptance of the doctrine of the objectivity of evil as a force in the human personality. I do not think, however that

25. *The Message From Arunachala* (London: Rider & Co., 1969), pp. 61, 2.

26. Betty Radice & Robert Baldick (ed.) *The Bhagavad Gita* (Penguin Classics with Introduction by Juan Mascaro), p. 85.

there is so staggering a contrast between these two concepts. Advaitins believe in the positive and cosmic character of **avidya** which is beginningless even though it can be overcome. They say it is neither **sat** (real) nor **asat** (unreal) which means that it is not absolutely false and fictitious. In Christianity too, sin is not so much a historical event as the price that man has to pay for his freedom.²⁷ **Avidya** is not easy to overcome and one can conquer it only after limitless cycles of existence. Sin is not inherent in man in his finitude; that would make God the author of evil. But perhaps there is anguish, and alienation, a crucifixion involved in the creative act.²⁸ Many Christians have begun believing in Creation as an eternal act and not as an event in the life-history of God. The relation of the world to God is not a necessary relation. It is not necessary for God. It is the **ratio congoscendi** rather than the **ratio essendi** of God. If God is a self, He must act and His act must be self-communicating and a revelation of His goodness, for goodness and perfection overflow their bounds. Hindus say the world is the overflow of the Divine joy (**lila**). It need not be misconstrued. While we cannot say when the world came into existence, we cannot understand it in its insulation from the Divine act. It is not quite proper to remark that the idea of a self-giving or self-communicating God is unknown to the Hindus. The **Upanishads** tell us that God desired to be many for loneliness was boredom to Him.²⁹ Nor need we say that religion is a matter merely of man seeking God and not of God also seeking man. In the devotional literature of Hinduism, the Vaisnava teachers have brought to the central focus even this aspect of the Deity which is claimed to be the singular contribution of Christianity. One can hear these days even from Christian platforms echoes of the Hindu belief in Karma and Reincarnation.³⁰ Therefore, for the Hindu, all religions have something unique to contribute; and in the interest of spiritual efflorescence it is necessary to create conditions for the spontaneous growth of the inner creative powers of men in their own social milieu. If experience be the same, it is immaterial which language one speaks. The eternal spiritual truth and experience can remain the permanent prized possession of mankind only if all religions are allowed to flourish and prosper. Differences in the language

27. Gerald Vann, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 103-104.

28. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on prayer* (London: Fontana Books, London, 1969), p. 47.

29. *Tadaikshata Bahusyam; ekaki na ramate.*

30. Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Christian Agnostic*, Chapter XIV.

of the experience of eternal truth are inevitable since conditions of culture, temperament and education cannot be overcome. That is why Lord Krishna says: "Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish?"; and that consequently; "Whatever form any devotee with faith wishes to worship, He (I) makes (make) that faith of his steady."³¹ Swami Vivekananda wrote:

Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become a Christian? God forbid... The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each religion must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its own law of growth.³²

Concluding Remarks

By way of conclusion we may say that the meeting of religions is the urgent necessity of the hour if the current crisis in civilization is to be faced. The problem today is not one of the conquest of the forces of nature but one of the brute in man; and the Sphinx in Cairo with a lion's head and a human body is a perpetual reminder of the existence of the brute in man. The external unity effected by science and technology will remain ineffectual if it is not supplemented by efforts for the achievement of the cultural unity of mankind; this can be accomplished only by cultivating the spirit of charity and fellowship of faiths. Happily some attempts have been made in this direction by thinking minds in many parts of the world and in important academic centres. But the Comparative Study of Religions is still young and much work still remains to be done. The problem of the present-day civilization is fundamentally psychological and not sociological or statistical; in this sphere only a new psychological awareness is called for. There can be no problem as such of the "Meeting of Religions", for, Religions have met in the past and are still meeting. Only the absence of a truly religious outlook divides one religion from another religion. Cultural solipsism or apartheid in the sphere of religion is the greatest insurmountable obstacle to the consummation of a World Community which is in its infancy. Since it is the same mind

31. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* 3:33; 7:21

32. Quoted by R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 221.

that thinks in all mankind we cannot say there is nothing on which we can agree and nothing which we can share with others. Bosanquet said: "Today Idealism is no longer Greek, or German but universal."³³ This is quite true of religions today. Religions are least religious when they are least universal, exclusive, individual and particularist; for religion is what binds, unites and integrates and not that which divides, isolates and disintegrates.

33. Bosanquet, *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 65.