THE CHRISTIAN DEBATE:
LIGHT FROM THE EAST
CONTENTS

I   CHRISTIAN DEBATE AND EASTERN THOUGHT       9

II  GOD AND BRAHMAN                              24

III SOUL AND ATMAN                              40

IV  TRINITY AND PERSONALITY                     51

V   INCARNATION AND AVATAR                      62

VI  SURVIVAL, REINCARNATION, NIRVANA            75

VII MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL                     93

VIII PRAYER AND MEDITATION                     105

IX  AUTHORITY AND MYSTICISM                      119

X   RELIGION AND SOCIETY                        131

XI  RELIGIONS AND TRUTH                         146

Index                                          154

For Further Reading                           160
The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Shelley, *Adonais*

The One who, himself without colour, by the manifold
application of his power
Distributes many colours to his hidden purpose,
And into whom, its end and its beginning, the whole
world dissolves—He is God!
May he endow us with clear intellect!

Shvetashvatara Upanishad, tr. R. E. Hume
CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIAN DEBATE AND EASTERN THOUGHT

On 17 March 1963, feast of St Patrick preacher of the faith, Dr J. A. T. Robinson, suffragan bishop of Woolwich, wrote a full front page article for The Observer entitled ‘Our Image of God must go’. This fine advance notice gave great impetus to the book expanding his ideas which was published by the Student Christian Movement Press on the following Tuesday, called Honest to God. The book became a best seller. The tentative first edition of 6,000 copies sold out on the day of publication, and by the end of the year 350,000 copies were in print in English, with a dozen translations in preparation.

The article and the book were expressions of an explosion in theology, and set people talking about religious ideas as they had not done for some time. Traditional Christian conceptions of God were said to be of an ‘old man in the sky’, one ‘out there’ in far space, a separate ‘person’, a ‘necessary Being’ to explain creation, or a ‘last resort’ in corners unexplored by science. Some thought the bishop dispensed with God altogether, since he talked about ‘religionless Christianity’ and ‘living without God’ in a secular world. But this was not at all clear, and it could be maintained that he was only trying to clear away images of heaven and ‘religion’ that were out of date. As Professor C. F. Evans neatly put it, this Honest-to-Goddery sought to relegate the muskets and barrel-
loaders used by defenders of traditional symbolism to Woolwich Arsenal.

Some laymen were pleased by the bishop's forthright denials of traditional expressions, but many were perplexed. The experts were divided, how evenly nobody could tell. The Dean of Liverpool, reviewing the book for The Sunday Times, called it 'a brave, scholarly and deeply sincere book'. T. E. Utley, in The Sunday Telegraph, accused the bishop of heresy or even atheism: 'What should happen to an Anglican bishop who does not believe in God? . . . This raises a grave question of Church discipline which cannot be shirked without the gravest repercussions on the whole Anglican Communion'. He reminded his readers that Bishop Robinson had been a witness for the defence in the prosecution of the publishers of Lady Chatterley's Lover, and his review was capped by a cartoon of the Crucifixion in which Honest to God took the place of the traditional inscription on the Cross.

In the same month a volume of Objections to Christian Belief was published in which four eminent Cambridge divines gave moral, psychological, historical and intellectual objections to traditional theology. These objections were the more searching as they were made by scholars from within the faith who saw what outsiders might miss, and this made alarming reading to some reviewers, though the expert might feel that there was little new. The writings of Bultmann, Tillich and Bonhoeffer, on which the bishop of Woolwich largely depended, now appeared before the public eye as criticisms of Christian teaching and their sales increased. Books such as God is No More and Religionless Christianity added to the confusion, and in May a newly inducted canon of Southwark objected to the assent demanded of Anglican theologians to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Rarely can a few months have seen, in modern times, such an outburst
against traditional theology, and such an interest created. All the writers named above were professing Christians and were seeking a way out of the difficulties caused by adjustment to modern secular thought. But many laymen were alarmed at the appearance of doubts among the clergy, and *Punch* gave point to this in showing a parson urging church reunion upon his now empty pews.

Alarm and despondency may spring from misunderstanding. But they suggest also an uneasiness about traditional methods of defence and unsureness of where better defence may be found. The bishop may be right in denouncing outworn language and ideas that were formulated by Jews over two thousand years ago or Greek theologians in the early Christian centuries. But these are not the only ways of understanding the universe that religious thinkers have discovered during the history of humanity. It may be that there are other concepts and expressions that could fit modern needs as well, or even better than the rather crude and concrete terms of the ancient Hebrews. That many people have found this to be so is clearly seen in the great popularity of far eastern, and particularly Indian, religious ideas that is such a surprising feature of our times.

At the battle of Bannockburn, a Scottish friend reminds me, it was the sight of camp-followers coming up over the hill that spread final panic through the invading army and gave the Scots their great victory. In like manner today, when Christianity is so often on the defensive and the attacking forces seem overwhelming, there are large bodies of irregulars and unrecognized allies that may turn the tide against unbelief. While churchmen lament a decline in religious interest, paperbacks on Buddhism or Yoga sell hundreds of thousands of copies. It is astonishing that this is not openly welcomed by the churches as evidence of deep religious concern today.
One of the great difficulties for religion in modern times in the West has been the unwillingness of many people to think about Christian claims at all. There is ignorance of them, and a feeling that they are not important or relevant. In a way this closed mind is not very different from the bigotry of the narrower biblical fundamentalists. This is not an intellectual objection to religion, though even among thoughtful people objections may be rooted in this indifferent attitude. When, therefore, there are realms in which discussion is free and interest easy to arouse in religion they should be encouraged. Instead of the religions of the West still thinking they should fight those of the East, they might consider whether they have not unexpected allies in the East, and whether it is not a matter of concern to us all to appreciate each other’s searches after truth.

The knowledge of the religions of the East, with their different and often subtle teachings, is one of the most significant events of modern times. For the greater part of the Christian era the West was cut off from all contact with the East and was isolated. It did fight Islam, but had little knowledge of the teachings of the followers of Muhammad and never imagined that anything spiritual could be learnt from them. Hinduism and Buddhism were unknown to us till quite recently, and their scriptures were not translated into English till the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But today there is a flood of literature about many of the religions of the world, and selections from scriptures are easily available in good and cheap translations. There is much second-rate and eccentric material too. But anybody who wants may buy selections from the great religious classics of the world. It is said that there are over fifty English translations of the Bhagavad Gita, more perhaps than there are translations of the Bible into English.
These many books and pamphlets on eastern religions reach a large public, outside the churches but also inside. Many lay churchmen have read books on karma, reincarnation, nirvana, Yoga, Brahman, the Buddha, and the Koran. Unhappily the clergy in their training colleges are rarely taught any knowledge of other religions than their own. Dr Vidler has called much theological teaching ‘Christian archaeology’, dealing with ancient texts and variants but out of touch with modern life and world thought. The parson may try from his pulpit to treat of problems of biblical exposition, or answer questions that nobody is asking, but he may easily be floored by a simple question on reincarnation. In church congregations there are many people who have travelled abroad, on business or in the services, and they have seen temples and mosques, monasteries and pagodas. They will not be fobbed off with tales of heathen darkness, or believe that everybody else is wrong and we alone right.

Theologians, having been trained in the same narrow way, need to widen their horizons. At most they admit the need for an occasional specialist in the comparative study of religions to teach those who choose this strange option in a theological course. But they rarely realize that new thought has spread in this century, comparable to the release of classical thought that changed Europe at the Renaissance, and that theology must be adjusted to it. They admit their complete ignorance of any other religion, in a frank way that is meant to be disarming but is in fact appalling in religious teachers. The study of religion even in universities is almost wholly restricted to Christian, and in this country to Protestant, theology. Perhaps the new universities will take up religious studies in a broader fashion, and not simply teach divinity for the clergy but religion as an essential part of the study of human culture.
The greater part of mankind still holds to different faiths than the Christian. Their teachings are not just confined to Asia and Africa, but now they are flooding the West. Instead of being ignored they should be studied, and turned if possible to good effect. For Christian ideas may be reinterpreted in less concrete fashion through eastern, notably Indian, expressions. R. C. Zaehner, in his stimulating book *At Sundry Times*, points out that in the early centuries Christian teaching had to be adapted to the philosophy of the Graeco-Roman world. Today, however, he says, 'it would be more natural for us, who during the last two centuries have become aware of the sacred literature of the Asiatic peoples, to look for the *praeparatio evangelica* not so much among the Greeks as among the nations of Asia; for it is Asia that is the birthplace of every single religion that has stood the test of time'.* Europe is the home of scientific inquiry, of concern with how the world works, but not of religious inquiry, concern with the meaning and purpose of it all. The claim that Christianity is a universal faith can only be maintained, first if it is recognized that Christianity is an Asian religion, and second if it is shown that it can assimilate not only Greek thought but also that of the other oriental religions.

It is customary to think of the Jews as chosen people, obsessed with the idea of God and teachers of other religions, like Christianity and Islam. But India is equally, if not more, eminent in the religious sphere and is the teacher of all Asia. Zaehner says, 'we are faced with two chosen peoples, not one; for, whereas Europe and the Near East owe their religion directly or indirectly to the Jews, further Asia owes hers directly or indirectly to the Indians'.† Therefore study of Indian thought, particu-

* *At Sundry Times* (Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 165f.
larly Hindu which is the fount of it all, is of great importance.

The stream of religious thought that has flourished in Asia for the last three thousand years has now overflowed its banks and spreads through the West. Asian holy men visit us; there are Vedanta and Buddhist societies and Muslim mosques in our cities. Not only do these teachers lecture and write, but they seek to make converts from other religions or none at all. Such counter-missionary activity is entirely new to Christianity, one that it has never met till this century. The Indian and Muslim missions return the compliment of Christians sending their missionaries throughout Asia. The Bible has been translated into hundreds of Asian and African languages, but the Koran, the Vedanta, and Buddhist and Chinese holy books are also now to be found in most Western languages. In our one world this mingling must lead to cross-fertilization. Instead of fearing new religious ideas, they may be welcomed and used. The problems which the bishop of Woolwich raised may find some solution through new approaches to religion made possible by modern knowledge of Indian thought. The answer to the questions of Honest to God may be with the ‘Honest Indian’.

‘Have you tried the Upanishads?’ asked a lady at a cocktail party despondently. Since her husband’s firm had just published a book of mine on the Upanishads, I had to admit to reading them. But they are far from easy reading. Many a person having heard of these great scriptures, or read a few striking verses in an anthology, has tried and soon given up in despair.

It is a strange reflection that some of the books that have moved millions are almost unreadable. Karl Marx’s
Capital demands great enthusiasm and application in the reader, and Mr Harold Wilson admits that he has never got beyond the first chapter. Darwin's Origin of Species is not read today, it is said, even by some professors of biology. The Koran, declared Carlyle, is 'the most toilsome reading that ever I undertook'. Even the Bible is hard going. How many enthusiasts, feeling that to read it through must be a good thing, have managed the stories of Genesis fairly easily, struggled on through Exodus, and given up halfway through Leviticus? Most Christians, if they read the Bible, are highly selective in their reading of the parts which they judge to be important. Indian religious literature is so vast that it is necessary to be selective also. Of all of them, however, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita are undoubtedly the most influential and characteristic.

The Hindu scriptures are called Veda, 'knowledge', a word related to our 'wit'; and Ved-anta, the 'end of the Vedas'. They are written in Sanskrit, an ancient classical language related to Greek and Latin, which nobody speaks now. There are four collections of Veda, of which the most important is the first, the Rig Veda or 'hymn Veda'. Here 1017 hymns chant the praises of various gods of the old Indian pantheon. There is no satisfactory translation of all these hymns in English, not even of the Rig let alone the other three Vedas, though there are good selections. But even so, the Vedas are strange to foreign eyes and their many gods may seem absurd to people who are trying to get rid of myths of even one God 'up in the sky'.

It is the Upanishads, the true 'end of the Vedas', together with a few late Vedic hymns, that are of greatest importance for understanding Indian thought, for here are the most daring speculations and intimations of the divine. The Vedic hymns reflect, in the main, the beliefs
in gods held by priests of the Aryan tribes after their invasion of India about 1500 B.C. from central Asia. They imposed their rule on the local populations, and in due course their religion merged with that of other tribes. In more peaceful times, somewhere before 500 B.C., there arose thinkers who gathered scholars round them and discussed the problems of man and the universe that have troubled thoughtful people all down history.

Upa-ni-shad means 'sitting down near', 'private sessions'. The Indian teacher (guru) sat with a group of students often in the open or in a forest clearing, on the bank of a river or on a mountain-side. There are said to be 108 Upanishads, and others are known. Of these, however, ten are particularly important and 'classical'. The great commentator Shankara recognized sixteen as authoritative and wrote commentaries on ten of them.

There are two standard translations of the principal Upanishads in English, by Hume and Radhakrishnan, the first literal, the second more literary. But they are not easy reading, especially the first Upanishad which begins with a description of a sacrificial horse as model of the world. The general reader can be referred to selections in Hindu Scriptures by Macnicol, which gives some Vedic hymns, parts of some Upanishads, and a rather heavy translation of the Bhagavad Gita. Even this is not easy and other versions can be tried. That by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester is easier reading, but it is admittedly an interpretation and often a paraphrase, and reference back to more literal texts is needed.

The Upanishads reduce the many gods of the Vedas and other books to unity. Then having unified the spirits without, they proceed to consider the spirit within. The eternal ground or basis of the universe, which is intelligent spirit, is seen to be one with the spirit in man. This has sometimes been called 'pantheism', that everything is
divine, but we shall see that it is too intricate an idea to be contained under one word, and also that there are many other strands of Indian thought to supplement this.

The Vedas and Vedanta are called ‘hearing’ (shruti) or revelation said to have been heard by sages in olden times and so embodying eternal knowledge (Veda). Other later commentaries are also sometimes called Vedanta as they expound the classical texts in pantheistic manner. The Neo-Vedanta of writers like Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood follows pantheistic lines and hardly does justice to the width of Indian thought, with its many teachings of a personal God.

Another great body of Hindu religious writing is called ‘memory’ (smriti). This composes books of law and morals (dharma), philosophical and proverbial aphorisms (sutras), many long mythological stories and poems, and the two great epics, the Maha-bharata and the Ramayana.

The Maha-bharata, the ‘great Bharata’ tribe story, suffers from being the longest poem in the world, 100,000 verses, or twelve large volumes in an old English translation. Professedly the story of great tribal wars, this story contains masses of mythology mixed up with religious teachings of great beauty and depth. Embedded in it is the most important of all Hindu teachings, a little section of eighteen short chapters called the Bhagavad Gita, the ‘Song of the Lord’. This most influential of Hindu books is known and loved by millions of Hindus today and is sometimes called the Gospel of India. There are many English translations of the Gita, some of which are paraphrases, perhaps the best cheap edition is by E. J. Thomas, entitled The Song of the Lord.

There is a great deal of other material in the Maha-bharata, and in the shorter but fine Ramayana, the ‘story of Rama’, which had a profound effect on Hindu religious
teaching and life. There is a tendency by some modern apologists to present Hinduism as purely philosophical and somewhat remote from the needs of the world. But the human, worldly, moral and social side is of great importance, and this is seen in the epics and the examples which they give, for these are known and admired all over India.

Another aspect of Hindu religion is the wealth of tales (Puranas) and devotional poetry, which insisted on a personal religion of love to God, and flourished during our Middle Ages and after. This is rather akin to the vernacular hymn writing of the pietists in Europe and the Methodists in England. Selections of these hymns reveal beauty and depth of religious feeling, and if they can be found in libraries it is well worth while to read books like Bishop Appasamy's *Temple Bells*, Gandhi's *Songs from Prison*, and W. G. Archer's *Loves of Krishna*.

Indian religious literature is so extensive that the most one can do is to choose pearls from its endless treasures. But it may be said that many Hindus have only a limited knowledge of their country's huge scriptures. They content themselves, as we must do, with the Gita and a few of the Upanishads from the classical texts, and excerpts from some later writings. There is a great deal of strange and mythological material which can be safely now left aside. This exclusion can be justified in the same way in which parts of the Bible are now neglected, because they reflect a frankly barbaric morality. The great truths can be studied better by being freed from unnecessary associations in an anthology such as the Bible is.

Paul Tillich, in his latest book, justifies this action of the student who 'selects facts according to his judgment of their relative importance, interprets these in the light of his own understanding, and evaluates them with reference to the telos, the inner aim he perceives in the
movement of history generally, and in particular the history of religion'. The theologian who does this, even while he holds to another particular faith, 'tries to grasp the facts as precisely as is humanly possible, and to show that there are elements in human nature which tend to become embodied in symbols similar to those of his own religion'.

Hindu religion is a living thing and great changes and reforms have taken place in modern times. In reaction to criticism from Christian governors, Hindus became more interested in social dharma or justice; long-needed reforms were made and abuses put down. Western knowledge also had a revolutionary effect, though after the first enthusiasm there came a rediscovery of ancient Indian teachings, and some adaptation to modern times. There came too an outward-looking attitude that was new to Hinduism. Hitherto it had been a national faith, that of most of the Indian people. Buddhism which arose in India had left that country to spread its gospel over the whole of Asia. But Hindus now found that the teachings of their religion were interesting to many seekers after truth throughout the world. So came the Vedanta and Ramakrishna missions, Theosophical societies and the Brahmo Samaj, and the translations of Hindu scriptures that are now available.

