

ASSAULT ON RELIGION FROM MODERN BEHAVIOURAL AND NATURAL SCIENCES

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1. Introduction

The two great challenges religions had to face, and are still facing, in modern times are the challenges posed by the existence of a plurality of religions and the implications of the new discoveries in the behavioural and natural sciences. Religious pluralism has been identified in the past as a major stumbling block in realizing the ideal of the oneness of all humanity and the forming of a world community. In the past, religions and religion-based civilizations have fought each other or at least hated each other because each one held one's own religion as the only one true faith, denouncing all other religions as false and corrupt. Accordingly, outside one's own religion there was no salvation. But humans have now found a way to overcome this once-thought-insurmountable problem. Through a sympathetic study of other religions and through the dialogue between religions humans have now learned to co-exist peacefully in the midst of cultural and religious plurality. The shift from inter-religious hostility to inter-religious dialogue and mutual acceptance, therefore, must be seen as a Copernican Revolution in the field of the growth and development of religions.

Yet another Copernican Revolution is taking place, sometimes silently and sometimes with the accompaniment of a lot of sound and light. The reference here is to the giant leaps made in the natural and biological sciences, especially during the last two centuries, and the need for entering into a dialogue with these branches of knowledge with a view to getting rid of falsehood and superstitions that have crept into these religions because of human ignorance and the erroneous understanding of truth. Scientific discoveries, no doubt, will be of enormous help in cleansing religion of much of its deadwood. Thus, purified and more vigorous, religion can serve humans better in the realization of truth. When we speak

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of the sciences, the more relevant and prominent ones in this regard are behavioural sciences like psychology, anthropology, and sociology, and natural sciences like astronomy, palaeontology, biology, physics, and chemistry. Other branches of knowledge like archaeology, linguistics and history also have shed much light on the correct understanding of the origin and development of religions. Unfortunately, however, as the title of the article implies, scientific discoveries and facts often become a weapon in the hands of atheistic or agnostic scientists and like-minded people to attack and destroy the credibility of religious faith. Naturally, many have lost their faith in religion or at least it has diminished.¹ This article, in contrast, is a bona fide attempt to see scientific discoveries more positively and in the light of faith, thereby making an attempt to cleanse religions of their deadwood and apparent errors, if any.

2. The Scientific Attitude and the Scientific Method

Scientists everywhere hold that scientific knowledge, which alone is true knowledge, can be obtained only through evidence and verification and that reason alone, not faith, can be of use in this regard. This obstinate position of hard-core scientists often makes communication between the atheistic scientist and the believing theologian difficult. The scientist refuses to concede that there is any alternative method by which truth can be reached.² He approaches religion just as he approaches any other natural phenomenon. For him, religion is only a natural phenomenon; it is just the creation of the human mind. Naturally, he rules out both divine intervention in the universe and divine revelation. As he sees things, the universe is governed by the immutable laws of nature. No force from outside the universe can intervene and influence the functioning of the universe either positively or negatively. He believes not in miracles but in the principle of strict causality. For him the scriptures are not revealed texts, they are to be considered and studied like any other piece of

¹Keeping alive people's faith is of crucial importance because that alone can come to their rescue in moments of despair, failure, pain, loss, and death, and that alone can give them an overall meaning to life and work. Many even believe that "the world community must have a religious basis..." See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby, New York: Crossroad, 1982, 11-12.

²See Alan Isaacs, *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, 170.

literature.³ A person's religious experience or faith, they say, is a private matter, not something that is open to public scrutiny, and so is neither verifiable nor objectively true. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, is open to public scrutiny and is verifiable, and therefore its objectivity and veracity are indisputable.⁴ The behavioural scientists in particular brush aside many a religious thinking and phenomenon as the result of mere wishful thinking, hallucination, or the self-interests of the dominant priestly class.⁵

The scientist and the believer employ radically different methodologies to arrive at truth. The believer reads the scripture – be it the Bible, the Koran, or the Vedas – believing that it is the Word of God and he/she finds the Word of God there. The scientist – be he/she a psychologist, cosmologist, biologist or anthropologist – approaches the scripture as the work of humans and then he/she looks for evidence indicating that it is otherwise. Finding no evidence, he/she concludes that it is nothing but the work of humans. The scientist gathers knowledge by employing a particular method, employed with a particular attitude. This method is the *scientific method* and the attitude is the *scientific attitude*. The steps involved in the scientific method are observation, the forming of hypotheses, verification, and generalization. The scientific attitude is characterized by scepticism, the belief in strict cause-effect relationship, the belief that only observable phenomena are to be investigated, and an unbiased and objective approach on the part of the investigator. A scientist is usually prone to dismissing religious claims because the characteristic of scepticism requires that one should doubt everything which is not proved

³The position taken by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru is typical of the position adopted by many intellectuals. Nehru did not believe the Vedas are revealed texts, nor did he believe there is any divine revelation.

⁴In the eyes of the intellectuals, the private experience of a mystic may be absolutely true or may be absolutely false. But there is no way one can verify its veracity. Speaking for this position, Alan Isaacs says: "Reason is the only known method by which we can build up our models of the universe: the information derived from revelation *may* be absolutely true, but it is not knowledge in the sense that it is verifiable by percept or by logic." *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, 170.

⁵The last of these points is especially relevant. Hence, great religious founders like Buddha, and in modern times others like Jiddu Krishnamurti, preached a religion devoid of authority. They wanted to free the masses from the oppressive hold of the priestly class.

to be true and valid. Naturally, a scientist refuses to accept as part of his vocabulary concepts like God or the human soul, heaven or hell, rebirth or transmigration, angels or the devil. Theistic scientists, however, try to integrate their faith and scientific pursuits, giving to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The theistic scientists believe that belief must precede knowledge, a position held by St. Anselm as the pre-condition for theologizing. For the secular scientist, reason alone can lead one to knowledge, while faith is of no use in arriving at true, objective knowledge. However, like the theologian, the genuinely theistic scientist also should be, in his investigations, influenced by Anselm's motto, "Faith seeking Understanding," and he should find no problem in integrating scientific truths and the divine realities. This point will be further explained when we discuss the question of reconciling evolution and creation.