Hindu teachings are offered by their exponents as 'eternal truth' (sanatana dharma). If we proceed now to study them it is not to urge acceptance of their infallibility, or maintain that they are fully suited to all modern needs. The aim is to see if they have some light for our problems, some suggestions that speak to our condition. Hindu teachers certainly hungered and thirsted after truth. In the epics and modern reform movements they

also thirsted after righteousness, as will be shown at the end.

It may seem strange to look for light to other religions, or even to admit that they have any truth. There are Christians who would oppose this, and declare that it is toying with evil, even with the Devil. But such an attitude is not in the best Christian tradition, and all down the ages there have been those who greeted light wherever it came from. Paul in preaching at Athens quoted with approval the Greek poet who said that men are the offspring of God. John in his Gospel used the Greek term Logos (word) to express the coming of Christ. Justin Martyr in the second century said, ‘Christ is the Logos, in whom the whole human race has a portion, and all who have lived according to this Logos are Christians, even though, like Socrates and Heraclitus among the Greeks, they are accounted godless’. Clement of Alexandria used Greek myths and teachings to expound to non-Christians the Logos by means of images familiar to them. Augustine said that the true religion had always existed and was only called Christian after the appearance of Christ.

During the isolation of Europe, owing to the defeat by the Arabs, and the disastrous Crusades, this broad spirit withered. But Nicholas of Cusa, a Roman cardinal in the fifteenth century, wrote a book in which he pictured the representatives of different religions conversing in heaven, and finding their unity explained by the divine Logos who said, ‘there is only one religion, only one cult of all who are living according to the principles of reason.’ The leaders of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century measured Christianity and other religions by their reasonableness, and wished to make Christianity universal by making it all-inclusive. The narrowness of some modern theologies not only opposes cross-fertilization of religions,
but also gives up the classical doctrine of the Logos reconciling all truths.

Today, says Tillich, the dialogue of religions must be begun, or taken up again. This dialogue presupposes that religions recognize the value of each other’s convictions, so that they think the discussion worthwhile. It supposes that each religion can speak of its own faith with conviction, and it assumes that there is at least some common ground which makes discussion possible. Finally it accepts openness to criticism, both of basic teachings and of temporal appearances, both of theology and of rites and worship. This openness and charity of discussion can be fruitful and important, and a great help to serious inquirers after truth.*

The impact of eastern religious ideas upon the West amounts to a third Reformation or Revolution. The first Reformation was, of course, the upheaval of the sixteenth century which remodelled many traditional doctrines though it did not come to grips with critical problems of the Bible. The second Reformation was brought about by the scientific revolution and enlightenment of the nineteenth century, and Dr Robinson’s protest is partly the tail end of this revolution. Ideas of God as ‘up there’ are pre-Copernican. Yet not only Biblical but doctrinal criticism has begun, and in the resulting confusion light may well come again from the East.

The third Reformation is the coming of eastern teachings into the midst of the West. The East is a convenient term, for India and beyond. Christianity, in its Jewish origins, was eastern, but it took Greek forms and found its success in the Greek and Roman worlds. In any case, we have seen that there are clear differences between Jewish and Indian ideas. For many centuries these two great

* Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, pp. 34, 40, 46, 54, 62.
streams of religious thought hardly met. Today they mingle with increasing force. The ease of communications, the one world of modern times, makes isolation and ignorance of other men’s ideas impossible. The volume of literature and the translation of eastern religious classics, reveal hitherto little known ideas, many of which make an appeal to thoughtful men and women in the West.

Official theology still pays little heed to the powerful leaven of these ideas. In The Honest to God Debate, a summary of many different views on Dr Robinson's book, there is only one slight reference to the effect of far eastern religions upon Christian thought. This is a field to which many leaders and theologians continue to close their eyes. One reason is no doubt because of the difficulty of the subject, its vastness and complexity. Another is the lack of training. It is almost incredible, but true, that very few colleges for training the clergy give any information at all about other religions than Christianity and Biblical Judaism. The number of those that make any attempt at this can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand, as can the number of British universities that provide any courses on the subject.

It is the purpose of this book to provide a simple guide, not to the history of religions, or to all their teachings, but to those doctrines that have an important bearing upon the great problems of thinking men in the modern world.
CHAPTER TWO

GOD AND BRAHMAN

'The Bible speaks of a God "up there"', says the bishop of Woolwich, though it is hard to discover this precise phrase in the Bible. The three-decker universe 'was once taken quite literally', though no doubt the 'more sophisticated writers' would have agreed that this was only symbolical of spiritual realities. 'Even an educated man of the world' like St Luke writes calmly of Jesus being 'lifted up' to heaven, 'there to sit down at the right hand of the Most High'.* Luke, in fact, does not use this last phrase in Gospel or Acts, but never mind, it is in Mark, in the false end.

It is 'the two most mature theologians of the New Testament', John and Paul who write 'most uninhibitedly' of this 'going up' and 'coming down'. For Paul, no doubt, this 'was as much a metaphor as it is to us', yet he used it in writing to his sophisticated readers at Corinth with no excuse. The reason must surely have been that both Jews and Greeks there employed this language as convenient symbolism.

These spatial metaphors are used throughout the Bible, and even favourite passages of devotion like 'Our Father, which art in heaven' look all too celestial and localized. But the Jews had a revulsion against using the divine name and preferred any circumlocution. Matthew's Gospel, the most Jewish of the four, from which the

liturgical Lord's Prayer was taken, is especially addicted to the euphemisms 'in heaven' or 'heavenly Father'. 'Our Father, which art in heaven' means in fact 'our divine Father', and today we should express it more naturally in that way. Luke's Gospel, the bishop as an eminent Biblical scholar knows well, gives what was more likely the form of the prayer as Jesus uttered it: 'Father, hallowed be thy name'.

The early Christians could only use such mythical world-pictures as were available to them but, as Dr Bezzant says, both Jewish and Greek mythical pictures 'are irrelevant and impossible for our age and never again will be anything else'.* The Jewish Christians found it hard enough to explain their new faith against their traditional world view, and Greek Christians 'tended to engulf the Christian message in a riotous speculation almost entirely lacking any historical' or philosophical basis which we can only regard as a free imaginative composition. Then when more systematic thought got to work on exposition later, it had to depend upon apparent facts recorded in the Bible and regarded as authoritative. Down the ages such exposition has continued and we are saddled with ancient imagery which is often defended in view of the so-called unity of the New Testament.

Yet although Christian teachers have continued to use spatial images it has not been without protests and reminders at various periods that such language was symbolical. From Origen in the third century to Luther in the sixteenth, the idea of heaven as a place in the clouds where God sits on a throne was said to be a child's picture-book notion. 'God is spirit', the Bible says or suggests in both Testaments (John 4; Psalm 139), and this remained the key to Christian symbolism down the ages.

Spirit is a vague notion, whether it is taken in the literal

sense of wind or breath, or with more refinement as an invisible power. We must have some ‘image’ or working model, and the very use of language involves concrete pictures. So most men have retained ideas of God ‘in the sky’, even though we have made ‘a remarkable transposition’ in abandoning the language of a three-storey universe. At least the ‘down there’ of hell has gone, for many people, along with the Devil and his angels, a fact that Dr Robinson seems curiously to deplore.

But the bishop says that we still think of God as ‘out there’, way beyond outer space, in the last recesses of the cosmos where our astronauts have not yet penetrated. This is where people think God is, and where men go when they die.* It is very hard to discover whether ‘people’ really do think this. We have never met anybody who would admit to it, and in a random selection of commuters interviewed by television all but one said that God is spirit, or within. These were proper comments and a testimony to the spirituality of Christian teaching.

‘Out there’, says the bishop, God is thought to exist ‘above and beyond the world he made’. There he created the world ‘over against himself’, and thence in fullness of time he ‘visits’ men in the person of his Son, who will one day ‘come again’ to gather the faithful to himself. And the whole scheme of salvation, says Dr Bezzant, has depended upon the view that history does not follow a natural course, but God will intervene in a cosmic catastrophe; the Judge will come from heaven, raising the dead for final judgement, and all men will be saved or damned everlastingly.

This is more serious criticism, for whether Christians do think of God as up there or out there, preachers and teachers tend to speak of God as separate from the world, intervening in miracles, suspending the laws of nature,

* Honest to God, p. 13f.
breaking in visibly in the incarnation of Christ, and coming again to bind up Satan in a cosmic catastrophe at the end. That God is ‘wholly other’ is the foundation of the theology of Karl Barth today. That God ‘intervenes’ in miracle and ‘visits us personally’ in Christ, is common teaching in Advent sermons and broadcasts. The symbolism of the language is often not explained, and in fact it seems that the speakers take it literally.

Dr Robinson says that the atheistic attack on a God out there is right, but what it does is to destroy an idol. We must get on without a God up there, for this is truly a projection, as Freud said. In place of a God above it is suggested that the teaching of Paul Tillich should be adopted which speaks of God as depth. ‘The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is God. That depth is what the word God means ... For if you know that God means depth, you know much about him ... He who knows about depth knows about God.’

This is still spatial imagery. Why choose depth rather than height or ground rather than sky? Depth suggests the unconscious, and this is dangerous Freudian ground. However Tillich takes depth to mean seriousness and says it should be translated into life, the depths of being, the ultimate concern, what is taken seriously without any reservation. As against this consider a shallow life, and if you reject it you cannot be an atheist for you have chosen depth and seriousness. Here the idea of God is not put far away, but it begins with human life as we know it.

Elsewhere Tillich has attacked the traditional ‘supernaturalism’ of Christian theology. The classical ‘proofs’ of the existence of God fail to convince men today because while they posit God as the ‘highest being’, above and beyond the world, they only make God ‘a being beside

others and as such part of the whole or reality . . . He is seen as a self which has a world, as an ego which is related to a thou . . . He is a being, not being-itself.* Even if God is not thought of any longer as existing in space, yet he is still considered to be defined and marked off from other beings, a Being with a separate existence.

The next critic to be pressed into service is Rudolf Bultmann whose attempts to ‘de-mythologize’ the Gospel have caused considerable interest and sometimes alarm over the last twenty years. The Gospel story is set in a mythological background that is unintelligible jargon to modern men, and this distracts attention from the real challenge of the Gospel. The jargon has become closely bound up with the core of the story, in the ideas of a supernatural order which invades and perforates this world, in incarnation and judgement, descent and ascent, miracle and catastrophe. These notions prevent understanding of the fact of Jesus as an act of God, they simply make it incredible.† Bultmann may exaggerate the extent to which such mythology pervades the Bible, but he is hardly wrong in seeing that it makes great difficulties for those whose outlook is shaped by modern science, by science rather than by philosophy. The notion of demon-possession has gone out, and nature miracles and a spatial ascension are hard to justify in modern times, if not the virgin birth and the empty tomb. But if this is true it must have an effect upon ideas of God, revelation and incarnation.

Modern Christians in varying degrees have adjusted themselves to some of these difficulties, often by suspending judgement or neglecting elements in the story that they no longer easily accept. Many would accept the

---

* Systematic Theology, ii (Nisbet, 1953), p. 5f.
necessity for modern theology to be thought out and expressed in new terms, and would agree with Tillich, and partly with Bultmann, as far as they can be understood. But far more radical disturbance comes from the scanty but explosive writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, upon which Bishop Robinson largely depends.

Bonhoeffer was killed in a Nazi prison, and the thoughts of his last years are to be found in fragments in letters where he suggested the need for a ‘Christianity without religion’. Bonhoeffer talked about living in a completely secular world, in which God was no longer needed as a stop-gap to answer questions that once were mysteries but now are becoming clearer. Men are adult and learn to live without that kind of God. But it is a great pity that Bonhoeffer did not live to expound his theories more clearly and at greater length, in one of those long series of dogmatic theology beloved of German divines. It is evident that he was opposed to what he called an earlier ‘stage in the religiousness of man’. He wanted men to be adult and take to themselves all the truths of modern discovery. But he also criticized a good deal of organized Christianity because he felt that religiosity was being substituted for ‘Christ himself’. Here the historical situation must be taken into account, and Bonhoeffer’s opposition to the ‘German Christians’ who accepted the Nazi state, as distinct from the Confessional churches which opposed it.

It is in his treatment of Bonhoeffer that the bishop of Woolwich seems most devastating and yet least clear, when he says that we must learn to live without God in this secular world. It is on this count especially that he has been accused of atheism. That ‘our image’ of God as an ‘old man in the sky’ is out of date is obvious. Elementary, my dear Woolwich. We all know this, and many Christians down the ages have known it too, even in the Bible.
The Tillich attack on God as a being, separated from the world, may pass, and perhaps a good deal of Bultmann’s de-mythologizing of the Gospels. But what does Bonhoeffer mean? The fact that the bishop gives lengthy quotations from him suggests that it is not clear, and he admits ‘what that meant I hardly began to understand’. But Bonhoeffer has his own meaning for God, apart from rejecting the notion of God as a mere explanation or stop-gap. ‘The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us.’* That is startling and paradoxical, but it is not atheism. Rather Bonhoeffer is trying to point the way to a ‘deeper’ view of God, one in which he is not just kept in a corner or used as a hypothesis but enters the whole of life.

Bonhoeffer attacked religiosity because it ‘uses God’ for its own purposes, whether in miracle or hypothesis. But his own views are hinted at even more in his constant exaltation of Christ as against religiosity. ‘Our relation to God is not a religious relationship to a supreme Being, absolute in power and goodness, which is a spurious conception of transcendence, but a new life for others, through participation in the Being of God’. A mystical relationship to Christ is perhaps the key to Bonhoeffer’s teaching, worked out through his suffering, and it deserves much fuller treatment from theologians than it has yet received.

‘Participation in the Being of God’ is a phrase that might have come from Indian religion, though Bonhoeffer would have repudiated this. For he opposed what he called ‘salvation religions’, meaning chiefly the Greek

mystery religions with their repudiation of the ‘world’ for the purely ‘spiritual’, and he saw this as having infected Christianity dangerously, as we shall see later. But man has ‘come of age’, by rejecting false notions of God as a stop-gap to be used for our own purpose. So we should live in the world and share in the divine life there.

‘Our image of God must go.’ Whose image? There are other images than those of traditional Christianity and some may suit the modern world better than the idea of an old man in the sky. That this latter is a Father-figure, a projection from childhood, has been argued by psychologists who point to the patriarchal organization of Jewish society where this idea flourished. In Jung’s psychology, however, it might seem that man needs to project his female counterpart, his anima, and so he would adore the Virgin Mary or the Chinese Kwanyin. Then the Father-figure would be a female projection; but there is little historical evidence for this.

The Arabs, who are as patriarchal as the Jews, never use the name Father for God. They regard it as too human, for God is the Wholly Other, completely transcendent. Some of the greatest debates in Islam were over this question of symbolism. How figurative were the attributes of God? God was said in the Koran to be sitting on a throne, visible at the judgement, and ‘coming down’ to the first heaven. So the Mutazilas (seceders) asked, ‘Will God be seen in a form which space can hold and eye observe?’ God is pure essence, they said; but this seemed both to deny some words of the Koran and to forbid believers to form any conception of God at all. Finally a compromise was reached in which the reality of the divine attributes was asserted, but the explanation
was declared a mystery. The champion of orthodoxy, Al-Ashari (ninth century A.D.), in his creeds declared, ‘we confess that God has a countenance, without asking how... We confess that God has two hands, without asking how’.

Much less rigid altogether were the Hindu speculations. At first glance Hinduism seems to present a multitude of gods. The Rig Veda is the oldest scripture and consists of hymns in praise of some thirty-three different gods. These hymns are not so crude as they might appear at first sight; they are liturgies composed and recited by priests over centuries, and they have received many mystical interpretations. Like the Bible, the Vedas are religious rather than speculative. The Indian Aryans who chanted these hymns seem to have been much more devout than the Greeks who believed in similar deities rather light-heartedly and told such immoral stories about their gods that Socrates was shocked.

However the modern Western reader would do better to leave the Vedas aside, except for the late Hymn of Creation which ends with an agnostic query: ‘The gods are later than this world’s production. Who knows, then, whence it first came into being? Whence this emanation has arisen, whether created or not, only he whose eye controls it in highest heaven, only he knows it, or perhaps he does not know.’

It is in the Upanishads that the nature of the divine is discussed many times and from many angles. The discussion first reduces the gods to unity. In a famous passage in the first Upanishad an inquirer asks the great sage Yanya-valkya, ‘How many gods are there?’ There are said to be 3,306, and then in a progressive dialogue their number is reduced to 303, to 33, 6, 3, 2, 1½, and finally to 1. These many gods are but manifestations, but there is one God in whom all the rest grew up. Which is that
one? He is Brahman, they call him that (tyat, the Yon).*

Throughout the later history and diversity of Indian religion this belief in one Brahman spread, till it became the common explanation of the unity of all things. The visitor to India today may be struck by the multiplicity of temples and the countless images of strange and sometimes terrifying gods. But every teacher says that Brahman is the reality underlying all the diversity of appearances. The Upanishads gave the classical statements and these were taken up and expounded by the great commentators and philosophers. Brahman pervades the gods and their followers, Brahman sustains the earth and fills the sky to the farthest atmosphere, Brahman measures the years and dwells in man.