3. Religious Language as the Language of Mythology and Metaphor

Rudolf Bultmann has defined mythology as "the use of imagery to express the other world in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side."⁶ The purpose of a myth is not to narrate an event literally, or tell the truth literally but to create "a particular attitude in its hearers."⁷ Especially for early humans, myths, rather than abstract discourses, were a more effective medium to receive a message. As John Hick rightly points out, "Understood in this way, as a style of persuasive discourse, myth-making is obviously enormously valuable; for most people's minds are much more affected by a concrete than by an abstract expression of an idea."⁸

Through their objective, painstaking research scientists and scholars have demonstrated that the language of religions is not the precise, objective, scientific language of science; rather it is an attempt to express certain truths, values, and convictions through the language of mythology and metaphor. Since one cannot expect full historicity or the exposition of

⁶Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961, 10, footnote #2.

⁷John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, revised edition, London: Collins, 1977, 167.

⁸Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 168.

a scientific truth in such descriptions, a literal understanding of the religious language is an absurdity in itself. In the religious language there may be exaggerations, later interpolations, *ex post facto* explanations, instances of flights of fancy, attempts to give supernatural explanations and interpretations to natural events or things which baffled them, and so on. Thus, for instance, divinity is attributed to the elephant because of its amazing size and strength, to the monkey because it resembles human beings, to the snake because primitive humans were in awe at the snake's ability to kill instantaneously. Big mountains, big rivers, big rocks and lakes and trees were all attributed divinity. Ancestor worship and the belief in ghosts and spirits are examples of the fear-hope-suggestibility complex working in the minds of humans. Some local heroes were later converted into deities and their powers and achievements were highly exaggerated. Worshipping fictitious heroes as gods is a common feature of the ancient Hindu, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Religions. This feature, however, is totally absent in the great monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Scholars today believe that what these believers did in worshipping different gods was giving recognition to the different energies of the one Supreme God, expressed in the form of different gods, and meant for popular consumption. To the behavioural scientist, however, these are nothing but the wild fancies of the early humans' pre-scientific, ignorant, and superstitious mind. Most of the religious explanations are, according to these scientists, *ex post facto* explanations of natural facts and events. An earthquake or a tsunami, for example, is interpreted as God's punishment.

Early humans were not capable of much abstract thinking. This was especially true with the masses. They were unable to conceive the Divine as pure transcendence. Naturally, the Divine was presented to the common folks through the medium of animals and humans, which they shaped in clay, stone, and wood. Ultimately, therefore, mythic worship is an attempt to make comprehensible the incomprehensible, to make tangible the intangible. In short, mythology and mythic worship are the solutions early humans found out to introduce the transcendent reality to the pre-scientific, ignorant, uncritical, and suggestible minds of the past. There were gods of love and compassion, there were gods of violence and revenge, gods of great energy and power, gods who redeemed people and even gods who demanded blood and sacrifices, gods that bestowed wealth and prosperity and gods that rained destruction and ruin. Thus, they

created gods with every characteristic that the human mind could think of. However, only the monotheistic religions could conceive of a single power behind everything visible and invisible; others needed a multitude of gods for all sorts of reasons. While the believer accepts all these developments as the work of a loving God in human minds, the atheistic scientist poohpoohs this view, brushing aside all these as the mere inventions of a pre-scientific, ignorant, superstitious mind. While modern humans, they argue, seek answers to the puzzles of nature in science and technology, the early humans resorted to mythological explanations and solutions.

Judging by the quality of these myths and legends, one should say that the early humans too had a very sharp and creative mind, but the problem was that they invested it in the wrong place and worked on the wrong stuff. There is also the view that mythological gods are more powerful in capturing the imagination and loyalty of their followers than the God of monotheistic religions. The power of this sentimental attachment and the passion and commitment coming along with it can be clearly seen in the case of a religion like Hinduism. Epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* can stir up people's passion and commitment much more than any theological discourse on the Supreme Being can do, just as the music of the Beatles could stir up people's minds much more than any dry Sunday homily could. In all probability the homily is mighty in its theological depth and logical sequence, but what appeals to the ordinary people is the exhilarating music of the Beatles. This is the power of myth, and this is one reason why religions like Hinduism, which contain a great deal of mythology, and even superstitions and unhealthy socio-religious traditions, are very appealing to the masses even in the age of space probe and the cyber revolution. Sometimes the intellectuals feel pity, not admiration, for those who live in the world of mythology and superstition, totally untouched by what is deemed as objective knowledge.⁹ These people would sacrifice everything they have to defend what they hold to be true. But then the point to be borne in mind here is that one's faith is often a matter of blind and passionate belief, it is not a question of accepting something on the basis of verified facts. For that reason, parading any amount of *evidence* will have no effect in

⁹For example, just take a look at all that is happening in India because of the belief that a particular spot in Ayodhya, in the State of Uttar Pradesh, is the birthplace of Lord Rāma, himself a mythological figure.

changing their cognitive system; they will only stick to it all the more vehemently.

Psychologists like Carl Jung opine that there are certain archetypal themes that are found recurring in all the religions around the world – primitive and tribal religions as well as the great world religions. These are themes like birth and rebirth, death and immortality, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, good and evil, the hero and the devil, the saint and the sinner, the wise old man, suffering and pain, pleasure and happiness, human frailty and the need for placating the gods, incarnations of the Divine, the blessings and wrath of gods, etc. The mythologies of all religions express, in diverse and numerous ways, these archetypal images that are buried deep in the collective unconscious of humanity and are inherited from the ancestors, going back to the earliest days of the human race.¹⁰ According to this view, the archetypal tendency in humans for hero worship impels them to create gods and goddesses with superhuman powers and capability. The human need for hero worship and the natural yearning of the human heart to deify living heroes after their death can be seen in a very striking manner if we look into what happened in Islam after prophet Mohammed's death. Mohammed preached a strict monotheism, and emphatically stated, in unmistakable terms and over and over again, that he is only Allah's prophet, that he is a mere human being. Yet, after Mohammed's death there were strong attempts to deify him. Huston Smith describes the situation after Mohammed's death as follows:

So highly has the prophet been regarded that his status has at times come near to threatening the monotheism he preached... When Muhammad died there were some who attempted to deify him, but his appointed successor killed the thought with one of the most famous speeches in religious history. 'If there are any among you who worshipped Muhammad, he is dead. But if it is God you worship, He lives forever.'¹¹

Moreover, the myth, these scholars contend, holds forth a message rather than objective knowledge or real history. Therefore, they contend

¹⁰See Carl G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds., H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953-. See, especially, vol. 9, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," and "The Shadow," and vol. 11, "Psychology and Religion," and "Answer to Job."

¹¹Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper and Row, 1986, 322.

that one cannot look for knowledge or history in the scriptures or other myths of religions. The creation stories – stories describing both the creation of the universe and the creation of humans – are typical examples. It will be absurd to conclude that God has revealed verbatim to humans what actually happened in the past in these cases. It will be safer to conclude that these stories are the creation of the human mind, meant to convey the message, in terms understandable to the masses, that the all-powerful Supreme Being is the creator of the universe and all that is in it. While theistic scientists are comfortable with this view the agnostic and atheistic ones are busy trying to find out an explanation for the origin of the universe, life, and human beings, without any reference to a creator God. In short, the behavioural and natural scientists see mythology as humans' earliest attempt to explain natural phenomena. Today we recognize that only science can give the correct answers to these questions. But science was not born then. People, therefore, made use of whatever was available to them, and that was mythology or "pseudo-science." As the scriptures of all religions contain a great deal of mythology, the need of the hour is demythologizing, they contend. The attempts by Rudolf Bultmann and others to demythologize the Christian scriptures must be understood in this context, although sometimes these ventures seem to go too far. In this context it must be also admitted that among all the religions of the world, past and present, the least mythologizing is to be found in the Christian Scriptures, traditions, and teachings. The values of the civilized modern world are mostly derived from the values upheld in the Christian Scriptures and traditions, although currently the non-Western world, especially the Islamic world, is defiantly challenging the universality of Christian or Western values.¹²

As already mentioned, some argue that as far as inducing the faith dimension is concerned, a myth could be more potent and effective than objective, scientific knowledge. When it comes to nurturing the faith dimension of the faithful, perhaps the mythological language can accomplish things which a scientific language, with all its accuracy, objectivity, and precision, can not even dream of accomplishing. Hence the argument is that even in the scientific age the mythological language commands respect because this language alone can effectively

¹²Thus, for instance, values in the Arab or Islamic world, in India, in Africa, and in China are different from the values of the Western world.

communicate the message to the masses so as to strengthen them in their faith. The journey of faith is a mystical journey in which only the truth contained in mythological narrations, not the “knowledge” propounded by scientific investigations, can act as the guiding stars, they alone can illuminate your path, argue the proponents of the significance of the mythological and metaphorical language in religious scriptures. Religion, they say, is a sort of magic. Magic has its own way of accomplishing the result, which is often contrary to the laws of physics. The proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating. That is to say, the efficacy or success of the magic show lies in whether it has succeeded in impressing the audience or in convincing them that the promised effect has been brought about. The audience is in another world, and the laws and principles are different here. Similarly, the believer is in another world, and his cognitive system is totally uninfluenced by the laws and principles that govern this world. The behavioural and natural scientist may denigrate this as the *subjective world*. But the believer is not worried about the objectivity or subjectivity of his/her world, as far as he/she is concerned, that is the *real world*. Now, you and I agree that God is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that God is pure existence, pure intelligence, pure transcendence, i.e., pure extra-dimensional non-matter existence, pure non-matter intelligence, and the supreme transcendence. But how are the masses going to know and love this God of Spinoza and Ankara? Here comes the need for a mythological and metaphorical language.¹³

Properly understood, therefore, there is nothing wrong with the understanding that scriptural language is mythological and metaphorical. How else can the sacred writer describe the incomprehensible and the indescribable? A metaphor is not the reality, it is only an image of reality; it stands for something else, which is the absolute reality. Prayers, sacrifices, rituals, traditions, etc., also do the same thing – they establish a

¹³Joseph B. Campbell gives an intellectual’s way of conceiving God: “There is a definition of God which has been repeated by many philosophers. God is an intelligible sphere – a sphere known to the mind, not to the senses – whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere,” Joseph B. Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed., Betty Sue Flowers, New York: Doubleday, 1988, 89.

living relationship between the human being and the supreme transcendence.¹⁴

4. Religion as the ‘Promoter’ of Evil

Not only the behavioural and natural scientists but also others like philosophers, theologians, writers, social activists, rationalists, intellectuals, politicians, and social and religious reformers have accused religion of sowing the seeds of evil among humans. Religion, according to them, divides people, teaches hatred of out-groups, incites bloodshed and even wars, cultivates a closed mind, spreads superstition and ignorance, hampers social, economic, intellectual and scientific progress, and in general dupes people in subtle ways. No wonder these scholars and thinkers hold that hard evidence lends support to Karl Marx’s statement that “Religion is the opiate of the masses” and to Freud’s characterization of religion as the “universal neurosis.” Many believe, as did Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the nineteenth century, that the unfolding of truth cannot be confined to any particular nation or age, rather it is a continuous process. Accordingly, it is not obligatory on anyone to stick to the ignorance, superstition, and empty rituals of a distant past. According to this view, since the unfolding of truth takes place progressively, it is taking place even today, through contemporary humans, and it is perfectly possible to build a common faith in the one Supreme Being and a common code of conduct for the whole of humanity without relying unduly on any particular religion. This view envisages the gradual disappearance of religious differences and the progressive assertion of commonalties, with less emphasis on rituals and traditions and more emphasis on doing good to fellow human beings.

A thorough scrutiny of religions will show that among all religions, ancient and modern, it is Christianity which can boast of an impact that is more positive than negative. Undoubtedly, Christianity too has its black marks: the crusades, the inquisition and the witch-hunt of the Middle Ages, intolerance of other religions, suppression of free thinking, male domination and the suppression of women’s rights,¹⁵ and an over-emphasis

¹⁴In many religions, for instance, facing the east, the direction of the rising sun, is of great spiritual significance although scientifically speaking all directions are the same.

¹⁵On the point of injustice done to women by the Church, James Gurudas, basing himself on the authority of Marga Buehring, makes the following observation:

on other-worldliness, which, at least in some cases, have assumed pathological dimensions. Yet, cancelling out all these shortcomings was the emphasis given to love and to 'doing good', which Christianity inherited from its founder. The overwhelming emphasis given to charitable activities without expecting any mundane profits or rewards, has added to the claim of the divine origin of Christianity. In fact, the emphasis on love as the single most important thing in life is the unique contribution of Jesus; the contributions of no other founder of religion or scripture or other social or political philosophy has come even close to Jesus' contribution in this regard.