What then is Brahman? It is a neuter word, beyond male and female, and this marked its history. But neutrality does not here suggest an abstraction, but powerful speech and energy. An early meaning is sacred utterance or Word and by reciting it the priests had ‘holy power’. Brahman as a neutral word-force needs to be distinguished from a personal god Brahma and the holy man Brahmana (Brahmin in English spelling), though these are from the same root. In the Rig Veda Brahman is used of sacred words and magic incantations. But it develops into a holy power, and in the Upanishads Brahman is the creative principle, the immovable and eternal ground of the universe.

This idea of Brahman as the spiritual power underlying all things has an attractive refinement. It is not a blind life-force, or power of evolution, in the manner in which Julian Huxley suggests that the power behind religion might be identified with evolution without a conscious revelation. For Brahman ‘knew itself’. Consciousness,

though not personality in the narrow sense of a God 'up there', is its highest manifestation. 'All this is guided by intelligence, is based on intelligence. The world is guided by intelligence. The basis is intelligence. Brahman is intelligence.'* Brahman might well be called 'mind', in modern terminology, and we shall see that this interpretation is reinforced by the relationship of Brahman to the soul (atman).

Brahman is the final cause and explanation of the universe. The Upanishads seek the cause and reason of things with restless curiosity. They speak of 'in the beginning' in many ways. This recalls the first words of the Bible, but whereas the Bible asserts dogmatically, and proceeds at once to God's acts towards man, the Upanishads question and turn the problem over and over. Here, no doubt, they would come under the judgement of Bonhoeffer who tries to dispose of speculation, 'clearing the decks' for the Bible. But while the Bible rarely speculates, men have done so all down history and this seems essential to human nature. Greek speculations became incorporated into Hebrew theology, to fill the gaps left by the more prophetic Biblical teaching. Tillich says that the questions of the meaning of life cannot be silenced as long as men are men.

The Upanishads are full of questions. The title of the Prashna Upanishad means 'question', and six problems are posed in it on the origins and destiny of life and creatures. The Kena ('by whom') Upanishad asks 'by whom do mind, breath, speech, hearing and sight come forth?' The reader of the first Upanishad (Brihadaranyaka), omitting the difficult first chapter, comes to discussions of the origin of things. 'In the beginning there was nothing, death covered everything, and then created

* Aitareya Upanishad, 5, 3.
the mind'. Or again, 'in the beginning there was only the soul (atman)', existing alone, and then it divided itself into male and female. This recalls a story of Plato's in which an original androgynous being was divided into the two sexes. Then comes the idea of the Brahman which was to prevail. 'Brahman indeed was this in the beginning.' Brahman was conscious. 'It knew itself only as "I am Brahman". Therefore it became All. Whoever of the gods became aware of this, became that (brahman).'

In the Hymn of Creation at the end of the Rig Veda it had been suggested that there was nothing in the beginning, 'neither non-existent nor existent'. Perhaps the notion was that ultimate reality was beyond these dualities or opposites of being and non-being, as beyond all other dualities: light and dark, heaven and earth, male and female. But the second (Chandogya) Upanishad firmly refutes any idea that 'being was produced from non-being'. This would be nonsensical, for 'how could being be produced from non-being? On the contrary, in the beginning this was being alone, one only without a second'. Mind is primary and is the explanation of the visible world. The details of creation are unimportant, whether it came from a steady state or a cosmic explosion, what matters is the divine mind in it all.

Brahman is identified with breath, like the breath of God blown into man in Genesis. It is also called speech, hearing, sight, heart, mind, and even food. Brahman is being, knowledge and bliss; a conception that was to assume great importance later. Brahman is the space outside man, and also within man. Brahman is the imperishable, from which the universe arises as a spider sends forth and draws in its thread. Brahman is progressively sought out in the sun, moon, lightning, air, fire, water, mirror, shadow, self and sleep. In all these Brahman is the real of
the real, the truth of truth; this is the secret teaching (Upanishad).

Brahman is in man, the body is the city of Brahman (the temple of the Spirit). In the space within the heart Brahman dwells as in a lotus flower, free from desire, wise, immortal and self-existent. This is the true self which consists of mind, smaller than a grain of rice or a mustard seed, greater than the earth and the sky, microcosm and macrocosm.* The relationship of the soul to Brahman will be discussed in the next chapter.

It was said that the gods become Brahman when they are aware of it, and that the many gods are reduced to one in Brahman. So all the many appearances and all diversity are unified in Brahman, which is within and beyond all things. ‘Verily this whole world is Brahman, he who believes this will have no more doubts.’ Brahman is the light of lights, everything shines only after that shining light; it is this universe, spreading below and above, Brahman is in front and behind, below and above, to right and left. Yet Brahman is indescribable, and can only be indicated by negatives: ‘not this, not this’ (neti, neti).†

This teaching seems to lead logically to pantheism, that Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman. Everything seems to participate in everything else and so to be everything else. It is more properly called monism, that Brahman is the sole reality that exists, but even then the most forthright sayings of the Upanishads are qualified. Hindus prefer to speak of it as non-duality (adwaita, not twofold). Taken in its barest form this would seem so to identify man and Brahman that there is no room for worship of a personal God, no real existence of the world, and no sin. However, we shall see in succeeding chapters that there have been many debates in India,

* Chandogya 3, 14.
† Chandogya 7, 25; Brihad-aranyaka 2, 3, 6.
and distinct schools which champion pure non-duality, while others maintain a modified non-duality, and others again teach a frank dualism of man and God. Yet all claim support from the Upanishads.

For the moment be it noted that the classical Hindu teaching of Brahman is of a divine Mind, which is in and beyond all things; not just identified with creation, for it is greater than the great. This is conscious Mind, yet it is not located ‘up there’ or ‘down below’. It is all-pervading and all-inspiring. It is without and beyond sex, neither a Father-figure nor a Mother-Goddess. It is beyond emotion, neither an angry Jehovah nor a suffering Deity. If these have their place, it will be found with the personal ideas of godhead and avatars, of which more later.

It is not pretended here that Hindu ideas are perfect and Biblical or Christian teachings crude. Dr Robinson and other modern critics have lampooned some traditional Christian ideas, and neglected others, and full justice needs to be done to the width and deeply religious character of Biblical teaching. On the other hand, the Upanishads have crude places and much confusion. Yet from them can be culled ideas of such perceptivity that they have made a great impression on many people in the West.

But can Brahman be compared in any way with God? Is this a religious concept, or mere theorizing? Certainly a good deal of the Upanishadic teaching about Brahman is more akin to the European philosophical conception of the Absolute, which according to a classical definition exists in and by itself, without any necessary relation to any other being. Brahman is undoubtedly the changeless in a world of change, the ‘ground of existence’. Brahman existed in the beginning as One without a second, like God, but the One desired to become many and in fact it
is the support of many beings. We shall see in the next chapter that the existence of the soul of man raised problems that were bound to modify the idea of absolute monism. This led to justification of religious relationships, and in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad the divine is shown like a ‘personal’ God, who indwells the soul but is not identical with it.

The reaction from excessive transcendentalism, God ‘up there’, has led in Christian thought to immanentism, God present and within. This is an important strain in Biblical and Christian teaching, and one that can be reinforced by comparison with Hindu ideas. Indeed, the value of the study of Hinduism is to redress the balance against extremely spatial notions of God and show that other elements have a due and perhaps more important place. When the immanental side is championed critics too easily brand it as ‘pantheism’, as if this were beyond the pale. We have seen that even the most extreme Hindu teachings are monism rather than pantheism, and in fact most Hindus do not go to this extreme. Dr Robinson criticizes both pantheism and ‘any immanentist worldview’ as being deterministic, allowing no room for freedom, evil or personal relationships. Whereas the Biblical view ‘grounds all reality ultimately in personal freedom—in Love.’ It is difficult to see how this can be squared with living in this secular world ‘as men who can get along very well without God’.* If this language means anything, it looks like trying to have your Biblical cake and eat or destroy it. For the Bible, with all its symbolism, never suggests that one can live without God but on the contrary God is ever-present and demanding.

Immanentalism also believes that God is ever-present, that all our being is in God, and that far from living

* Honest to God, pp. 130-39.
without him we must live in him. He is the 'inner Controller', say the Upanishads. And Hindu thought goes on to consider those relationships of man and God that we find so important, and solves them at its highest points—in Love. To these relationships, and personality in man and God, we shall proceed in the ensuing chapters.
CHAPTER THREE

SOUL AND ATMAN

Understanding of the nature of God depends partly on the understanding of the nature of man. There are those who would translate ‘theology’ into ‘anthropology’, and apply the divine attributes of love, wisdom, and justice to man. Bultmann says bluntly that he is ‘interpreting theological affirmations as assertions about human life’. It is possible to go further and make the knowledge of God into nothing more than the knowledge of man, and proceed to the deification of man in the sense of the Superman of Nietzsche or the Religion of Humanity of Comte. If theology becomes completely translated into anthropology then the category of God is ‘semantically superfluous’.*

The idea of the transcendence of God is meant to guarantee belief in God as greater than all human categories. This may mean a God ‘up there’ or ‘out there’, but really awareness of the divine comes in an unconditional or ‘numinous’ way which surpasses human attributes. This may speak in the ‘depth’ of experience, and in all serious relationships.

It is to be expected that the noblest attributes ascribed to God should be the highest, or deepest, in human experience. ‘God is love’, says the epistle of John. And it continues to state that apart from the relationship of love there is no knowledge of God; not just without faith, but

* Honest to God, p. 50f.
without love for man, because 'he who does not love does not know God'. This does not mean that the phrase can be reversed to say 'love is God'. But love is 'of' God, because in the relationship of love at its best there is disclosed as nowhere else 'the divine Ground of all our being'.

The Jewish mystic Martin Buber has said that in personal relationships the character of the divine is seen. 'Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou.' God is transcendent, yet not in the sense of being infinitely remote but close at hand, the beyond in the midst. For 'the eternal Thou is met only in, with and under the finite Thou'.

Yet God is not to be identified with man, or human society, or nature, in pantheist, humanist, or secularist fashion. If the old notions of the 'supernatural' must go, yet the modern naturalist assumption that God is merely a name for society or humanity must also be challenged. Some of the most dangerous critics of religion today are not the pure scientists, physicists and chemists, but sociologists and anthropologists. They study religion in primitive society, often in great detail with descriptions of rites, organization and function. They recognize the importance of religion as a social cement. But the religious man knows that the vital element is missing. If sociologists were to study churches they could observe rites, dissect organization and consider social function. But these are mere trimmings, for religion is about God, and meaning, and life itself.

Tillich says that secularism fails in explaining the problems of life because it fails to see God in the world. Secularism 'gave consecration and holiness to our daily life and work. Yet it excluded those deep things for which religion stands: the feeling for the inexhaustible

*ibid, p. 53; I and Thou (T. & T. Clarke, 1937), p. 75.
mystery of life, the grip of an ultimate meaning of existence, and the invincible power of an unconditional devotion. These things cannot be excluded. If we try to expel them in their divine images, they re-emerge in daemonic images.*

The problems of life are perennial; they belong to man’s restless mind which cannot be content with blind existence in a universe that signifies nothing. The nature of the human mind needs to be understood in relation to the divine mind within and behind all. What the human soul is many modern writers do not stop to ask, but its relationship to the ‘ultimate ground and depth of existence’ must be considered.

In the book of Genesis it is said that God breathed the ‘breath of life’ into man. Shorn of crude symbolism this means that the divine Spirit is the source of human life. And since the divine Spirit is immortal, then man must partake of that immortality.

There is little else about the soul in the Old Testament, and one major difference between the Jewish and the Hindu approaches to religion is that the Jews emphasized the transcendence of God, while the Hindus had much greater concern with the soul. R. C. Zaehner says that ‘so obsessed do the Jews appear to have been with the majesty of God and man’s utter insignificance that they forgot that man became a “living soul”’.† This explains why the Old Testament says so little about life after death, as will be seen in a later chapter.

The New Testament and later Christian teaching balanced Jewish teaching, especially in the belief in an afterlife. But today the reaction is against the notion of God ‘out there’, and in favour of neglecting the problems of the soul and the future life. Here Hindu teachings

---

†At Sundry Times, p. 177.
have been especially interesting to those who have felt a lack of teaching on these subjects.

In the Upanishads the Brahman or world-ground often seems to be virtually identical with the soul (atman). But the latter word is used ambiguously, sometimes of the individual soul of man, and sometimes of the soul of the universe when it is another name for Brahman. So that one cannot simply identify Brahman and Atman, but distinctions were made, especially in the later writings.

The soul or self is called Atman, a word that is thought to come from a root meaning 'to breathe', so it is the breath of life or consciousness, not unlike the breath of God within man in Genesis. Other words were used for the ego, the person, and the individual soul (aham-kara, purusha, jiva), but Atman came to be regarded as the deepest and divinest element.

The first Upanishad says that when a man goes to sleep he takes material images of this world and builds up a dream world, projecting the images and delights from himself, for the soul is a creator and is self-illuminated. But in the deepest sleep there are no dreams, and the soul is tranquil as an eagle gliding through the air or like a husband in the embrace of his wife.

The second Upanishad (Chandogya) has a long dialogue affirming that the soul is ultimately free from evil, age, death and sorrow, for it is reality. This was spoken by the Lord of Creatures (Prajapati), and to him for further enlightenment came Indra, a great god of the Vedas, and a demon called Virochana. They wanted to find out what the soul really was, and first were told to look in a pan of water. The demon was pleased at this apparent identification of the soul with the reflection of the body in water and he went off to preach bodily
pleasure-seeking to the other demons. But the god Indra was not satisfied and sought further enlightenment, and was told then that the true self is the one that moves about in dreams. But the dream self suffers and weeps, so Indra asked for further instruction and was told to consider dreamless sleep. But dreamless sleep resembles destruction, for it gives no knowledge of the self. So finally, after 101 years of study under the Lord of Creatures, Indra came to discern the true nature of the soul. The body is mortal, but it is the standing-ground or support of the deathless soul. The body suffers pains and pleasures, but the soul is beyond these. It is conscious, beyond dreams. It has true knowledge, and the mind is its divine eye. That is the soul, immortal and fearless.

The Upanishads use other words to elucidate the nature of man, but they insist that consciousness is essential of the highest element in man, rather than the torpidity of dreamless sleep. They could not think of the moving principle of the universe as other than intelligent; 'how can being come from non-being?'. So man must participate in this intelligence. The 'phenomenon of man', as Teilhard de Chardin has insisted, is an integral part of nature, but the human mind transforms the interpretation of nature.

But what is the relationship of the soul to the divine? Is theology only anthropology? Or is man simply divine, anthropology become theology? It is often said that the Upanishads identify man and the divine, and this extreme monism is fully seen in the tiny Mandukya Upanishad, but elsewhere many different views are expressed. The Upanishads struggle with the problems of the individual and the universal, the one and the many, man and God, and God ultimately is viewed not only as a principle but as personal.

The deathless soul is indeed at times called both Atman
and Brahma, or rather at its deepest levels it is one with the ground of the universe. But Atman is used of the ‘soul of the all’ as well as of the individual. In the speculations about the origins of things it is said both that in the beginning this world was Brahma, and also that in the beginning this world was Atman. This is in the first Upanishad, and it is no wonder that in the second Upanishad attempts are made to elucidate the matter which clearly was puzzling Upanishadic disciples. Five great householders, learned in sacred lore, approached a famous sage to ask, ‘What is our soul? What is Brahma?’ And the sage by enumerating the different elements showed that there is a universal soul within them all.

The best known dialogue on this subject, and one which was to determine Hindu thought ever after, was given in the discussions of the wise man Uddalaka with his son Shvetaketu.* The boy had been away for twelve years to study the sacred Vedas under Brahmin teachers and returned conceited with his learning. But his father told him that there is a deeper knowledge which cannot be understood superficially. Reality or truth is one, and all the rest is ‘name and form’ (nama-rupa). Things made of clay have different forms, but the reality is clayness, so beneath transient shapes is the one Soul. In nine successive parables Uddalaka showed that the finest essence of the world, the ultimate reality, is revealed as the Soul. Bees collect different pollen but reduce the essence to unity, rivers flow from many directions but become one ocean, a tree may be cut in many parts yet survive because of its single life, a fig may be divided into seeds but has an invisible essence, salt is dissolved in water yet permeates the whole, and similarly a blindfolded man, a dying man, and a man falsely accused all find truth in the one abiding reality. At the end of each parable Uddalaka

* Chandogya Upanishad, 6, 1-16.
said, 'This is reality. That is Soul (atman). That art thou.'

This last phrase became famous in Indian religious philosophy. 'That thou art' (tat tvam asi), meaning 'you are yourself that Soul, the divine', or 'you, the individual, are that universal essence'. By its nature the Atman is at the deepest level one with the ground of the universe. Or in modern jargon, man is one with the 'ground of his existence'. Because God is all-pervading, fully immanent, so man 'participates in the being of God'. Like Brahman, the Atman also is indescribable, 'not this, not this', indicated by negatives.