It is the multitude of superstitions and irrational traditions and practices that has forced many to regard Hinduism as a mere creation of the humans. As Hinduism has no one specific founder, it is a crystallization of beliefs and traditions of generations of people, especially the Vedic Aryans who share a common ancestry with the ancient Greeks and Romans not only in the case of race and language but even in religious matters. The Vedas, the earliest religious texts of humanity, contain many spiritual and theological insights, but they also contain the seeds of later perversions. The first gods, Indra, Agni, Vāyu, Śrīya, Marut, Ushus, etc., were personifications of the powers of nature. Later, more and more evil, all pointing to the overwhelming role played by the human factor in Hinduism, crept in. For instance, think of all the harm done by the "fantastic" mythologies, the negative developments brought about by the laws in the *Manus-rti*, the selfish interests of the Brahmin priestly class, the theory of Karma or fatalism, the caste system, untouchability, low status of women, practices like Sati, child marriage, and the Devadāsī system, astrology, occasional human sacrifices, the "sacred" cow, monkey, serpent, and elephant, and the endless repetition of empty and lifeless traditions and rituals. The Brahmin-sponsored notion that only the Brahmins would achieve salvation and one would need hundreds of

"No honest Christian would deny the reality of injustice being done to women in the name of faithfulness to the Bible. For validation and justification of all its teachings and actions, whether justifiable or unjustifiable, logical or illogical, the Church has always looked into the Bible, and sought out "*dicta probantia*," proving pronouncements." James Gurudas, "Gender Justice in the Bible," *Journal of Dharma* 29, 2 (April-June 2004), 130.

thousands of lifetimes to achieve this goal¹⁶ is a typical example of the Brahmins' attempt to assert their superiority over all other castes, thereby capturing for themselves all the rights and privileges. Many believe that if it were not for the contact with Western Culture and the introduction of English education in India, Hinduism would have degenerated into something worse.

Perhaps it is an accident of history that Islam as a religion has always been misunderstood by others, especially the Christians, the Jews, and the Hindus. According to this view, because of its "cult of violence" and intolerance of others Islam has wreaked havoc on humanity ever since its inception. Concepts and practices like the Jihad, polygamy, attitude toward the 'infidels', and a general tendency for bloodshed without any scruples make many believe that Freud is right in saying that sex and aggression are the two most powerful drives in humans and that everything one does is a direct or indirect attempt to fulfil these two basic drives. Besides, it is claimed that Islam itself spread through the power of the sword, not through the power of love as in the case of Christianity. While 'love' has always been accepted as coming from God, modern humans have difficulty in accepting violence and bloodshed as coming from an all-loving and all-good heavenly Father. But then there is always the counter-argument that the perversions of certain individuals or even groups cannot be blamed as the inherent weakness of any particular religion.

The Asian religions like Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism are accused to be not in touch with contemporary realities, and so anti-modern and anti-progress. Buddhism, for example, is said to breed pessimism and total inactivity. Buddha saw the whole life as nothing but *dukkha* or "suffering," and the cause of all suffering is "desire." All that Buddha did was to preach a way to obtain liberation from the ubiquitous pain and suffering. In fact, Buddhism arose as a reactionary movement against the dominance of the priestly class. Buddha himself abandoned all tradition, including the use of the Sanskrit language, and urged his

¹⁶Manu has given a detailed description of how a person will be reborn, as a punishment for sins, in various forms. As G. T. Bettany puts it, "For corporeal sins a man will be reborn as a plant or a mineral; for verbal sins, as a bird or a beast; for mental sins, in the lowest human state. The slayer of a Brahmin will be re-born as a dog, boar, ass, bull, etc.; he who steals gold from a priest will be born a thousand times in the bodies of spiders, snakes, etc." G. T. Bettany, *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, New York: Darset Press, 1988, s.v. "Modern Hinduism."

followers to do the same. Buddha's only concern was the concrete realities of life here on earth; he was not bothered about the supernatural or the life after. All appeal to gods and the supernatural, Buddha felt, was a clever way to hoodwink the people, a clever way to divert the attention of the people from the hard, practical task of self-reliance and responsibility. Whether Buddha really denied the existence of God is a much-disputed question, but Buddha's religion which rejected the supernatural, theology, divine grace, authority of the priestly class, rituals, and tradition, stands apart from all other religions as a purely human-oriented as God-oriented religion. As far as the modern critic is concerned, Buddhism fails the test on two counts: First, it does not foster humans' dependence on God and, second, it stifles human achievement motivation which is the key to all material success and progress. Buddhism, critics say, may be suitable for the unproductive psyche of an unproductive people living in an unproductive land like traditional Tibet, but not for the sophisticated people living in the modern space-age world.

The Jews were hated, isolated, and persecuted throughout the Christian centuries mostly because of their religious identity. "Indeed, a whole day would not suffice to tell all [about the Jews... the] most miserable of all men," wrote St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century.¹⁷ The holocaust was only a culmination of what had been smouldering for centuries, although it was done by the hands of evil men, not religious zealots. As Paul van Buren, a Christian theologian who is an advocate of Jewish-Christian relations, pointedly rebukes us, "... our historic contempt of the Jews helped us to quietly look the other way when a full third of God's people were slaughtered."¹⁸ This, in fact, amounts to faith leading to fratricide.

Jewish-Christian and Protestant-Catholic hostilities were not a peculiarity of Europe. It was there in the United States as well. As early as the late 18th century George Washington had described the new nation as a country where religious tolerance is the official policy.¹⁹ But what actually

¹⁷John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, 1.7, PG 48.853, quoted in Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, eds., *Uncivil Religion: Inter-religious Hostility in America*, New York: Crossroad, 1987, 3.

¹⁸Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, Part I, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980, 51.

¹⁹Cited in Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, Introduction, vii.

happened in the following centuries was a different story. Bellah and Greenspahn describe the situation as follows:

The facts of American life have not always been as benign as the United States' official policy of tolerant religious pluralism. In the last century, Mormons were subjected to the kind of persecution more commonly associated with the Middle Ages, and American Protestants have long rejected Roman Catholics as an alien presence. A poll taken during World War II disclosed that more than twice as many people considered Jews to be a "menace to America" than were concerned about Japanese or Germans.²⁰

Religion is further accused of cultivating a closed mentality. While closed-mindedness and dogmatism are believed to be anti-progress and anti-truth, open-mindedness and the spirit of free investigation are held to be conducive to progress and the discovery of truth in all its dimensions. The orthodox believer, always supporting tradition, dogma, and authority, is considered to belong to the "hopeless" closed-minded group. Religious fundamentalists are typical examples of extreme closed-mindedness. The clash between creationism and evolutionism is another example. While open-minded people like Teilhard de Chardin have attempted to reconcile science and religion in this case, the camp of the closed-minded fundamentalist believers still stick to a literal understanding of the biblical account of creation. Again, the closed-minded people still refuse to give up the notion that there is a separate, invisible entity existing in humans, called the "mind," while the modern psychobiology has convincingly proved that "mind" is nothing but the functional aspect of the brain, especially that part of the brain called the cerebral cortex. Again, much of the religious phenomena coming under "visions" and "voices" are proved to be the outcome of hallucinations and delusions. Many other phenomena, which humans did not fully understand in the past, were interpreted as interventions by God or gods – either to punish or reward humans or to demonstrate the power of the Divine. Anything out of the way was interpreted as a miracle or Divine intervention. Certain behavioural peculiarities and their cure can be explained in terms of psychological concepts like hysteria, psychosomatic illness, paranoia, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive behaviour, etc., while the medical sciences can give explanations for many others. Humanity's understanding of truth,

²⁰Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, Introduction, vii.

God, and God's way of acting in his universe must also evolve with time. It is illogical to think that the growth of knowledge and understating of the Divine stopped several hundred years ago and that no further growth of understanding or knowledge is possible. God's way of revealing himself to humanity is subtle and mysterious, and it occurs through a very long process. Only if we keep our eyes and mind open we can catch hold of the truth that is being revealed progressively.

5. The Unconscious and Religion

Psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung see the work of the unconscious mind of humans in the origin and development of religion. Psychological and anthropological studies show that the themes of all religions in all cultures are approximately the same – the same universal theme but expressed slight differently depending upon cultural variations. The parallel nature of the themes compels scientists to speculate that probably there are specific genes that produce the religious orientation in humans. That is to say, just as the genes create in us the need for love, self-preservation, food, water, and so on, there must be also genes that produce in humans the quest for the ultimate origin and meaning of all these, a quest that culminates in the pre-supposition of an all-powerful Divine reality/realities that create and sustain the visible and invisible universes and all in them. What the scientist calls the pre-programmed genes may be understood as what Jung calls the “collective unconscious,” which is the racial memory of humanity. Unless there is something pre-programmed in our genes, argue the scientists, one cannot account for the striking similarity of the motifs in a variety of religions all over the world, from primitive times to modern. Behavioural and natural scientists see the mythologies of religion as humans' earliest attempt to explain natural phenomena. According to these scientists, only science can give us an objective and accurate understanding of natural phenomena, but science was not born then. Thus the early humans, utterly devoid of any scientific knowledge, attempted to explain all that they saw and experienced, in terms of supernatural forces.

Freud, with his materialistic and atheistic philosophy of life, was extremely antagonistic to the idea of God and religion. In his view, the idea of God is a projection of the human mind, religion an “illusion” and a

“universal neurosis,” and the believers are neurotics.²¹ Freud held that underneath every religious feeling is a craving for power and protection. Branding religion as an illusion, Freud attempted to tell the “true story” behind the origin and growth of religion. He held that religion has its roots in the ignorance and fear of primitive people. Freud argued that when they encountered the terrors of nature, primitive people experienced fear and helplessness. Out of this anxiety and helplessness they “invented” the idea of god/gods and religion as a source of power and protection. Thus, when faced with a threatening universe, primitive people comforted themselves by shielding them with the “power” of an “illusion,” which in fact is nothing but the creation of their own unconscious minds. Since people have experienced in their vulnerable and helpless childhood years, and also in their adolescent years, the nurturing care and protection of their parents whom they perceived as loving, omniscient, and omnipotent, they imagined god as a superparent who will extend to them safety and security in a threatening universe. Thus, human beings create an imaginary deity, a divine father-figure, and surrender themselves before that “supreme power” with the belief that their safety and security are now assured and that all their needs will now be met. People also believe that this supreme power or god/s could be influenced by their praises, prayers, and actions. Thus, there arose mythologies, hymns, prayers, rituals, sacrifices, and traditions. According to Freudian assumptions, people believe in gods expecting three things from them – protection from the terrors of nature, the ability to get oneself reconciled with the cruelty of fate, and receiving compensation for the sufferings which people have to endure in this life. Freud added that the believers regarded religion as a source of knowledge and, in this regard, religion competes with science. Incidentally, scientists believe that as years pass by, the role of religion as a source of knowledge will progressively decrease and that of science will steadily increase until, finally, scientific knowledge will more or less totally replace religious knowledge.

Other unconscious elements too have had a prominent role in humans’ religious experience. Among these is the idea of good and evil as opposing forces, and life as a relentless conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. This idea is perhaps most prominent in

²¹See Sigmund Freud’s works: *The Future of an Illusion*; *Moses and Monotheism*; *Civilization and Its Discontents*; *Totem and Taboo*.

Zoroastrianism, but Judaism and Christianity also have been influenced by this concept. Zoroaster taught a dualistic principle, according to which Ahura Mazda, the good spirit, is constantly antagonized by Ahriman, the evil spirit, who is the originator of everything evil. Carl Jung explains humans' awareness of evil in the world in terms of the archetype of *shadow*. According to Jung, the shadow archetype consists of all the animal impulses in humans which they inherited from the lower forms of life as part of the evolutionary process. Thus for Jung it is the archetype of shadow that is responsible for the animal nature in human beings. This archetype, i.e., the deep awareness of the evil side of their nature, creates in humans the concept of original sin. When the concept of evil is projected outward and personified, it becomes the devil, the perennial enemy of God and humans.²²

Behavioural and natural scientists see the birth of religion or religious awareness as the result of a specific development during a particular stage in the evolution and growth of the human mind, especially intellectual and cognitive development. They note that the period around the sixth century BCE was a busy one as far as the origin of religions is concerned. This was a period of great religious awakening. During this period the great prophets preached in Israel and Judah, Buddhism and Jainism were founded, and some of the great books of Hinduism were written. Several hundred years before that, Moses did his work as a great religious leader, the Vedas were composed, and Zoroaster preached his religion in Iran. All these, believe the behavioural and natural scientists, represent a particular stage in the evolution of the human mind and its cognitive powers. Very-early-man was not capable of thinking; gradually, as his cognitive capacity improved, he produced gods and mythologies and religion, but was not yet capable of higher level thinking in which the scientific attitude and the scientific method are key ingredients. Later, with humans' mind further developing, science developed, which, eventually, especially from the time of Copernicus and Galileo, became a threat to religion, which at first tried to suppress scientific inquiry, but in vain. With scientific development humans have adopted new ways of formulating

²²Carl G. Jung, "The Shadow," in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9, part II, eds., H. Read, M. Fordham, and G. Adler, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.

values and new ways of understanding the Supreme Being, the universe, planet earth, and the origin of life, especially human life.