This may appear to be complete pantheism, or rather monism; only one divine being really exists, identical with man. Yet the apparent identity was not so complete as to forbid debates as to its extent. The human soul at the deepest level, like the divine, was outside time. Yet it could be argued that there was a distinction, in that the individual soul did not share in creation; it partook of absolute being, but it was not God. And a rather late Upanishad says that 'there are two forms of Brahman, time and the timeless'.

In India itself several schools of thought debated this question of the relationship of the soul and the world-soul, and their followers still differ today. In commentaries on the Upanishads and other texts the views of the differing schools appear clearly. The champion of absolute monism or non-duality was Shankara (9th century A.D.). While the Upanishads are the true Ved-anta, the 'end of the Vedas', yet the teachings of the later commentators, and particularly Shankara's school of non-duality, have been regarded also as the Vedanta philosophy. Modern revivals of this monism, particularly those championed by Huxley and Isherwood, are often called

*Maitri Upanishad, 6, 15.*
Neo-Vedanta. They tend to set out monism as the greatest and most dominant philosophy of India, with Shankara as the supreme authority. Yet, as will be seen, this absolute monism is by no means the only interpretation of the Upanishads, it is not always faithful to the variety within the texts, nor does it appear to be entirely consistent with itself.

Shankara believed that there is no real duality of being. The plurality which we see is therefore unreal, and arises from temporality or delusion (*maya*). The visible world is changing and dependent, it is the sport or play (*līla*) of divinity, proceeding from its own nature but not from any necessity of purpose. Yet Shankara rejected the completely subjective idealism of some Buddhist philosophers who held that the world was unreal or void. The world is as real as the individual who perceives it, and it is not non-existent or void. But the world is not ultimate reality. It is wholly dependent on Brahman, who is the basis and ‘ground’ of all experience; and yet Brahman is different from the world of space, time and causation. The world is changing and passing, and cannot exist by itself, for it depends on Brahman, but Brahman depends on nothing, is unaffected by the changes of the visible world, and is not merely the highest being (*a* being) but is ‘being itself’.

The individual soul, the Atman, in Shankara’s view, while apparently different for a time from other souls, and also from Brahman through illusion (*maya*), yet fundamentally is nothing but the sole Brahman. For Shankara Atman is the same as Brahman, because the ‘deepest’ part of our being is one with the being of the universe.

Complete non-duality of Atman and Brahman, identity of man and God, would seem to spell the death of religion, or at least of devotion and worship. For how can
one worship oneself? The Buddhists, who rejected both Brahman and Atman, were faced with the same problem in a different form, for what religion was there left to this scepticism? And it is interesting that both monists and Buddhists retained or evolved forms of worship which seem to imply what they denied. Shankara, like the practitioners of Yoga disciplines (of which more later), believed that the idea of a personal Lord (Ishvara) was useful as a help towards self-purification, and he even wrote hymns to the Lord under different names. Yet he held that this was but a stage, and that finally one should pass beyond the Lord to 'become one with Brahman'.

This absolute non-duality was all very well for certain philosophers, especially since liberation from the illusion of separateness was to be obtained by knowledge alone. Religious actions and devotion could only play a subordinate part here. But many other Hindu philosophers and religious men refused to accept complete monism, and they sought to give the scriptures different interpretations. Madhva, in the 13th century, set forth a frankly dualistic teaching. Brahman is all-pervading, but he is not the embodied Atman. In fact Madhva emended the famous verse, ‘thou art that’, to read ‘thou art not that’ (a-tat). How can weak man call himself Brahman who is all-powerful and ever-present? ‘It is impossible and against fact and reason that one and the same self could be in all bodies at the same time. For the Lord is all-knowing, all-powerful and absolute; while the self is of little understanding, little power and utterly dependent.’

Madhva identified Brahman with the god Vishnu, and held that souls and the world exist in dependence upon him. Vishnu became for him and millions of other Vaishnavites (followers of Vishnu) the sole God. And in medieval India there arose many devotional schools, of which that of Chaitanya is one of the best known still,
which taught an attitude of love and adoration to Vishnu. This could not be satisfied by teaching identity with God, but dependence on him.

But most significant was Ramanuja (11th century), who held a mediating position between the extremes of monism and dualism, by his teaching of ‘qualified non-dualism’ (vishisht-advaita). Ramanuja pointed out that the human soul is limited, and that claims made by sages to be perfect and identical with Brahman were unfounded, for they were clearly limited in knowledge and power. Commenting on the Bhagavad-Gita, he noted that the Lord is called ‘unborn’ in a different way from mortals. ‘The Lord is different in kind from the liberated soul which, though unborn, none the less has a beginning, for the unborn condition of the liberated soul has a beginning. That is to say, since it was involved in evil in former lives, it still has a propensity towards evil.’* And again, the Supreme Soul is other than either bound or liberated souls, because he is in a different category from all else. Souls are absorbed in the Lord at the dissolution of all things, but they are not identical with him, and they are separated again at a new creation.

Ramanuja came to be regarded as one of the greatest Indian teachers, and is so venerated still, for he gave justification to the growing movements of worship and devotion. These all needed a concept of a personal Lord, with whom the soul had relationships of love and union, but not complete identity. This strongly personal side of religion will be considered later, and here it may suffice to remark that it has been of great importance in India, despite the attempts of old and new Vedantists to deprecate its significance.

The understanding of the soul, then, in Hindu thought,

fundamentally affected the view of Brahman, and changed it from an undifferentiated Absolute to a more clearly worshipful God. Even the complete monists believed that the world and souls had some reality, in Brahman, though they were not eternally separate. Modified non-dualism tried to have the best of both worlds, which is perhaps not a bad thing. It pointed a way between extremes, in attempting to give some account of the relationships between the infinite God and limited man with his immortal soul, relationships which are finally indescribable.

These notions may seem strange to Christianity which, it is often said, insists upon the utter difference of God and man, both in degree and in kind. There is no doubt that this is taught in various kinds of Calvinism, but there are other strands in Christian thought. If God is mind, and man more than body, then there may be a kinship between God and man, however much veiled in man by ignorance and evil. In the New Testament there are phrases like ‘partakers of the divine nature’, ‘in him we live and move and have our being’, and ‘abide in me and I in you’. These suggest a much closer relationship with God than with one who is ‘wholly other’. With the Old Testament behind them Christian teachers have rarely dared to speak in monistic fashion of ‘identity’ with God, but many mystics have sought ‘union’ with him.
CHAPTER FOUR

TRINITY AND PERSONALITY

Belief in the Trinity is one of the most difficult Christian doctrines. At first sight it might seem that the Jews and Muslims had won, in their insistence that God is one and alone. Yet not merely the Cabbalistic mystics, but the great Talmud itself bears witness that Jews down the ages have believed not only in God ‘up above’, but also in his Shechinah or ‘dwelling’ among men, in the temple, in the law courts, and even where an individual sits alone to study the Law. And in Islam the gulf between the transcendent God and man is bridged by the Sufi mystics in showing how God deals with men in love, while the 99 Beautiful Names of God are recited daily on prayer beads by the devout. There is diversity in the divine nature and personal relationships are possible with God.

On the other hand Christian teaching has appeared so difficult that ordinary people have often veered between unitarianism and tritheism. The language may seem puzzling, as the Athanasian creed admits: ‘there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated: but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible’. The plain man may think this meaningless, but as J. S. Bezzant says, ‘in spite of difficulties, orthodoxy remains monotheistic and logical in asserting that God is one and therefore in being modalistic’. That is to say, that God reveals himself in different modes. In popular devotion, however, this is
not enough, and 'the tri-unity of God is spoken of in language which renders it indistinguishable from tri-
theism'.

In any religion there is concern with the relationships of man and God or the spiritual world. This may lead to extreme language in some kinds of devotion, and the idea of the divine may be over-personalized. This might be justified if we thought God to be concerned only with human life, but that is impossible since God is always held to be the creator or ground of the universe, and so much more than a person in touch with persons. The idea of Brahman or the world-ground reminds us that God is not a 'Daddy up aloft', but is far beyond all personal categories. Yet he must include that which communicates personally with men, and hence personal devotions can be justified.

Dr Robinson criticizes a popular view of God as 'a Person, who looks down at this world which he has made and loves from "out there"'. However, he says that 'classical Christian theology has not in fact spoken of God as "a person" (partly because the term was already pre-
empted for the three "persons" of the Trinity). Yet it seems that popular Christianity has posited such a supreme personality, a highest person, a transcendent being wholly other than man, dwelling in majesty. But later Dr Robinson seeks to use the concept of personality without speaking of a personal God. 'To say that "God is personal" is to say that "reality at its very deepest level is personal", that personality is of ultimate significance in
the constitution of the universe, that in personal relations-
ships we touch the final meaning of existence as nowhere else.' And Feuerbach is quoted to the effect that 'to predi-
cate personality of God is nothing else than to declare personality as the absolute essence'.

*Objections, p. 103.  
† Honest to God, pp. 39f., 48f.
This might mean nothing more than that human beings are important, and that any notion we may have of the divine is coloured by the experience of social relationships. The natural world may give some ideas of a spiritual reality, of a creator or divine artist. But nature is cold and unconcerned, and personality comes from human life. And the bishop goes further still, to assert a relationship of love. 'To believe in God as love means to believe that in pure personal relationship we encounter, not merely what ought to be, but what is, the deepest, veriest truth about the structure of reality. . . . Belief in God is the trust, the well-nigh incredible trust, that to give ourselves to the uttermost in love is not to be confounded but "accepted", that Love is the ground of our being, to which ultimately we "come home".'

This is said to be a tremendous act of faith, in face of all the evidence. And indeed it is. For personal relationships teach all manner of things. In this century the easy optimism and trust in human nature of the last century, has given way to a recognition of the evil that is also in man. The most extensive massacres of all history took place in educated Germany in the 1940's, and there have been plenty of tortures, brain-washings, and murders elsewhere. As Tillich says, 'we have looked more deeply into the mystery of evil than most generations before us; we have seen the unconditional devotion of millions to a satanic image; we feel our period's sickness unto death'.

The belief in God as love, in gracious personal relationship with man, comes not from every kind of relationship, but from the saints and sufferers, and supremely from Christ. This must be considered later, in the next chapter on Incarnation. Let us first see what India has said about diversity and personality in God.
One of the most famous of the countless great religious sculptures of India is the massive stone Trimurti, in the caves on Elephanta Island opposite Bombay. The central figure is a colossal three-faced statue, nineteen feet high, the Tri-murti or three-formed god. The central face is Brahma the creator, the left face Rudra the destroyer, and the right one Vishnu the preserver. But all three are manifestations of one God, in this case the great Shiva. So India has seen diverse manifestations and activities of the divine yet with an underlying unity.

It was said earlier that the many gods of the Aryan Indians, sung about in the Vedic hymns, are reduced to unity in the Upanishads. How many gods are there? One, they call him Brahman. Hardly had this unification been accomplished, however, before the Indian philosophers were faced with the resurgence of far more powerful deities in infinite diversity.

Early European students of Indian religion were struck by the contrast between the rarefied philosophy of the Upanishads and the lush polytheism of the masses today, seen in the countless temples and wayside shrines, with their images and symbols of gods who are hardly or never mentioned in the Vedas. This was sometimes explained as a decline from a purer religion of the Brahmins, to a corruption of the people which arose later, no one knew how. But since the excavations in the Indus valley in the 1920’s it has been widely considered that the ancient religion there suppressed went underground for centuries but rose again and mingled with the religion of the invaders to remain to this day; so hard is it to kill a religion.

In the Indus valley there existed great cities contemporary with ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. About 1500 B.C. (around the time of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt) Aryan people from central Asia came
through the Himalayan passes and poured down into the plains of the river Indus in north-east India. The Aryans had recently domesticated the horse and they were warriors, but otherwise lower in culture than the people they conquered for they seem to have been illiterate and ignorant of many peaceful arts. No remains of their buildings or sculptures have remained till those made a thousand years after their conquest.

The ancient Indus people had walled cities, houses with sanitation, and great granaries. They had a form of writing which is still undeciphered. Small images representing their gods survive, particularly female figures, and a few pictures of a horned figure sitting cross-legged like a modern yogi or ascetic or some later gods.

Towards the end of the Upanishads, and in the Bhagavad Gita, personal gods reappear. They flourish profusely in the Great Epic (of which the Gita is a small part), and in later Puranas or traditional tales. Here the greatest gods are Vishnu, Shiva and the Great Goddess, and to this day these three are the greatest deities of India. Many Hindus call all of them manifestations of one God or Brahman.

Vishnu was first of all a Vedic god, who has a few hymns dedicated to him. His chief characteristic was that he took three great strides across the universe, earth, air and sky, and so was a great god of light. But there seems to have been little else to mark out Vishnu from other Vedic gods, and the reason why he became so much more important later, while other mighty gods like Indra declined, is perhaps because Vishnu came to be associated with avatars, ‘descents’ or incarnations. Some of these, notably Krishna and Rama, possibly old Indus gods or heroes, were very popular and have remained so to this day. More will be said about them in the next chapter.

The Great Goddess is the female principle, venerated
under many names: Parvati, Uma, Shakti, Durga, Kali. In ancient images she is a mother figure, and in later imagery she is black, perhaps coming from the black Indus people. Sometimes she is a fearful figure, a destroyer, and triumphing even over her husband Shiva. But she is also gracious, the Mother, who gives children to the barren, heals the sick, and cares for her devotees. Here India saw the power both of life and destruction, and gave the female half of humanity its representation along with the male. In devotion the Mother has been a favourite for centuries, and modern holy men like Rama-krishna and Tagore have sung her praises: ‘Mother, I shall weave a chain of pearls for thy neck... Wealth and fame come from thee.*

Shiva, the ‘great god’ (Maha-deva), creator and destroyer, is called ‘lord of yogis’, like his prototype in the remains of the Indus culture. The name is used as an adjective, shiva, ‘auspicious’, in the later Upanishads, but before long it denotes the personal deity who for many is the Great God.

These are the great deities of traditional and modern India, each supreme to millions of devotees, and in addition there are countless other gods and goddesses with their followers. But it may be asked what interest this extreme polytheism can have for a modern Christian who is trying to get rid of spatial ideas of one God, let alone the extravagant mythology of thousands. Following on the Jewish battle for monotheism, Christians have always, in theory at least, opposed polytheism and any modification of the unity of God. Tillich has pointed out that the beauty of the Greek gods and their statues did not impress the early Christians. But in return the educated followers of Greek polytheism accused the Jewish-Christians of atheism, because they seemed to deny the divine presence

in every realm of being. In time Christians not only came to speak of qualities of the divine such as the Wisdom, Word and Glory of God, but they saw angels and demons in nature, and admitted hosts of saints and martyrs to high honour. So polytheistic influences were accepted, while trying to reconcile them with monotheism. Even today, says Tillich, the struggle continues between those who romanticize nature and give it artistic expression, and those who would profane nature completely and use it as a mere tool of human purposes.*

However, the Hindu gods are not simply suggestive as personifying elements of nature. They serve a more useful purpose in showing that personal relationships with God cannot be long excluded even from the most refined philosophical approach to religion, and this throws light on discussions about a personal God, or personality in God, in Christian theology. Having merged many gods into one neuter Brahman, the Upanishads then gradually had to give place to more personal terms, in which grace and faith could flourish as they cannot in the purely impersonal and abstract concepts of deity. The Katha Upanishad speaks of Brahman-atman, 'smaller than the small, greater than the great, set in the heart of the creature here'. But it then proceeds to say that one becomes freed from sorrow 'when through the grace of the creator he beholds the greatness of the soul'.

This verse occurs also in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, which considerably expands the idea. Here the one God is identified with Rudra, a storm god of the Vedas but soon to become another name for Shiva. 'Rudra, with thy body which is kindly (shiva) appear to us.' And again, 'the One who rules all the worlds, who stands alone in their arising and their continued existence... truly Rudra is the one'.

* Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, p. 85f.
This personal nature of God is indicated by calling him the Lord (Ish or Ishvara). ‘By knowing him as Lord men become immortal.’ This is not just a personal deity, far away in the sky, for in India he is always immanent also. ‘He who dwells in the heart of all things, all-pervading is he and bountiful, therefore omnipresent and kindly (shiva).’ And again, ‘he indeed is the protector of this world in time, the overlord of all, hidden in all things. By knowing him thus, one cuts the cords of death’.

The personal idea of God ensured a view of the universe as ruled by intelligence: ‘Some discourse of inherent nature, others likewise of time. Deluded men! He by whom this whole world is constantly enveloped is intelligent, the author of time, possessor of qualities, omniscient’. Such a God, rather than a blind force, can be worshipped: ‘worship him as the manifold, the origin of all being, the adorable God who abides in one’s own thoughts, the primeval’.*

The relationship of man to God, of the individual to the universal soul, is set out in a charming picture, taken from the Rig Veda and given a deeper meaning in two Upanishads. Two birds, constant companions, cling to the same tree. One eats the sweet figs, while the other looks on motionless. The first is the active individual soul, the other is the universal Lord; when the soul sees the Lord he is content and free from sorrow.†

But even more important for religion is the grace of God, his concern for his creature. The neuter Brahman, while all-pervading and intelligent, could hardly be credited with attributes like grace and compassion. The wise man, the scholar rather than the saint, was his true follower who sought to become equally detached from all the affairs of life, living beyond good and evil, care or

* Shvetashvatara, 6, 1-5.
† Ibid., 4, 6f.
concern. There is a hint of grace in the Upanishads, but becomes explicit in the Bhagavad Gita.