6. Faith and Science as Complementary: The Case of Creation versus Evolution

Religion and science were at odds with each other for centuries. Each viewed the other with suspicion. But there has been a change in the attitude of the Church recently. Today the Church recognizes that “the two truths, of faith and of science, can never contradict each other.”²³ Religions in general now accept science as a genuine partner in the perennial search for truth. In order to demonstrate the increasing role of science in finding out truth, just one case may be mentioned here. Science is now coming closer to solving the mystery of the origin of humans on earth. The latest evidence come from analyses of mitochondrial DNA, which is the genetic material inherited solely through the female line. These studies show that modern humans or *homo sapiens* or all the humans living today are descendants of a single female human being, whom scientists have nicknamed “the mitochondrial Eve,” who lived in sub-Saharan Africa (Africa south of the Sahara desert) some 200,000 years ago. The report of a study on the migration route of early humans, conducted by a team of geneticists led by Vincent Macaulay of the University of Glasgow, which drew its findings from an analysis of mitochondrial DNA, said: “Everyone in the world can be placed on a single family tree, in terms of their mitochondrial DNA, because everyone has inherited that piece of DNA from a single woman, the mitochondrial Eve, who lived some 200,000 years ago.”²⁴ Unlike the palaeontological studies, which are based on inferences drawn from pieces of bone and teeth, the mitochondrial DNA studies are capable of producing very accurate and reliable results, scientists agree. Macaulay’s team has calculated that the emigration from Africa occurred some 65,000 years ago, reached the coasts of India and Southeast Asia to eventually make its way to Australia 50,000 years ago.²⁵

²³These are the words of Pope John Paul II. See the Proceedings of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, November 10, 1979, PDF files, page 2, quoted in Mathew Chandrankunnel, *The Condemnation and Rehabilitation of Galileo Galilei*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 213.

²⁴“Migration Route of Early Humans,” *The New Indian Express*, May 14, 2005, 11.

²⁵“Migration Route of Early Humans,” 11.

While some archaeologists say that Europe was colonized by a second migration that came north out of Africa, Macaulay's team says there could have been just one migration. "Therefore, people from the southern migration, probably in India, must have struck inland to reach the Levant and, later, Europe," said the report.²⁶ It was an offshoot of people who came from India and Iran that eventually reached Europe, the report further said. There was only one migration of modern humans out of Africa and it consisted of a single band of hunter-gatherers, probably just a few hundred people strong, Macaulay's report said.

The curious thing is that the report bears a striking resemblance to the Biblical account of the creation of man and woman, although the "truth" is expressed in mythological language in the Biblical account. The geneticists' reference to a single mother, "the mitochondrial Eve," from whom all modern humans descended, is of particular interest. Now, how did "the mitochondrial Eve" appear on earth? A literal understanding of the Bible would mean "through a direct and sudden act of creation by God." But science would say: "Through a long period of evolutionary process." The "Garden of Eden," for the believer, becomes a metaphor for sub-Saharan Africa.

At this juncture, it would be relevant to examine whether religion and science are propounding the same truth, although expressed in different languages. At the very outset, a word of caution is in order. It will not be accurate to state that the scriptures are stating scientific facts through the language of mythology and metaphor. Those who wrote the scriptures, or the founders of religions whose words and actions are recorded in the scriptures, did not know anything of modern science, nor was it God's intention to give to humanity, through these specially chosen individuals and through the language of mythology and metaphor, the secrets of modern science like the theories and concepts of the Big Bang, nuclear energy, gravitational force and electromagnetic energy, the age of the universe, and the role of the genes and DNA in the life of organisms. God was only giving a spiritual message to humanity. Again, the expression, "God *talking* to humans" is nothing more than an allegorical expression. Such expressions are to be understood as anthropomorphic ways of expressing ideas. God is not a "person" with mouth, tongue, and lips to "speak" to humans. God does not "speak," he only *inspires* humans;

²⁶"Migration Route of Early Humans," 11.

to be precise, he inspires the cerebral cortex of human beings, which is the seat of all intellectual and mental activities. When the inspired message is expressed through writing or speech, it may be influenced by a variety of personal and socio-cultural factors, and this could be one of the reasons for the significant variation in the “truth content” of various religions.

Let us go back to the question of the origin of human beings, which has led to the heated “creation versus evolution” controversy.²⁷ The crux of the problem here is that both camps misperceive each other’s positions. Here a few clarifications on the nature of both evolution and theistic evolution, or God’s plan of purposeful evolution, may be of some help in better understanding the issues and overcoming the impasse. In the first place, it must be understood that evolution does not proceed in a purely linear fashion, keeping the same slow pace always. At certain stages evolution proceeds through a sudden “leap” or spurt. That is to say, suddenly a significant mutation occurs, which produces a sudden qualitative change or species change in the organism. For instance, the anthropoid “Lucy” that lived in Africa 3.5 million years ago was neither an ape nor a human, she was in between the two. That is to say, through some sudden mutational change she had left the “kingdom” of the primates but did not yet reach the “kingdom” of humans. It took millions of years again for either her descendants or the descendants of one of her “cousins” to undergo other “sudden changes” and become the sub-Saharan “Eve,” who lived 200,000 years ago and is believed to be the single mother of all humans living today. Now the question is who brought about these sudden “leaps?” The atheistic scientist would answer, “Nature,” the believer, “God.” The problem could be solved if one bears in mind that the believer’s “God” is what the scientist calls “Nature.”

Our species took about six million years to evolve from an ancestor who was common to us and the primates. During these six million years many of the “cousins” or the parallel species became extinct, leaving us humans to emerge as the final victor. “We had,” points out Jacob Abraham, “a number of cousins including the Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis who had bigger brains than we have, were intelligent, spiritually sensitive and resourceful. They dominated the earth for about

²⁷See George M. Marsden, “A Case of the Excluded Middle: Creation versus Evolution in America,” in Bellah and Greenspahn eds., *Uncivil Religion*, 132-155.

50,000 years but were slowly and steadily replaced by Homo Sapiens.”²⁸ Our species, the Homo Sapiens, has evolved from the branch called Homo Erectus.