In the Gita the avatar Krishna reveals himself to the warrior Arjuna at the latter’s request. In a great theophany Krishna appears as Vishnu, all the gods, the universal Lord, the everlasting Person, as time, being, not-being, the primal one, the supreme, the great Godhead. At this manifold vision Arjuna is terrified and beseeches Krishna to appear again in his limited personal avatar form, and the Lord has pity on him and consoles him. The next chapter then debates whether the search for God as Manifest or Unmanifest is better, and it decides that the way of the Unmanifest is too hard. The highest path to the knowledge of God is that of devotion and love (bhakti). Both paths are permissible, but devotion is open to both sexes and all classes of society, and moreover it reveals the innermost nature of God.

For God, though transcendent, is not unmoved by the needs of his devotees. They are ‘dear to me’, ‘well beloved of me’, and finally ‘positively desired of me’. So love to God, and God loving man, became an open way in India. This led to a great flowering of mystical devotion, often expressed in erotic lines where the soul is compared to a woman beloved of Krishna and united to him. Love verses were given a spiritual meaning, as both the Jewish and the Christian churches interpreted the frankly sensuous wedding poems of the Song of Solomon, as the love of God for Israel and Christ for his church.

The great ‘modified non-dualist’ philosopher Ramanuja read into the grace of Krishna to Arjuna the love of God for the soul which satisfied a need of the divine itself. ‘Whoever loves me beyond measure, him will I love beyond measure. Unable to endure separation from him, I cause him to possess me . . . Just as he who approaches me as his ultimate aim cannot maintain himself without
me, so I too cannot maintain myself without him. Thus he is my very soul.*

The involvement of God in the world was affirmed in the devotional schools, though no doubt teachers would say that behind the avatar was the infinite divine. God was not just a person, but within his infinitude personal relationships could be established. Even the monist Shankara found it hard to empty personal concepts from religion. He composed hymns which are prayers: 'O Krishna . . . ward off from us rebirth and re-death . . . Chant religious songs more than a thousand times, think always of the form of Vishnu . . . Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, deluded man'.†

Shankara also accepted a complex formula Being-Awareness-Bliss (sat-chit-ananda, or sacchidananda) as descriptive of Brahman, which shows plurality or differentiation within the Godhead. In the Taittiriya Upanishad Brahman had been called 'real-knowledge-infinite', placed in the secret place of the heart and in the highest heaven. This was expanded into Being-Awareness-Bliss and accepted by all the Vedanta schools. So Brahman was not just an abstraction, or a neutral force of evolution, but a living divinity whose being could include differentiation.

With Ramanuja, Madhva, and the devotional schools this went much further, to an assertion of the eternal play of love between man and God who is 'the one ocean of tenderness to all who resort to him'. But even the more philosophical monists could not resist accepting the plurality of Being-Awareness-Bliss. And this corresponds, as R. C. Zaechner has pointed out, with the Christian faith in Being-Logos-Love, or Father-Son-Spirit. Despite

* Quoted in Zaechner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, p. 197.
great differences of approach and emphasis, there is a valid comparison here between Christian and Hindu teaching. If Christians today have lost their nerve, as Philip Toynbee has suggested, in face of the new outlook on the universe, they may take comfort from the fact that the most thorough-going attempts in India at depersonalizing the deity failed before the insistent demands of religion.
CHAPTER FIVE

INCARNATION AND AVATAR

For many people the most disturbing part of the bishop of Woolwich's book was not his attack on the image of God as an old man in the sky, but his description of the Incarnation as the 'invasion' of the world by Christ from 'out there'. Perhaps to those who are used to the critical study of the Bible, and have adjusted their thought to Bultmann's de-mythologizing the Gospel story, this may not seem so devastating a notion as the bishop's suggestion of living without God, in the negative Bonhoeffer phrase, without Bonhoeffer's positive assertion of the claims of the God of the Bible.

Nevertheless the bishop's broadsides on the traditional views of the Incarnation were searching. They suggest, he said, 'that Jesus was really God almighty walking about on earth, dressed up as a man... He looked like a man, he talked like a man, he felt like a man, but underneath he was God dressed up—like Father Christmas... God took a space-trip and arrived on this planet in the form of a man. Jesus was not really one of us; but through the miracle of the Virgin Birth he contrived to be born so as to appear one of us. Really he came from outside'..

The bishop admits that this is a parody, and 'probably an offensive one'. It is just that, for many people. But it is possible to disentangle some of the strands of argument.

*Honest to God, p. 66.
That Jesus came from out there, from a God who was up above, is a notion that need not detain us any longer, for belief in the immanence of God cuts the ground from underneath the argument. Yet it is still common to hear preachers and broadcasters at Christmas time talking of God 'coming into' human life, 'visibly intervening', and of Christ 'descending'.

More serious is the common 'docetism', the notion that Jesus only 'appeared' to be a man. Wren-Lewis has said that while modernist clergy have rejected the Virgin Birth as a stumbling-block because the ordinary person, they imagine, thinks of Jesus just as a good man, yet in fact for ordinary people, even non-churchgoers, 'the commonest vision of Jesus was not as a human being at all. He was a God in human form, full of supernatural knowledge and miraculous power, very much like the Olympian gods were supposed to be when they visited the earth in disguise'.

The New Testament and Christian orthodoxy have always insisted that Jesus was truly human, the Word of God, yet made 'flesh'. But the idea of God and man as two beings with utterly contrasted natures leads easily to the view of Jesus as a God-man 'who chooses in every respect to live like the natives . . . the prince who appears in the guise of a beggar. However genuinely destitute the beggar may be, he is a prince; and that in the end is what matters'.

Jesus is called Son of God by New Testament writers, but this term has now lost so much of its original meaning of divinely-decreed Messiah, that it is questionable whether it is not more of a hindrance than a help. Already in the seventh century Muhammad repudiated this term strongly, perhaps because it suggested to him a physical begetting of Jesus by God on Mary, in the

* Honest to God, p. 66.  
† Ibid., p. 67.
manner of the pagan Arabian gods and Zeus in Greek myth. This was a notion that early Christianity had to combat in the Greek world. Yet strangely enough Muhammad accepted the teaching of the Virgin Birth, but he explained the conception of Jesus as simply happening by the mighty command of God; he said 'Be', and it was. Some modern Muslim commentators regard this as referring to a normal birth, which would be used by God for his mission.

It is probable that Jesus never used the title Son of God about himself, for it had too many associations of political messiahship as expected by the Jews of his time. His own name for himself was Son of Man, which identified him with the community and gave a hint of his sufferings. The New Testament also never clearly calls Jesus 'God'. It regards him as the Word or Son of God, and Lord, but to say 'God' seems to imply God the Father or the whole Trinity. The Basis of the World Council of Churches which declares that Jesus Christ is 'God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures' (the latter phrase added at the request of the Norwegian state church) is ambiguous, if not heretical.

Several attempts are made in the New Testament to interpret the significance and nature of Christ. But a common argument now made that Jesus claimed to be God, and therefore must either be God or a liar, has no foundation. This is not said by Jesus or about him in the Bible. Rather the biblical writers look at the significance of Jesus in terms of his work. John's Gospel speaks of him as the Word (Logos). In the Old Testament the Word of God had been the means of creation, 'by the word of God the heavens were made'. And so John says that 'all things were made through him'. He then goes on to say that the Word 'became flesh' in Jesus Christ. This is the Incarnation (in flesh) of the Word of God in man.
A parallel interpretation had been given by Paul in Philippians 2. Christ ‘emptied himself’ and became man even to the extreme of death, and the shameful death on a gallows. This ‘self-emptying’ (kenosis) has been taken by modern theologians to indicate the full humanity of Jesus. Jesus was limited in power and in knowledge, he was ignorant of things outside normal human experience and could also make mistakes, for example about the authorship of the Psalms, and he could truly suffer, be desolate, and die.

But still the tendency is to look for explanations, rather than consider what Jesus really said and did. If Jesus never claimed to be God he revealed God, not only in his fine moral and religious teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, but in his compassion and healings, in his life and death. So he disclosed God in a fully human medium. As Tillich says, ‘The question of the final revelation is the question of a medium of revelation which overcomes its own finite conditions by sacrificing them, and itself with them. He who is the bearer of the final revelation must surrender his finitude—not only his life but also his finite power and knowledge and perfection... He becomes completely transparent to the mystery he reveals’. In other words, Jesus not only laid no claim to divine power and knowledge, but not to all human powers either, and by this double self-denial God is seen perfectly in him.

If it is claimed that love is ultimate in the universe, and that this is the ‘deepest truth about the structure of reality’, it is because of Jesus. It may be so ‘in face of all the evidence’, of the natural world, of sin, suffering, disaster, cruelty and despair. But it is ‘that strange man upon the cross’ who shows love despite all appearances. As Bonhoeffer says, having swept away religiosity, and

*S systematic theology, i, p. 148.
notions of God as a stop-gap, 'Christians range themselves with God in his suffering . . . It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world'.

It is not claimed here that every Christian doctrine can be paralleled in Hinduism or explained by its concepts. The most distinctive Christian contributions to the world are those that are unique. Christianity depends on Jesus, though Jesus was a Jew and a background of non-distinctively Christian teaching is present and fundamental. Moreover, in formulating its doctrines of Incarnation Christian teaching drew on Greek and non-Jewish ideas also.

Yet there are more parallels with Hinduism than are often thought. It is strange that while some clergy have been explaining away the Incarnation, many laymen have taken to the Indian idea of Avatars with remarkable ease. So common is this notion that the word Avatar has entered into our dictionaries.

An Avatar is a descent, a 'down-coming' (ava-tara), partly in the spatial sense of a deity descending from heaven. But the word is used generally of any distinguished person as a disclosure of the divine, and of any new and unusual appearance. It is the manifestation of the power of divinity. The Gita says: 'Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, then I send forth myself'.

Avatars do not appear in the Upanishads but in the epics and Purana tales, and they are known most popularly in the appearance of Krishna as the Avatar of Vishnu in the Bhagavad Gita. The Great Epic, of which the Gita forms a small part, says that portions of every deity had appeared on earth, for the celestials had been
commanded by Narayana the father of all, 'be ye born on earth'. The most famous Avatars were of the great creating god Vishnu. There were said to be ten of these, though some held that they were innumerable, 'like rivulets running from a great lake'. Some of the ten Avatars were in animal form, for in India there is always a close connexion between the human and animal worlds; and these avatar-animals performed prodigies for the benefit of the world, such as the fish which saved man in the flood. But three human Avatars are particularly important, because they can be fairly claimed as truly human and historical; these are Rama, Krishna and Buddha. An Avatar to come, an adventist Messiah figure, is Kalki who will appear on a white horse at the end of the iron age to destroy the wicked and renew creation.

Rama was the seventh Avatar of Vishnu, whose story is told briefly in the Great Epic (Maha-bharata) and in more detail in the second epic, Rama-yana, 'the story of Rama'. To rid the world of a demon called Ravana, Vishnu appeared to Dasha-ratha, king of the solar race, and gave him a pot of nectar, and after his wife had drunk it she brought forth Rama of the divine essence. After this mythical birth, however, the story of Rama is quite human. Defrauded of his inheritance to the throne Rama retired to exile in the forest for fourteen years, with his faithful wife Sita. Sita was abducted by Ravana and taken off to Ceylon, whence after many adventures Rama rescued her and killed the demon. Rama was then restored to his throne where he lived happily with Sita, until he finally walked into a river, was hailed by a divine voice and entered into the glory of Vishnu.

Indians believe this story to be historical, in its main features at least, and to have taken place in the regions of Ayodhya or Benares, though critical historians think it impossible to date or locate Rama precisely. But the
story of Rama and Sita has furnished models of heroic
and chaste living, which never became mingled with the
fertility myths of some other cults. Devotional writers,
and later translations of the Rama story, gave impetus to
the worship of Vishnu under the Avatar of Rama, and
he has countless worshippers today. The salutation 'Ram'
is very common, and his name is chanted at funerals.

The most widely popular Avatar is Krishna, the eighth
of Vishnu. A mass of myth and legend gathers round
him, particularly in the Great Epic, the Purana tales, and
later devotional poetry. The mixed character of Krishna
shows that the stories about him were composed of dif-
ferent elements. The name means 'black' and it is a fair
assumption that Krishna was a god of the darker Indus
valley or forest people whose great popularity led to his
being adopted eventually by the Aryan Indians also, by
association with Vishnu as an Avatar. In popular stories
Krishna was born from a hair of Vishnu that entered his
mother's womb, and he was brought up by cowherds. In
his childhood he played many naughty pranks, and at a
later age sported with the cowgirls, one of them, Radha,
becoming his special paramour. In medieval poetry all
this was made into symbolism of the love of God for man.

In the Great Epic Krishna is different, without the
erotic element, but still complex. There are several state-
ments of opposition to his cult, apparently by some of the
Aryan tribes. The main subject of the epic is the great
war that took place near Delhi. Here Krishna appears to
help the Pandu clan in its struggle against the Kurus.
Krishna plays various roles, and appears especially in the
Bhagavad Gita section of the epic as the charioteer of
the warrior Arjuna. After his self-revelation he is called
'the supreme universal spirit, the highest dwelling, the
eternal person, divine, prior to the gods, unborn, omni-
present'. So magnified is Krishna that he is virtually
identified with Vishnu, and in the devotion of millions of people to this day it is Krishna who is practically the sole deity.

The Great Epic is the longest poem in the world and contains legend and myth, as well as moral teaching and history. But what history there is can hardly be dated, for the story is like the Iliad or the legends of King Arthur. Yet few Indians doubt that Krishna really existed on earth as a human being. He was truly born, of a human mother, Devaki; he grew up as child, youth, man and king. Finally he was killed by being shot unintentionally with an arrow. Although there is great diversity and confusion in the stories, yet the human life of Krishna is accepted. During the manifestation of Krishna as divine, Arjuna explains in surprise that the one whom he had called comrade, playing, jesting, eating and resting with him as a man, is yet also lord of heaven, filling all things, and is indeed the All.

Both Rama and Krishna, then, are regarded as human and historical Avatars of Vishnu. This humanity and historicity are confirmed by the addition of the Buddha as the ninth Avatar of Vishnu in Hindu teaching. Buddhism arose and flourished in India, from about the fifth century B.C., as a new religion or way of life, against the Hindu background yet rejecting many Hindu ideas. The countless Hindu gods were denied or ignored, or at least were put on a lower level than the Buddhas who were supreme. This was understandable against the gross polytheism and sacrificial system at that time. Some Hindu gods do appear in Buddhist story, however, notably the personal Brahmā and Indra, and in Ceylon to this day most Buddhist temples contain images of Vishnu and Indra among many Buddha images. But of the impersonal Brahman there is no trace in Buddhism, and no discussion of monism or dualism. The great
Upanishadic debates on the divine and the soul were passed by, if they were known publicly.

Buddhism spread so widely for over a thousand years that the Hindu leaders had to do something about it. So, by a subtle stroke of inclusion, the Buddha was said to be an Avatar of Vishnu. He had appeared, it was said, to encourage wicked men to despise the Vedas, reject caste, and deny the existence of the gods, and thus the wicked and demons would bring about their own destruction.

What is significant in this argument is that the Buddha was indisputably a historical figure, who had lived as a real man, however much he was later glorified. It came to pass in India that the devotional cults of Vishnu, under the Avatars of Rama and Krishna, became so popular that Buddhism was largely re-absorbed into Hinduism. Buddhism had been strongly monastic and suffered from that restriction. Its lay following developed real worship of the Buddha, in the absence of God, but in time the more religious appeal of Hinduism made itself felt and Buddhism declined. The final blows were delivered by the Muslim invasions, when Buddhist temples and monasteries, along with many others that contained images, were destroyed. And so Buddhism disappeared from the land of its origin. It grew and spread elsewhere, however, and flourished in Ceylon, Burma, and South-east Asia where the local religions were not powerful enough intellectually and devotionally to combat it, and so it remains there to this day.

It is curious that Buddhism itself, though it largely ignored the gods, and the idea of Avatars, came to accept a belief that is comparable. It is common in the West to talk of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama of the fifth century B.C. But for all Buddhists he was only a Buddha, even though he is the Buddha for this present age. Some say that there were twenty-four previous Buddhas, and
some many more, revealed through countless ages. The next Buddha to come, Maitreya, is expected by all Buddhists. The vast time scale of these stories is truly astronomical, but the historicity of the Buddhas as they appear is not doubted, nor the continuity of the process. In 1956 the Southern or Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhists of South-east Asia celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of the attainment of final Nirvana by Gautama Buddha. Many believe that the next Buddha is about to be revealed, and signs of this are seen in the degeneration of modern times and the neglect of truth.

Buddhist story is rich in legend about Gautama Buddha. The Jataka (‘birth’) tales give 547 previous births of the Buddha in animal and human form. In his last and final birth the Buddha entered his mother’s womb as a white elephant, and as soon as the child was born, being caught by gods in a golden net, the babe took seven steps, and roared in a lion’s voice, ‘I am the chief in the world’. Many legends accompany the Buddha in his youth, renunciation, enlightenment, and wanderings till his death or passing into the Nirvana of no return at the age of eighty. These stories are told in all Buddhist countries, yet underneath them it is possible to see a teacher of great power, troubled by the suffering of the world and seeking a way out of it, who has been called the greatest son of India.

It may be asked what, if anything, Christianity can learn from these ideas of Avatars and Buddhas. And no doubt the first thing is to make quite sure what the Gospel and the other stories imply, and not make unjustifiable assertions. It has often been said that the Christian Incarnation is historical, whereas all others are mythical. And it is true that the secular historian may feel that the Gospel is more like history as we understand it, because the Jews felt history to be important, and had
written historical books for centuries. But the historian may also feel that there is legend in the Christian story which needs to be de-mythologized. And it is clear that some of the Avatars have strong claims to historicity, notably Rama, Krishna and Buddha. At least their human lives are believed to be real and not illusory.

Christian theology teaches that the Incarnation is unique, in the sense that Christ came 'once for all'. But the Epistle to the Hebrews which invented this phrase, places Christ firmly in the succession of prophets and angelic messengers. 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son'. And, according to the New Testament, the human life of Christ is not the only time that he will appear. Little is made nowadays, apart from a few small sects, of the ancient teaching of the Second Coming. But this is still confessed in the daily offices: 'we believe that thou shalt come', and 'from thence he shall come'. This has been interpreted in many ways in the course of Christian history, but it could at least be suggested that at his next coming Christ will be as hard to recognize as he was before. It will hardly be maintained, in the light of modern physical knowledge, that he will appear on the clouds 'up there'. This is a suggestion only, of possibilities in traditional teaching, but it might be worth working out more fully. There is a great deal of doctrine that needs re-expressing in the light of the new knowledge available today.

The significance of Jesus needs to be interpreted afresh for this generation, and it must be done in the full view of the other religions. In days gone by it was customary to quote the Biblical miracles as evidence, if not proof positive, of the divinity of Jesus. But Hinduism and Buddhism each tell of far more abundant miracles and
wonders, in the births and lives of their Avatars and Buddhas. And the modern critical or scientific view of miracles may bring a reminder of the constant objections of Jesus himself to those who sought signs from heaven: ‘there shall be no sign given to this generation’.

Does this mean that a purely human view of Jesus, as championed by the Unitarians, is adequate for Christian doctrine and devotion? It might seem to be so, from the difficulties that some modern theologians put in the way of re-interpretation of the old Christology. Yet there are interesting objections to this from India itself. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, in an address given on Christmas Day, said: ‘I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by some one that the man Jesus never lived, and that what was related in the Gospels was a figment of the writer’s imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me’.

Few Western Christians would agree with this dismissal of the historical life of Jesus, which would make an ‘imitation of Christ’ impossible. The fact of Jesus must be held, even if some of the details are blurred. Yet the greatness of Jesus lay not just in the fact that he lived, but in what he said and was. What he taught, however paralleled in odd verses in other religions, is such a quintessence of religious teaching that it exalts him to a very high, if not the highest, place. Then his life, love, compassion to the sick and outcast, and his dying, all are further pointers to his worldwide significance. Certainly these have gained for Jesus the reverence of multitudes today, far beyond the bounds of the Christian church, a fact that theologians might take into account.

If Jesus is compared with other revelations of the divine, it must be in his teaching and actions. But instead of trying to prove his supremacy by denying or denigrat-
ing all other revelations, it would be closer to his spirit to
discover and welcome whatever elsewhere is not against
him, and share whatever he is believed to have brought
of the light and love of God. For Incarnation, Avatar and
Buddha all reveal something of the essential nature of
spiritual reality. And because of this they have been wor-
shipped and adored in Christian, Hindu and Buddhist
devotion. A God 'up there', a hypothesis to explain
creation, or a characterless Brahman everywhere, are not
enough for human needs, nor do they reveal that love is
the heart of the universe. This needs an Incarnation or
Revelation which, however explained, is essential to
religious devotion. Any reconstruction of theology which
leaves this out of account will be too cold ever to influence
religion. The experience of other religions can serve as a
pointer to the development of Christian theology, and so
these religions deserve more serious and tolerant study
than they have received in the past.

Devotion seeks to establish relationships with God,
personified in the Incarnation. That God acts in human
life, challenges evil and speaks in conscience is the whole
view of the Bible. It needs to be said that this speaking
is within, for firework displays on Mounts Sinai and
Carmel must be de-mythologized, but that does not in-
validate the religious experience of Moses and Elijah,
though no doubt the quieter voices of Jeremiah are more
to modern taste. That God speaks most clearly in the love
of Jesus is the Christian faith, and from here devotion to
Christ began. The re-construction of doctrines of the
Incarnation would do well to return there, with the devo-
tion of the early Christians to the Jesus they knew.
CHAPTER SIX

SURVIVAL, REINCARNATION, NIRVANA

If the idea of a God ‘up there’ is out of date, even more so is the notion that when we die we ‘go’ up there to him. Similarly the notion that God in the person of his Son will one day ‘come again’ to gather the faithful into the clouds is no longer tenable. So says the bishop of Woolwich, and however much objection may be taken to some of his statements, few would deny that many Christians have consciously abandoned or slowly neglected the old symbolism about heaven.

If this is so for heaven, it may be illustrated even more in the doctrine of hell. ‘In the old scheme, hell was “down there” . . . But a localized hell gradually lost more and more of its purchase over the imagination, and revivalist attempts to stoke its flames did not succeed in restoring its power.’* Even by Shakespeare’s time the notion of a literal hell under the earth seems to have weakened, though the old metaphors were still used. Milton appears to have taken hell literally, but the great Miltonic debate that is going on today is due to the inability of the modern mind to accept Milton’s symbolism, let alone his idea of God, in spite of the majesty of his verse.

The bishop thinks it a ‘tragedy’ that the Devil and his angels, the bottomless pit and the lake of fire, have tended to drop out of popular Christianity altogether,

* Honest to God, p. 16f.
and that this has been much to the detriment of the depth of Christianity. But if the symbolism is outworn it is no use pushing it further down, or inventing a rather more distant hell ‘out there’ in unexplored space. The whole concept of evil needs reshaping. This century cannot dismiss evil as a mere negation, an absence of good, for it has seen torture, sadistic cruelty, and mass murder on a scale unequalled in history. As Tillich says, ‘we have looked more deeply into the mystery of evil than most generations before us; we have seen the unconditional devotion of millions to a satanic image’. Hell is not outside, it is inside; not in a Devil but in the human mind. For Freud said that in the unconscious mind ‘hate rages unrestrainedly . . . censored wishes seem to rise up from a veritable hell’. And when the restraints of religion and morality are taken off the conscious life, then not merely the bestial but the diabolical elements in man all too easily assert themselves.

The late Dean Inge wrote years ago that the greatest change in Christian preaching in his lifetime was the virtual disappearance of references to ‘the other world’, meaning life after death, heaven and hell. It is said that Victorian preachers would dangle souls over the edge of the pulpit, so to speak, as if pulling them in and out of the infernal flames. Hymns were mild if they simply said, ‘I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home’. More morbid verses in hymn books till quite recently told one to contemplate the green mounds in the churchyard and those within them. While mawkish sentiment reached an all time bottom in the hymn about little Willie who said he would like to die, ‘if my papa would die too’. Apparently father was too keen on business to accept this invitation, but Sunday School children lamented his worldliness and gloated over godly Willie.

The Pilgrim’s Progress was once second only to the
Bible as a guide through this vale of tears to the heavenly land. Who reads it today? For to some of its fine simple language must be contrasted not only wearisome passages of exhortation, but also the whole picture of a miserable earthly life, and salvation by flight from wife and family, to struggle eventually to the rather sugary celestial city.

Today the change from all this has brought strange reactions, thanatophobia (fear of talking about death), the use of taboos and euphemisms. It is done to speak of ‘passing away’ and not of dying, just as people refer to ‘the one above’ or the ‘great architect’, and not bluntly to God. The old symbols have been exploded, and heaven is not in the clouds where the righteous fly around for ever playing harps. The Russians and Americans have been up there and found nothing. The old hope, they say, was pie in the sky when you die.

Yet either there is pie or there is not. Not merely fears and superstitions have to be faced, but the fact that it is not known what lies beyond death. ‘What dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause’. J. S. Bezzant says that the young are not much interested in this, ‘and rightly so’. It is unhealthy for youth to be troubled about another life when they have not long begun this, but older people are likely to be more concerned. If present conduct shapes the soul or personality, and that soul survives in some form, then it is a matter of concern. That the modern West is less concerned with mortality is probably due in large measure to greater security and longevity. In days gone by, and still in most Asian and African lands, life was short, if not ‘nasty and brutish’. There was a high rate of infant mortality. Tropical diseases include most temperate ones, and have deadly varieties of their own, so that the average expectation of life is low. Western man may be little concerned with death till his later years. Accidents may
indeed strike any family, but he hopes it will not be his own. Many diseases are rarely fatal and, like insanity, are hidden from sight in hospitals. We are cushioned against many of the cruelties of life, and a modern Gautama would hardly be so struck with the sight of disease, crippled age and corpses that he would renounce everything to unravel the mystery of suffering. Death comes at the end to us all, but we hope late, painlessly and unconsciously. Only in time of disaster and war do men begin again to speculate on the problem of the hereafter, with which most religions have been concerned.

Talk of life after death may suggest to some people that this is a trick to distract them from present needs. They feel ‘that they are being put off their rights in this world by cheques drawn on the bank of heaven, the solvency of which they greatly doubt’. In the past some churches justified this criticism, by encouraging people to be content with their lot in the hope of a heavenly reward. Yet where conditions were nearly hopeless religion did bring consolation, and Karl Marx not merely said that religion was an opiate for suffering, but also that it was ‘the sob of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world’. And at the same time the reforming and social activities of the church helped to bring about the greatly improved material conditions of today. For Christianity inherited from the Hebrew prophets and Jesus an intense concern with social justice and a hatred of oppression that can never be completely hidden.

There remain intellectual objections to the idea of life after death, feelings of its improbability or impossibility. The knowledge of the dependence of consciousness on the brain, and the injury to personality that harm to the brain can cause, bring questions that are hard to answer. If there is no continuation or connexion of any kind in a

*Objections, p. 92.
future life, then this is a serious challenge to traditional belief. Can religion stand without it?

It is a curious fact that the Old Testament makes little of life after death, though later Judaism remedied this defect. So intent were the Jews upon belief in a transcendent God, says Zahn, that they neglected study of the soul and its immortality which is inherent in the belief that it is derived from the breath or spirit of God. In the greater part of the Old Testament the afterworld was thought to be underground, 'down there', a dark cold place called Sheol, like the Greek Hades. This was a land of no return, a place of oblivion, of which Psalm 88 said that the shades do not praise God or know his 'righteousness in the land of forgetfulness'. And the medium (not a witch) of Endor, like any spiritualist expert, called up Samuel's ghost from the underworld to speak with Saul.

There is no question but that the Hebrews believed in some kind of continued existence after death, for archaeologists have uncovered graves where tools and weapons buried with bodies prove that the dead were thought to have a use for them in the world below. But it was an unattractive prospect, and most Hebrews concentrated their thoughts on prolonging life in this world as long as possible. So when the Christian Church looked for a proper Psalm for Easter Day it had to be content with the ambiguous phrasing of Psalm 16, which could suggest deliverance from Sheol after death, or before death. 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days', is the true translation of the favourite Psalm 23 which has become overlaid with Christian interpretation.

Yet it was, after all, shocking to think that there could be a realm where the decree of God did not run. Some prophets contested this opinion. Amos declared that God could pull men out of Sheol, and Psalm 139 says more positively that 'if I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou
art there'. But there is little in the rest of the Old Testament. The favourite verse of Job, 'I know that my redeemer liveth, and without my flesh I shall see God', is a very corrupt text whose meaning is disputed. A single verse in Isaiah declares that the 'dead bodies shall arise', but this may refer to the resurgent nation.

Not until the book of Daniel, written in the late Maccabean period, second century B.C., does there appear the only clear statement about a resurrection in the whole of the Old Testament. Here Persian influence may be present, bringing the teaching of Zoroaster on a resurrection. To encourage the dying Maccabean heroes the author of Daniel declares that 'many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life'. Even so, this may still be to a restored life on earth, and not in heaven or an afterworld.

Between the Testaments, Persian and Greek ideas were stirring Jewish thought to fuller consideration of the beyond. So in the New Testament it is seen that the Pharisees, who represented the bulk of the Jews, believed firmly in a resurrection. Only the priestly but worldly Sadducees rejected this belief, because it was not taught in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. This is the significance of the argument in the Gospel where Jesus quoted from Exodus, 'I am the God of Abraham'. Not 'I was', for God is 'not the God of the dead but of the living'.

The Christian church grew out of this background of Pharisaic teaching. But the experience of the disciples of a risen Jesus made them certain of the beyond, and their chief message was 'Jesus and the resurrection'. Whatever the explanation of their experiences, these frightened men were changed into bold evangelists, for this was the 'good news' of 'eternal life' which they offered to Jews and Greeks. This experience crystallized their faith in
Jesus as the promised Messiah and as the Lord to be worshipped. 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

In the teaching of Paul the idea of resurrection was developed and clarified. He held belief in the resurrection to be essential, else 'we are of all men most miserable'. But he went on to use the symbolism of the seed planted and the green blade growing, to show that it was not a resurrection of the same flesh. 'That which you sow, you sow not the body that shall be . . . for this corruption must put on incorruption . . . it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body'. Despite this clear teaching, the 'resurrection of the flesh' was stated in the Apostles' Creed (altered to 'body' in most English translations, conveniently). Many Christians and Muslims have believed that somehow the decayed physical body would be gathered together, by the power of God, and so they have opposed cremation. But to most modern men, as to Hindus and Buddhists, the idea of a resuscitated flesh is repugnant and ridiculous. In any case Paul clearly did not teach this. What he meant by a 'spiritual body' may be disputed, but some kind of personal identity and continuity is implied.

The accounts of the resurrection of Jesus have suggested further problems to modern critical scholars. Emil Brunner says that the empty tomb, like the virgin birth, played 'no part whatsoever in the New Testament as the foundation for faith in the resurrection'.* To speak of the resurrection, as some apologists do, as 'one of the most sure historical facts in the history of the world' is senseless, says Brunner, for it was an experience of believers only and was apprehended by faith. Paul, whose account of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is generally taken to be earlier than the Gospel accounts, places his own

*The Mediator (Lutterworth, 1934), pp. 576, 324.
experience of the risen Lord on the same footing as that of the disciples.

Bultmann, in his de-mythologizing, affirms that the resurrection is a matter of faith, and so is belief in it today, so that one act of faith has as its basis another act of faith. This may be so, but one should know what one is doing. J. S. Bezzant quotes another theologian who stated that 'the resurrection is to be understood neither as outward nor inward, neither mystically nor as a supernatural phenomenon, nor as historical'. He comments that 'if this has any meaning it can only be that the resurrection is not to be understood in any sense'. And if faith claims to be immune from proof then it cannot pretend to prove anything but faith.*

It is a relief to turn from this scanty atmosphere to Bonhoeffer who says that 'the difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and a mythological hope is that the Christian hope sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament'. Jesus and Paul did not simply promise men salvation in a better world beyond the grave, or hold out a refuge in eternity from earthly difficulties, but they offered man a new life here. To die and rise with Christ, according to Paul, was not put off till after death, but was a death to sin and a new life in Christ now.†

Much of later Christian thought was influenced by the book of Revelation which, written to encourage fidelity during Roman persecutions of Christians, was too often taken literally by later ages. This literal interpretation, and application to all ages, was disastrous. Most of our crude ideas of heaven come from this book, whose rich symbolism needs interpreting in the light of the writings

* Objections, p. 90f.
† Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 112f.
of Ezekiel and Daniel. If ever a book needed to be published always with a commentary it is Revelation.

The Gospels themselves say little about life after death, though they assume it as a fact. They speak of 'heaven', as was said earlier, where we should say God or 'the divine'. Jesus occasionally used metaphors such as paradise, Abraham's bosom, and the Messianic banquet, for some future state. He spoke of death as sleep, in the stories of Lazarus and Jairus' daughter, and early Christians also used this metaphor. But that life beyond death is to be imagined as very different from this world is shown in the statement that there 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven'.

'Eternal life' is both a present possession and a goal. In the parable of the judgement it is the lot of the righteous, but is not mere everlastingness. In the Fourth Gospel eternal life is the knowledge of God, a present fact, for 'he that believes him that sent me has eternal life'. Judgement is telescoped into the present and the believer has already 'passed from death into life'. But this is not only due to knowledge and faith, it depends on love. The epistle of John points out that it is hypocrisy to say that you love the unseen God if you do not love the brother whom you have seen. If we do love him then 'we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren'. While, then, Christianity affirms the continuance of life, the resurrection, and the goal of all in the vision of God in heaven, yet it turns men's attention to this life on earth and regards its quality as more important than speculation about the future.