“Nature” or God can produce a new species by making slight but powerful changes in the number and type of an organism’s genes. Thus, for instance, the difference in genes between the human and the chimpanzee is less than two percent. Therefore, only a few hundred mutations were necessary to separate the humans from the chimpanzees. Among these, less than 50 genes are responsible for the higher order characteristics of humans, like intellectual and mental activities, speech, awareness of the Divine and the supernatural, a moral sense, free choice, and so on. These few genes allow the human brain to enlarge to 1,400 cc, which makes it possible to develop the 10^{19} neural connections, which in turn produce all the sophisticated intellectual and mental behaviour in humans. The very complex and mysterious ways in which evolution works is, in fact, very difficult for us to comprehend fully. Just see how, with a few genetic mutations, Nature has produced us humans who are vastly superior to our immediate predecessors. Now, with the cracking of the human genomic code we know that we have only 30,000 genes and that this is only double the number of what a very low creature, the worm called nematode, has. However, it is amazing to note that these 30,000 genes contain three billion pieces of specific genetic information in the form of DNA encoding, all arranged in the form of a string. Hence, all evidence shows that evolution is a planned and purposeful “march” toward a goal, not a mere random “throwing of the dice” by Nature, and a believer’s eyes can easily discover the fingerprints of God in every stage of evolution. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between faith and reason, but he made it clear that both can lead a person to the same knowledge of God, although the methods employed by the two are different. Perhaps nothing illustrates this fact more convincingly than the creation-evolution reality. Teilhard de Chardin, a person who laboured all his life to reconcile faith and science, speaks of the need for, and the importance of, this ‘revised’ approach in the understanding of evolution as God’s plan for humanity:

For my own part I can see no reason at all, theological or traditional, why this ‘revised’ approach should give rise to any serious difficulty.

²⁸Jacob Abraham, *The Quest for the Spiritual Neuron*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 65.

And it seems to me certain, on the other hand, that by the very fact of making this simple readjustment in our 'eschatological' vision we shall have performed a psychic operation having incalculable consequences. For if truly, in order that the Kingdom of God may come (in order that the Pleroma may close in upon its fullness), it is necessary, as an essential physical condition, that the human Earth should already have attained the natural completion of its evolutionary growth, then it must mean that the ultra-human perfection which neo-humanism envisages for Evolution will coincide in concrete terms with the crowning of the Incarnation awaited by all Christians.²⁹

Chardin further observes that this new vision alone can offer some hope to the "human beings torn between a Marxism whose depersonalizing effect revolts them and a Christianity so lukewarm in human terms that it sickens them."³⁰ That is to say, neither an atheistic, purely materialistic science nor superstitious religions can "redeem" humanity; humanity needs a creative synthesis of the message of religion and the verified facts of science.

7. The God of the Scientist and the Intellectual

Among scientists and intellectuals at last, a trend of belief is slowly developing that God is, to borrow Rudolf Otto's words, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, and that all religions are nothing but human attempts, probably assisted by God, to catch a glimpse of this *mysterium tremendum* and present it to the masses using the language of mythology and metaphor. In this sense, even the Christian scriptures are alleged to contain mythological and metaphorical elements.³¹ In the eleventh century St. Anselm had written about the inconceivability of God, and now some radical theologians and philosophers are reviving that position. Directly challenging the God/gods of the Vedas and of all the mythologies, |ankara had spoken of a *Nirguna Brahman*, a God without any qualities or attributes, a God who is infinite and limitless. Albert Einstein, when he said that he believed in the God of Spinoza, was speaking for many of the

²⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, London: Collins, 1964, 280.

³⁰ Chardin, *The Future of Man*, 281.

³¹ See Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 165-179; Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, New York: Crossroad, 1988, 32; *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Bartsch.

modern theistic scientists and intellectuals. Einstein, in fact, was a believer, but a believer in the God of Spinoza, not the God of traditional religions. This fact is well expressed in his famous telegram to a rabbi who wanted this matter clarified. Einstein cabled to the rabbi: "I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings."³² Einstein's famous dictum, "God does not throw dice," again clearly reveals his belief in a principle and purpose behind everything. The scientist's conception of the world is one in which everything is governed by the immutable laws of causality; without exception every effect has a cause. Accordingly, the intellectuals refuse to believe in the traditional conception of God in which God intervenes in human affairs every now and then. When the great British astronomer, Stephen Hawking, visited India recently, he was asked whether he believed in God. His answer was in the affirmative, but he added that it was not the traditional type of belief in God. According to the theistic scientists, our language is incapable of defining or describing what is indefinable and indescribable. Some would describe the Divine as the "mind" of the universe or the "cosmic intelligence."

In earlier times humans' knowledge of the natural world was very limited, and they were dissuaded by religions from venturing into the area of gaining more knowledge. That is to say, before the acquisition of all the vast amount of knowledge that we have today about the universe and our planet and life on it, religions explained everything about God and the humans in "simplistic" terms, using an anthropomorphic and mythological language. Things were very simple and easy then. But the situation has changed today. Modern scientists are no more afraid of venturing into such "forbidden lands." They turn their microscopes and telescopes to everything before them, with the result that today we have a more informed, enlightened humanity, which is less prone to accepting superstitions and false traditions. With the dawn of the new age it has become clear to humanity that God or the ultimate reality cannot be comprehended and explained that easily. In fact, one of the fundamental ideas implied in the concept of the unity of all religions and the dialogue between religions is this belief that God is the mystery of mysteries, and every religion is an attempt to comprehend, in whatever way possible, this great, inscrutable, and fascinating mystery.

³²Cited in Isaacs, *The Survival of God in the Scientific Age*, 169.

Intellectuals and thinkers have recently raised questions about whether our past understanding of God and his will for humanity was correct and coherent. Religious fundamentalism, inter-religious hatred, sponsoring violence and bloodshed as part of God's will, and the historic hatred of the Jews are often given as examples. One of the recent websites of the Al-Qaida leader in Iraq, Abu al-Zarqawi, declares: "Allah wants us to kill all infidels who are the enemies of Islam. In that process, some innocent Muslims, including women and children, may also get killed. But that is inevitable, they have to contribute to the cause of Jihad by sacrificing their own lives." One must be another terrorist to believe that this is what God wants some of his children to do to some other children of his.