What is there in the great passing-on? How is it that yonder world is not filled up? There is doubt regarding a man deceased; some say he exists, others say he does not
exist; tell me the truth. Such are the problems with which
the Upanishads deal. The questioning Indian mind
pursued many suggestions on life after death; one of the
most popular came to be that of transmigration from one
life to another or reincarnation. Many people in the
West have come to believe in reincarnation, to fill up the
gap caused by the decline of traditional ideas of heaven.
This comes from India and appears first in the Upani-
shads. The first stage is belief in the indestructibility of
the soul.

The Katha Upanishad tells the story of a young man
called Nachiketas who went to the house of Death
like Odysseus and Orpheus in Greek myth and Christ in
later Christian story. Death (Yama) was away when the
boy arrived below, and so on his return granted him
boons to compensate for the lack of hospitality. After two
preliminary questions Nachiketas presses home the real
poser, and will not be put off. 'What is there in the great
passing-on? Even the gods do not know. There is no other
boon equal to this.' Eventually Death reveals the secret,
which is that of the indestructible nature of the soul
(atman): 'the wise one is not born, nor dies. This soul has
not come from anywhere, and has not become anyone.
Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this soul is not slain
when the body is slain'. This means that in man there is
an eternal element which is not 'in' the body, is un-
affected by any actions, and so goes serenely through
births and deaths as 'illusion', the abiding and untouch-
able divine.

This verse of the Katha Upanishad is quoted at a key
point in the Bhagavad Gita and is essential to its thought.
When the warrior Arjuna is filled with foreboding and
concern before the battle, at the thought not only of his
own possible death but the certain death of kinsmen in
this fratricidal war, he is reassured by Krishna. To the
survival, reincarnation, nirvana

compassion of Arjuna over his foes Krishna returns the answer that death is only apparent, or at least it cannot affect any one's immortal soul: 'if the slayer thinks to slay, if the slain thinks himself slain, both of these do not understand; this soul slays not nor is slain'.

There is a slight parallel here to the Gospel saying, 'fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul'. The Gospel is directed towards encouraging constancy in persecution, and it continues to affirm that God can kill both soul and body (Matt. 10, 28). The Gita does not fully answer Arjuna's scruples of compassion, and it is not pacifist, for it proceeds to declare that Arjuna must fight to fulfil his caste duty as a warrior. Nevertheless, beneath the differences, both Gita and Gospel are convinced that there is in man an abiding element which death cannot destroy with the corruption of the body.

In Hinduism the immortality of the soul is taken for granted. The soul had no beginning and will have no end, it pre-existed and so it will post-exist, and its essential nature is untouched by embodiment in this changing world of maya. The earliest Upanishad twice records a conversation of a sage, who is about to die, with his wife who inquires how immortality is gained. His answer is that the soul alone is dear, and is to be sought after and pondered upon. The soul is not this, not this (neti, neti), not to be identified with any object, and not to be defined except by negatives: unseizable, unattached, unbound, indestructible.

The idea of reincarnation or rebirth, passing from one life on earth to another, by a process of transmigration, soon made its appearance in India. Its origins are obscure, since the hymns of the Vedas make no mention of it, and it seems that the priests who composed them had no knowledge of the idea. Therefore it is likely that
the notion of rebirth was an old Indian belief, held before the Aryan conquest by the earlier inhabitants, perhaps those of the great Indus civilization. This belief, or varieties of it, is found in many other parts of the world. Plato mentions it in the story of Er in the last book of his Republic, and he describes how souls before their birth chose their lot according to the experiences of a previous life. In Africa the belief also appears, not usually with a moral significance but to ensure the continuity of the family and its name.

That the Brahmin priests were ignorant of reincarnation is shown by two dialogues in the Upanishads where learned men are puzzled by the questions of a king, who said that this knowledge was restricted to the warrior caste. How is it that yonder world is not filled up with the dead who continually go there? The answer is that they come back to earth. At death men go to the world of the fathers, in upper space, and eventually they return in the clouds, becoming rain, falling on earth, entering into plants, and being eaten as food they enter human bodies again. These rather primitive notions express the idea of perpetual transmigration, going or wandering about (sam-sara) through many states and from death to birth.

A moral note was introduced into belief in rebirth by the statement that the condition of the next life was determined by actions in present existence. The classic verse says that those who are of good conduct here will return to good wombs of women of Brahmin, warrior or merchant castes, the three upper castes. But those whose conduct here is evil will return to an evil womb, of a dog, a hog or an outcaste.* Through evil deeds men sink to the animal or insect level, while by good deeds they rise to the highest castes and eventual liberation.

*Chandogya Upanishad, 5, 10, 7.
The working of rebirth was explained by the idea of Karma. Karma means ‘action’ or ‘deeds’, from a root meaning to make or do. Actions affect destiny. This is a simple observation and an application of the law of cause and effect, and so it is claimed as scientific and moral. Karma explains present joys and sorrows, through supposing that they are the result of previous conduct, the good or bad actions of a former life. This Karma works automatically, and therefore personal tragedy and sufferings here are blamed on a previous earthly existence. This can go beyond religion, and become an iron system in which one can only work out one’s own salvation alone. The Buddhists accepted this logic, but Hindu ideas of divine grace led to modifications which were not clearly developed, though they were present and important. It is sometimes said that the teaching of Karma is pessimistic, but the Upanishads are not so burdened as was early Buddhism with the thought of the misery of existence and the desire to flee away to monastic quiet.

To the Westerner the notion of rebirth may appear speculative, though a number of our poets have toyed with the idea: ‘our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting’, and ‘I have been here before’. Attempts are sometimes made today to prove rebirth by claiming to have memories of previous lives, and in India and Japan some people profess to be able to remember past lives in considerable detail. But in fact the classical Hindu scriptures say nothing of such memories. For them the sole evidence required is the indestructibility of the soul and its procession through the veils of successive earthly embodiments. A parallel might be drawn between this conviction and some modern scientific ideas. The chromosomes of the cells pass through successive generations, though this can hardly mean a reincarnation of the same person. The soul, or the consciousness, is a different thing. Yet if
chemical elements are indestructible, then perhaps mental elements are too. The body may be transmuted, but not utterly annihilated. Then the mind or soul should also be able to survive, though transfigured. It is perhaps along such lines that a new theory of reincarnation needs to be worked out. Transmigration and Karma have been pointing the way to a concept of survival, but they need reshaping by modern thought.

It is significant that belief in rebirth and future bliss survived in Buddhism, though everything seems to have been against it. Gautama Buddha himself seems to have held an agnostic attitude both towards the divine and towards the soul, though this can easily be misunderstood or exaggerated. In the earliest sermon attributed to him the gods are mentioned, yet the enlightened Buddha who has perceived all truth has passed beyond them. Another sermon speaks of the Marks of Non-soul. This proceeds by rejecting form, feeling, perception, impulses and consciousness. None of them are to be identified with the soul, because they are impermanent and subject to sickness. The true disciple loathes the body, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness. By this loathing he becomes free from all passion, and so is liberated from rebirth.

In the fascinating Questions of King Milinda (supposed to be a Greek inquirer into Buddhist doctrine), which is accepted by all Buddhist schools, the nature of the soul is discussed. Man is compared to a chariot, but when the wheels, axle, framework, pole and flagstaff are taken away, there is no chariot left. (Plato might have answered that the ‘idea’ of the chariot remained.) In Buddhist thought the personality is composed of five constituents (skandhas): bodily form, sensation, awareness, impulses and consciousness. When these are taken away the person cannot be found.
How then could Buddhism continue to speak of rebirth? King Milinda asked whether, when a person is reborn, he is the same as the one who has died, or is he another? His Buddhist teacher replies, characteristically, that he is neither the same nor another. A tiny infant is not the same as the man he will grow up to be; are we the same as we were at three years of age, or ten, or eighteen? There is a succession of states of consciousness, each of which is linked with but is different from the last. A flame passes from one candle to another, but it is not the same flame, for the other may still be burning. What then is the link between two successive births? The orthodox Buddhist answer is that the only link is Karma. Because of one’s deeds one is joined again to a new organism. The body indeed dies, and all that goes with it, but the entail of Karma remains and must be worked out in another existence. This is asserted by analogies rather than explained logically.

It seemed that Buddhism not only denied, or rather passed by, Brahman or God, but also that the soul had evaporated too. Some schools did indeed maintain that there was an abiding person or consciousness, but many clung to the non-soul teaching. Yet the logic of this was not pursued. For when it was asked whether the monk in the final bliss of Nirvana had ceased to exist, that was called a wicked idea. The Buddha was ‘in’ Nirvana, the object of adoration to millions of the faithful, and portrayed in countless images in pagodas and temples. To suppose that the Buddha no longer existed was too devastating to be tolerated. Thus the agnosticism of Buddhism had to yield to the demands of religion, and this provides one of the strongest negative witnesses to the power of belief in life after death.

Nirvana was the Buddhist goal, but what is Nirvana? The word means ‘going out’ or ‘blown out’ (nir-\textit{va}; \textit{va}
meaning wind; spelt Nibbana in southern Pali Buddhism). The image of a flame which is blown out symbolizes the cessation or de-spiration. This is often called extinction, but it is not just that. The first aim, in the practical way of Buddhist ethics, is the extinction of desire. The Buddhist analysis of existence is that all life is suffering, suffering is caused by desire, desire will cease with non-attachment, and this can be achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path of moral and spiritual discipline. These four stages of recognizing and combating desire are called the Four Noble Truths, and were the basis of the Buddha’s teaching. His analysis of the cause of all suffering as due to desire may be questioned, as also the ascetic way of loathing all desire, but the moral fervour cannot be denied.

The first steps of ‘going out’ are conquest of bodily and mental passions, all that creates suffering and Karma and hence all that will perpetuate rebirth and bring on a further embodied existence, through the need to work out accumulated Karma. The goal is to get rid of all desire and hence all Karma. Then one becomes fully enlightened, a Buddha, there is no more rebirth, Nirvana is attained. So Gautama declared that he had reached the highest full enlightenment: ‘knowledge arose in me, insight arose that the release of my mind is unshakeable; this is my last existence; now there is no rebirth’.

Those Europeans who are attracted by the Indian idea of rebirth often fail to notice that Indians themselves may speak of the round of existence as a chain. ‘To be born here and to die here, to die here and to be born elsewhere, to die there and to be reborn elsewhere’, that is the round of existence. This can continue through countless ages. Gautama himself is said in popular story to have passed through 547 previous mortal lives before becoming a Buddha with no more rebirth. How much more may
ordinary mortals have to endure endless ages of earthly life? Life is without beginning, and without end, a crushing repetition of never-ending life through never-ending death. For in the Hindu view of the universe there was endless creation and dissolution over billions of years. Through each cosmic age the soul gathered good or bad Karma, but even at the end it was reabsorbed for a time only to emerge again to take up a new load of Karma. Even the gods were subject to the law of Karma, and when they had worked out their good they would be reborn as men.

Hinduism therefore turned its attention to discovering a way out of this agelong cycle, and finally gave the goal of ‘liberation’, freedom, or ‘salvation’ (moksha). This resembled in some ways the Buddhist Nirvana, and some Hindu writers use that term which belongs more properly to the Buddhists. Liberation from this ceaseless round of existences comes by complete union with God. ‘In this vast Brahma-wheel the soul flutters about, thinking that itself and the Mover are different. Then when blessed by him, it gains life eternal . . . Without the Lord the soul is bound, through being an enjoyer; by knowing God one is freed from all fetters.’* As Hindu teaching about God became more personal, so the grace of God opened the way of release from the round of existence, and this came through faith and love. So the Gita crystallized it: ‘intent on Me, the yogi of restrained mind comes to the peace that is in me, the supreme Nirvana’. By borrowing the Buddhist term, and giving it a divine object, the Gita would attract religious minds back to Hinduism as a religion of salvation.

In Buddhist teaching Nirvana is indescribable, like Brahman in Hinduism, and only to be spoken of in negatives. Yet it is wicked to say that Nirvana does not exist:

* Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 1, 6-8.
'Nirvana is something which is, it is knowable by the mind'. It is like the wind which cannot be pointed out or grasped by the hands, which has neither colour nor shape, yet the existence of the wind is not doubted. So, there is a Nirvana. And sometimes more concrete images are used, on the understanding that they are but similes. Like a lofty mountain peak, so is Nirvana, unshakeable and inaccessible to passion, yet bringing joy and shedding light.

Nirvana is the goal of Buddhist effort, and it has been compared with the kingdom of God, with heaven, and even with God himself. In popular art and writing Nirvana is often depicted as a paradise of rivers, trees and flowers, with graceful angelic figures in it. The Buddha himself, or other Buddha-like figures, may fill the role of God. Particularly in northern Mahayana Buddhism, in Tibet, China and Japan, the Buddhas and their paradises give plenty of scope for adoration. They offer assurance of the bliss of the adept as he journeys in the ship of salvation across the sea of sorrows to the Pure Land in the west. In Hinduism the devotee seeks 'the abode of Brahman', in 'supreme devotion' to God, by 'entering into him'. This resembles in some degree the Christian mystical goal of the beatific vision of God. From God we came and to God we must return, even after many wanderings through purgatories or reincarnations. The final goal is beyond this life. Yet to understand it we are placed in this world. The Gita says that one cannot refrain from action, for 'nature will compel thee'. And the 'eternal life' of the Gospel is not a loathing of existence or passion, but the use of these as sacramental.
CHAPTER SEVEN
MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL

The old religious language often spoke of the world as a ‘vale of tears’, sin, illusion, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. ‘The world, the flesh and the Devil’ seemed to be equally dangerous. Hymns are still sung which decry the sense-world and its pleasures, in favour of joys ‘in the skies’. Even some modern rebels think in terms of a contrast of material and spiritual; if it is not joy ‘up there’ it is ‘within’, rather than in the everyday things of life.

Dr George Macleod has shown that neither the old ‘purely spiritual’ theology nor its prayers speak to men today. ‘Most of them are conceived in medieval terms, we are not really conditioned to what they are saying. For medieval man life was dull, brutish and short. Life here was over against the real life of the Spirit . . . We moderns are of a different expectancy to medieval man. Life is not brutish or short. We are girt about with possibilities . . . Matter is so marvellous . . . Modern man is earthed; materially environed.’*

Not only did this other-worldly attitude affect devotion, leading to asceticism and the Negative Way, but the interpretation of life was given a wrong direction. Modern theology needs to ground itself thoroughly in this world, work from the given, to whatever may lie beyond or within it. It is significant that Bonhoeffer,

* Only One Way Left (Iona, 1956), p. 151f.
critical as he was of 'religion' and God as a stop-gap, constantly harked back to the 'God of the Bible', and especially the Old Testament interpretation of life as against later variations. 'Is there any concern in the Old Testament about saving one's soul at all? Is not righteousness and the kingdom of God on earth the focus of everything ... It is not with the next world that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved and set subject to laws and atoned for and made new. What is above the world is, in the Gospel, intended to exist for this world.'*

This applies to all physical life and sex. 'Even the Bible can find room for the Song of Songs, and one could hardly have a more passionate and sensual love than is there portrayed. It is a good thing that that book is included in the Bible as a protest against those who believe that Christianity stands for the restraint of passion (is there any example of such restraint anywhere in the Old Testament?).'

Bonhoeffer even brings such criticism to bear against common theories of the salvation brought by Christ. 'Christianity, it is true, has always been regarded as a religion of salvation. But isn't this a cardinal error, which divorces Christ from the Old Testament and interprets him in the light of the myths of salvation? ... It is said that the distinctive feature of Christianity is its proclamation of the resurrection hope, and that this means the establishment of a genuine religion of salvation, in the sense of release from this world. The emphasis falls upon the far side of the boundary drawn by death. But this seems to me to be just the mistake and the danger ... The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and a mythological hope is that the Christian hope sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way

* Letters, 93, 95, 100, 112.
which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament.'

This sheds light on the problem of what Bonhoeffer meant by denying the 'religious premise' of man, and his rejection of the idea of God on the borders of life or when human resources fail. 'I should like to speak of God not on the borders of life but at its centre, not in weakness but in strength, not, therefore, in man's suffering and death but in his life and prosperity . . . God is the "beyond" in the midst of our life. The Church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the centre of the village. That is the way it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense we still read the New Testament far too little on the basis of the Old.'

The Old Testament, in fact, and most of the New Testament, is concerned with this world, with material things, and it is rightly called life-affirming. It is true that knowledge of sex and death, both natural things, are said in the Genesis myth to come from the temptation of man into disobedience by a talking snake. For the snake is an ancient symbol both of sex and immortality (by shedding its skin the snake seems not to die). And in this story the knowledge that the snake gives is partly that of sex, after which the man and woman know themselves to be naked. But this myth, though based on ancient Babylonian originals, is a sophisticated attempt to explain the existence of sin and death, and was composed in its present form by priests at a late date. There is no sign of its influence in the rest of the Old Testament, though we tend to read the whole book in its light, since it now comes at the beginning. Even the New Testament makes little of it, apart from Paul who says that through man came sin, and from sin death. But there is no devil or Satan in Genesis, and none of the lurid imaginings of medieval theology or Paradise Lost.
The Bible sees the world as good, created by God and given to man for his use, to 'be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth'. For this reason there is no celibacy in the Old Testament, and some priests had two wives. Jeremiah alone was told not to take a wife in the time of distress, and this may not have been for his whole life. In the New Testament, Peter and other apostles were married, and only the celibate Paul threw out a few suggestions that later ages magnified into commands. Writing to the Christians in the immoral city of Corinth, Paul said that it was good for a man not to touch a woman, yet better to marry than to burn. A virgin would care for the things of the Lord more than a married woman, yet if a virgin married she had not sinned. This grudging concession may have owed something to an increasing ascetic spirit, but it was largely due to the belief that the Lord was returning soon, bringing the end of the present world order, and marriage was hardly necessary for so short a time.