As mentioned earlier, St. Anselm in his *Proslogion* propounded the theory of the inconceivability of God. This idea has again become fashionable among intellectuals, scientists, and philosophers. Toeing this line, the logical positivist A. J. Ayer claimed that all religious language is meaningless. The adherents of this school of thought are against the idea of a personal God. According to them, a personal God is a purely anthropomorphic way of conceiving the formless, extra-dimensional Supreme Being. Anthony Kenny, another British proponent of this view, puts it bluntly, "... to be a person is to have a mind and a will, to have beliefs and desires..." The modern theist intellectual or critic does not deny the existence of God; he/she is affirming only two things. First, God must in no way be conceived as a 'person' as we understand the term today and, second, nothing can, in principle, be known, and so said, about God. All that we can say about God is to assert Anselm's definition, "God is 'that than which no greater can be conceived.'"³³ Thus, God may be perceived as "The Great Cosmic Mystery," "Pure Transcendence," "Pure Consciousness," "Pure Existence," "the ground of all beings," "Pure non-matter Intelligence," "that which is beyond all names," etc. This Great Mystery is transcendent and beyond comprehension. As Bede Griffiths succinctly puts it,

The Cosmic Mystery itself is beyond words, beyond thought. It is an inexpressible mystery, manifesting itself in the cosmos; infinitely transcendent and not to be uttered; *neti, neti*: 'not this, not this.' It

³³"*id quo nihil maius cogitari potest/posit.*"

manifests [itself] in the whole creation, so that the whole creation is filled with the presence of God...

...Paramatman, the Supreme Spirit, is beyond word and thought...³⁴

In Indian thought Sankara is the great champion of the impersonal God, a Brahman without attributes or *Nirguna Brahman*. In the Vedas personal gods are emphasized. The *Upanisads*, on the other hand, advance the concept of an impersonal God. Sankara revived the Upanisadic tradition. Sankara makes a distinction between “lower” and “higher” knowledge. “Lower knowledge” refers to the knowledge coming from scripture, ritual observances, and intellectual study whereas by “higher knowledge” Sankara means the sheer intuitive power by which reality is apprehended. According to Sankara, certain parts of the Vedas contain lower knowledge, that is, they prescribe rituals, prayers, and hymns; but this is meant for use by those who are relatively dull in intellect and are slaves to carnal and worldly desires, those who cannot comprehend Brahman through higher knowledge. But the Upanishads, which contain the higher knowledge, are meant for those who have freed themselves from such low impulses and desires, and have achieved high levels of intellectual and mental concentration. Sankara holds that the masses who are under the grip of *avidya* or ignorance cannot conceive Brahman without qualities. Only those who have extracted the thorn of ignorance embedded in the Self can conceive the Brahman without qualities. The “lower knowledge,” according to Sankara, communicates to humans in relative and worldly terms the ultimate reality, which is the indescribable Brahman without qualities. No wonder, the theistic scientists and intellectuals prefer to follow the path of the “higher knowledge” which leads to the knowledge of the impersonal, qualityless Supreme Being. To them, the concept of personal God/gods is an over-simplified version of reality, which is not in tune with the spirit of the scientific age.

However, as far as the ordinary human being is concerned, devotion to a personal God is the only way to salvation. The path advocated by the *Upanisads* and Sankara is mostly untrekkable for them. Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* taught of achieving salvation through devotion to a personal God, a *Bhagavan*, a ‘Lord’. In much of later Hinduism, the Supreme Being is worshipped through various manifestations, especially

³⁴Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*, London: Collins, 1983, 109-110.

Siva and Visnu. Krisna and Rama, the two widely worshipped gods, are incarnations or *avatars* of Visnu.

Scientists and intellectuals believe that even in a civilized society, the people who form the lowest stratum intellectually, educationally, and psychologically are attracted by the popular forms of religion. But those at the highest stratum shun the popular forms; instead, they opt for a purely intellectual approach toward God, worship, and the good life. Many of them do not even feel the need for organized religion and religious authorities. The stance adopted by Jiddu Krishnamurti, an enlightened modern Hindu thinker, is typical of the above position. Krishnamurti contends that the authorities and dogmas of organized religions keep humans fettered to all sorts of superstitions and ritualism. Organized religions and their authorities, feels Krishnamurti, will not tolerate free thinking. No challenge of any sort is tolerated. They will not allow us to find out truth for ourselves, they will tell us what it is. Intellectuals and the “enlightened” ones believe that only when one breaks away from the clutches of organized religions can one find truth because truth is outside these religions. Each one has to undertake the search personally and find out the truth for himself/herself. Thus the religious authorities are seen as a hindrance in achieving truth.

According to the above view, the organized religions, with their elaborate system of priests, gurus, authorities, hierarchy, and organized beliefs will only distract our mind in our search for truth. They want to imprison us in the cage of dogma, superstition, hope or ritual. A cage is always a cage or prison; truth exists outside this cage. But they won't let people get outside the cage lest they should discover the truth. In such a situation, one can't perceive the reality.

The intellectuals and “enlightened” humans do not see why there should be a human medium between God and us. In their view, religion is the direct communion with the Divine, the realization of the oneness of life and freedom from the limitations of personality. According to this line of thought, whenever a religion is identified with beliefs and traditions, it loses its communion with the Divine and gets involved in the mundane affairs of life.

The modern scientists and intellectuals are so self-confident of themselves that they think, of course, in vain that they can grow and develop and find the meaning and fullness of life without any help from

organized religion or its institutions. Krishnamurti's words echo the view of this group:

... whatever the consequences may be, after all you can grow, you can fulfil yourself, only through your own experience, through your own greatness, through your own uniqueness, through your own *Dharma*, and in no other way. Religion, traditions, institutions, dogmas, books, prophets are of no value to the self.³⁵

8. Conclusion

Modern behavioural and natural scientists and other intellectuals view religion and religious phenomena critically; they attempt to measure them with the yardstick of objectivity, historicity, and scientific validity. One thing that must be borne in mind here is that, with the passage of time humans' understanding of the Divine and other spiritual realities must also evolve and grow; it must be dynamic rather than static. What the early humans, with their limited scientific knowledge, understood then in a rather imperfect and superstitious manner, must be conceived now in a more advanced, coherent, logical, and objective way. Any impartial person would agree that in this context the behavioural and the natural sciences, with their sundry new knowledge and discoveries, can come to the aid of humans in more ways than one. In fact, there is nothing wrong with seeing the contributions of these disciplines as one of the numerous ways of God to help humanity understand Truth better. Unfortunately, the trend in the past has been to see these disciplines as the foes of religion, not friends. However, it is a welcome sign that a change in attitude is gradually taking place. At the same time, those who borrow from the behavioural and natural sciences, on their part, must be motivated purely by the desire to unearth truth, and nothing else. They must realize that no one will benefit from a prejudiced and unscrupulous assault on religion as it will only make matters more complicated and disastrous for the whole of humanity.

³⁵Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Early Writings*, I, 155, quoted in R. K. Shringy, *Philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurti*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977, 107.