Later centuries exaggerated these notions into placing celibacy above marriage, and regarding the monastic or conventual life as most truly 'religious'. But the Roman church alone of all religious bodies insists on a celibate priesthood. The Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant churches (and all non-Christian religions) have married priests and ministers, and even the Romans admit exceptions in the Uniate churches and a few other cases. Yet the anti-material attitude has remained in collects which speak of 'forsaking all worldly and carnal affections', and the 'sinful lusts of the flesh'. And it can be argued that rulings on marriage questions may be unbalanced if decided solely by unmarried priests and monks.

In the Old Testament also work was regarded as natural and done by the help of God, despite the solitary myth which suggested that working 'in the sweat of thy
brow' was a punishment. Exodus says that the artist Bezalel was filled by the spirit of God for 'all manner of workmanship'. And the book of Ecclesiasticus has a famous hymn of praise to God who 'gave men skill that they might be glorified in his marvellous works'. The doctor, scribe, ploughman, craftsman, smith and potter are all praised, for 'in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer'.

The New Testament continues this, and as every Jew was taught a trade even if he was an intellectual, so Jesus was a carpenter and Paul a tentmaker. There is no notion of the 'religious' who spends his time praying, while lesser mortals work to keep both him and them alive. The modern world with its ideals of social justice, largely derived from the Hebrew prophets and Jesus, is much nearer in this to the Bible than either Christian or Buddhist monasticism, both of which are now under heavy attack and in serious decline. The Benedictines and other orders, of course, have always worked to be self-supporting, and work is part of prayer. But there remains the glorification of celibacy, and here Buddhism seems more rational. For while it recognizes that some men and women may be naturally celibate, yet the vows need not be binding for the whole of life. And there is much more openness and coming and going between monastery and lay life than in the West.

The Bible views the world as real and important. Salvation comes in the world and not in detachment from it; for it is harmony with God, forgiveness of sin and better living. The world may need redemption from sin, but it is not to be abandoned as hopeless. Furthermore, salvation is not merely individual, a private treasure to be hoarded and gloated over in secret devotion. The kingdom of God is social, and men are to be incorporated into
the company of those who have found the 'redemption of the body' as well as the soul.

The idea of progress certainly owes much to the teaching of the Bible. For man rises from low beginnings to the perfect world under the reign of God. There is no blinking the fact that there are wicked men and social disasters, so the line of progress rises but with frequent setbacks, and not inevitably. Yet there is justification for the view that the Hebrew ideal of human life is linear, rising in an ascending line of progress, whereas much Asian thought considered life to be cyclic, going round and round almost for ever. However, it will be seen that this is a simplification which needs modifying.

If medieval Christianity was world-denying Hinduism seems to have been even more so, for in few countries has asceticism been so notable. Yet there is the contrary fact that nowhere in the world has there been greater delight in sensuous male and female form as in Indian sculpture and painting all down the ages. To call all Indians world-deniers is like the myth that says that Africans cower in fear under their religion, yet their smiles are notorious. Hindu priests were not celibate, though monks were necessarily segregated, in the East as in the West.

One of the key words to understanding the Hindu attitude to the world is maya, often translated 'illusion'. Originally maya meant supernatural power or artifice (perhaps related to our word 'magic'). In the Vedas it is often used in this way, and the first Upanishad says that the god Indra by his magic powers (maya) goes about in many forms. But the favourite text is in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad which says that 'nature (prakriti) is maya, and the wielder of maya is the Great Lord. This whole world is pervaded by beings that are part of him'.

From these few hints the powerful Vedanta school of Shankara developed the theory of *maya* to buttress belief in non-duality and solve the problem of the relationship of the world to God. All human knowledge is illusory, not in the sceptical Greek manner of doubting one’s own eyes, but because of the unity of all in Brahman. Brahman alone is real, and all else is unreal. Yet the world exists, we exist as individuals, and the creating Lord exists, as *maya*. However Shankara thought that *maya* was false knowledge which created appearances, but would vanish when the truth was known.

Less extreme monists paid more attention to the Great Lord (Mah-eshvara). Here theism saw Brahman, or Vishnu, as controlling the world, bringing it forth by his power though himself unaffected by it. The world is not unreal, it emanates from the divine as sparks from the fire or the web from a spider. In the Gita the divine Avatar comes into being by his *maya* power. His creative power (*yoga-maya*) veils him from the world, but the Lord reveals himself to whom he will. Popular religion has not been deluded by the theory of *maya* into denying the reality of the world, even though its transitoriness is recognized in a tropical country where death is sudden. And in practical living it will be seen that material duties are taken with great seriousness.

A cyclic (or steady-state?) view of creation finds support in the Hindu scriptures, rather than a single creation. But this is because of the boundless time-scale of Hindu speculation, which is more comprehensible today. The universe revolves in cycles, each subdivided into four ages or *yugas*. Mankind is now in the last of these ages, which will be shorter than the others because of sin and the decline of true doctrine. This age began in 3102 B.C. and will last a mere 432,000 years. At the end of the cycle all the world and spheres of being are dissolved into the
primeval divine substance. Then after another age the cycle of some four thousand billion human years begins to emerge and revolve afresh.

This is the play (*lila*) of the divine, the Lord, the ‘adorable God’, into whom all this world is resolved at the end and comes into form again at the new creation, say the Upanishads. And the Gita says that all beings come back to the divine nature when a cycle ends, and when a cycle begins again he sends them forth. In the light of this stupendous eternity the human individual may appear very tiny, as indeed he is before the vast solar systems. His life may seem short, yet by transmigration he remains involved, under different masks, throughout the whole course of change. There is constant rebirth, though salvation (*moksha*) from the round of rebirth is taught by both monists and theists. The first see deliverance coming when delusion is realized to be mere ignorance. The theists attain to liberation through devotion to the gracious Lord.

The vast time scale of Indian speculations may be more agreeable to modern man than the comparatively short period of Bible history, though in fact astronomical time is so incomprehensible and removed from daily experience that six thousand years or so of creation are enough for most people. And the reality and importance of human life may seem better guaranteed under the biblical than under the Hindu scheme. However, the cherishing of human life and the material world seemed to go along independently of the length of history in the Hebrew view, and much the same happened in India.

The ascetic ideal, practised by renunciation of the world, has a long history in India, yet it is by no means so thoroughly world-denying as is commonly thought. The yogi lying on spikes or blinded through staring at the sun, catches the popular imagination and provides as easy
cartoons for *Punch* as the veiled women of Muslim lands. Yet these are extreme cases in India, in a vast country where there is a religious lunatic fringe, as in most countries. In fact normal asceticism was only the final stage of a full life, and few reached it.

The traditional Indian discipline of life was summed up in the teaching and practice of the four Ashrams, the stages of ideal life. These have become best known in the ascetic form of the hermitages where holy men lived. The term Ashram conjures up a picture of a clearing in a forest or on the banks of a river, where a sage with a long beard sits under a tree in contemplation, with his aged wife in the hut behind, a few disciples sitting round him, and a low altar nearby on which burns the sacred fire.

But every Hindu knows that this is only one Ashram, and that the other stages are equally important and may be much longer. The Jabala Upanishad says, ‘after completing the life of a student, let one become a householder: after completing the life of a householder let one become a forest dweller; after completing the life of a forest dweller (or earlier) let one renounce’. The life of a householder was an essential stage, to be maintained till a man had seen his son’s son. Only then, in old age, would he retire with his wife to meditate on the end. In the West men retire to a country cottage to cultivate the garden or play golf.

The Ashrams, or stages of life, are held out as the ideal, and in all periods there have been exceptions to one or more of them. Some took up the hermit life fairly young, and so omitted or curtailed the period to be spent as a householder. But the great majority lived life in the world and never got beyond the second stage. It is possible that the ideal of four stages was a reaction against Buddhism and Jainism, which encouraged young men to
become monks. So Hinduism stressed the sanctity of family life.

The first stage (ashram) was not infancy, but began with investiture with the sacred thread of the twice-born (the three upper castes), and training at the home of a Brahmin teacher (guru). This was not only religious education, but it included morals, grammar, poetry, music, and astronomy. It might last for twelve years, and so corresponded to school and college.

At about twenty years of age the young man would return from his boarding school and resume at home the ordinary life of his class. He would marry as soon as possible, for to 'be fruitful and multiply', is a duty in India as in Israel. Marriage ensured both procreation of children and sensual pleasure; it continued the family rites and traditions.

Only after having established his line, seeing his children's children, could an old man normally retire, to become a forest dweller and so by penance and meditation free himself from the cares of this world and prepare for the next. The last stage, to which few now proceed, involved leaving even the hermitage and becoming a homeless wanderer, to die if possible at Benares or some other great sanctuary.

Life is also said in many Hindu texts to have four ends or aspirations, to direct human conduct. These may be roughly translated Duty, Material gain, Love, and Salvation. Duty (dharma) is more positively the practice of virtue than keeping to negative rules. It is the conduct proper to the situation of life in which one is found. The Great Epic has virtue as one of its central themes, and King Yudhishthira, eldest of the five brothers who struggle to regain their kingdom, is both the son of the god Dharma and his true embodiment, the king of righteousness.
Worldly wealth (artha) is necessary to existence, and the textbook Laws of Manu says that it should co-exist with the other ends of life. But material goods, like pleasure, must be regulated so that the needs of other people are not hindered. Many of the moral texts seek to give guidance to rulers and all men of property, to ensure that while they enjoy pleasure and luxury they also care for those less fortunate than themselves. Every just man must give food every day to the poor and to animals. The care of cows is notorious, and taking of any kind of life unnecessarily is evil. Many Hindus are vegetarians, but by no means all. And some of the great rulers and teachers made provision for the sick of man and beast.

The place given to the pursuit of pleasure and love (kama), the third normal end of life, is due to the importance of the life of a married householder. Although the hermit or celibate life is possible, it is only for the few, or for old age when normal powers have failed. In recent times women have often been secluded and teachers like Gandhi have practised and praised married abstinence. But W. G. Archer, in his recent edition of the famous Kama Sutra, the treatise of love, considers that this seclusion is a perversion foreign to the spirit of India, due to the influence of Islamic harems and veiling. Certainly classical India developed a science of love and a delight in sensuous beauty almost without parallel for its lavishness and detailed explication, in sculpture, prose and verse. Physical pleasures were to be enjoyed equally by men and women, and legitimately, not in the seductive or sly ways of Ovid and de Sade and their perverted followers. And along with sensual love went delight in beauty in statuary, painting, music and all the arts.

The fourth end of man was salvation (moksha). In some periods this was regarded as fulfilled by the observance of the moral law, the 'way of works'. But India
developed a rare tolerance which said that salvation could come through any of the three ways of virtue, knowledge or devotion. In devotion the overlapping of the four ends is seen in the extent to which imagery, verse and erotic symbolism developed in the worship of God to an extent unequalled elsewhere. If, however, the intellectual or Puritan found this ‘love affair with the universe’ too intense a kind of worship to bring salvation to him, he was perfectly free to follow the more pedestrian path of duty, or the more philosophical path of knowledge. All would eventually lead to the goal of salvation, or liberation from return to this earth.

The Indian scriptures and religio-moral texts are immense, so much so that a great authority like Zimmer said that nobody could read them all in a lifetime. But their very diversity shows the richness of life in classical India, the breadth of its culture, and its adaptability to every walk of life. Far from being all life-negating, nowhere in the world is there found such joyous abandonment to the pleasures of life than in Indian art. The Kama Sutra itself is said to have been written by a Brahmin, as part of his religious duty. If philosophy at times exalted asceticism, or damped religious ardour in monism, yet this could not be maintained for everyone, because ‘cheerfulness kept breaking in’.

In modern times India, like every other country, is undergoing the attack of fresh ideas and foreign ways of behaviour. But the old ideals have deep roots and an abiding influence. And their appeal outside India, in the balanced view of the various ends of man and diverse paths to salvation, is more widespread than ever before.
CHAPTER EIGHT

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

Is modern Western man 'the praying type', or is prayer only an occasional exercise, to be indulged in when human powers give out? So many problems appear when the prayers of the past are considered that some of them must be mentioned. Traditional prayers often seem to be wrong-headed or irrelevant.

There is no doubt that many prayers use a blunt symbolism that is difficult to follow. The prayer attributed to Solomon, no doubt a priestly composition, has been used many times since: 'Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and render to every man according to his ways'. Many collects repeat similar sentiments: 'Who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth, most heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious sovereign.'

Belief in the transcendence of God is stressed here, but it leads easily to the notion that God has to be 'invoked', 'brought down', asked to 'be near'. From there it is an easy step to assume that God, being so exalted, has to be informed of what men are doing down below. Many prayers are too much like catalogues, telling God what he really ought to know. This applies less to liturgical prayers, which are generally short and to the point, as to private petitions. What killed the old prayer meetings of the evangelical revival was the recitation of events like a news bulletin, of which an extreme case was the plea,
‘O Lord, no doubt thou hast read in the newspapers...’ The Lord would at least have read the ‘top’ papers.

More serious still is the assumption that God needs to be persuaded to listen or help, as if he were unwilling, or less kindly disposed than men. The Lenten collect, taken from the Book of Wisdom, is negative enough, ‘God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made’. But many other prayers suggest a pleading with God, like Abraham at Sodom, as if the divine anger had to be appeased. This obsequious notion infects a good deal of traditional prayer; for example, ‘we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness’.

All these statements can be explained theologically, but the cumulative effect of so much negation is to colour the idea of God with harsh and unco-operative attributes. And if this is so in formal collects, it has been much more present in popular devotion. Hymns and prayers battered away at the gates of heaven till, as one classical writer who should have known better wrote, ‘God cries out, let me alone’. Reducing God to acquiescence by a process of attrition not only made prayer mechanical but misrepresented the divine character.

Then there is ‘religious’ devotion of aids and rosaries and manuals of prayer, of which Dr Robinson said it did not speak to his condition, ‘but nothing else was offered in its place, and to this day we have an inferiority complex’. And Dr George Macleod writes of the ‘bankrupt corner’ or platoons of ‘bantam booklets enlisted at intervals to help one to pray better... Why do they go dead on us?’

Characteristic of the modern crisis of praying is the nagging doubt, does it do any good? Can anything really happen, and is God expected to intervene by suspending
his own laws? In the past it was assumed that miracles happened easily, they were divine interventions, breaches in the order of nature. Since nature was thought to be under the sway of the Devil, after the Fall, then each miracle and each prayer answered was a victorious tussle with the Prince of Darkness. Church history is full of miraculous answers to prayer, like Patrick killing all the snakes in Ireland; not to mention the later stories of winking virgins and bleeding masses. But today demonology and thaumaturgy have been undermined and largely demythologized. If the idea of miracle is to be retained, it must be along the lines of God using his own laws, physical and spiritual, rather than abrogating them. If prayer is made for healing it will be for the opening of every channel of health and grace for the sufferer.

But ‘what is the place of worship and prayer in an entire absence of religion’ asked Bonhoeffer, and did not survive to answer. Yet Dr Robinson is careful to say that definition is important here. ‘Religion’ is often regarded as a realm apart, the opposite of ‘secular’, the world with its flesh and devil. A ‘religious’ film is commonly thought to be one about nuns or parsons, cardinals or Lourdes, and not about the urgent problems of sex or nuclear warfare. The ‘religious’, in the sense of the monk or nun with a life withdrawn from the secular to be spent in prayer, has provided an artificial model of devotion and coloured much prayer language.

Christianity itself is often regarded as virtually identical with church-going, though little is said about this in the Gospels. A ‘revival’ of religion is taken to mean that more people go to church, and not that more justice is done to the oppressed; this is the opposite of what Jesus illustrated in the parables of the Pharisee and the publican, the sheep and the goats, and the Good Samaritan. The sacrament of ‘Communion’ itself is looked upon as a
withdrawal, almost a private appointment with God, in which the artificiality of every action and symbol tends to stress the difference between this and everyday life. Yet this was originally a meal, shared among friends, a love-feast and not a spectacle, and in the commonest elements of food the love of God was shown.

A further hangover from the monastic ‘religious’ viewpoint, that affects prayer, is the attitude taken to the material world. Thomas à Kempis, one of the most popular and profound of all masters of the spiritual life, used many phrases that come hardly to modern man: ‘Grant that I may die to all things that are in the world . . . turn for me into bitterness all carnal comfort’. It might well be asked, what is the matter with carnal comfort? Few Christians are monks, and the world and the flesh have wonderful joys. Modern men are likely to be more attracted by the uninhibited generosity and joy in nature shown by Francis of Assisi, or by the Practice of the Presence of God illustrated by Brother Lawrence doing the washing up or buying hay. The monastic life may have been a useful protest, for a time, for those who liked seclusion. But it is a tragedy that such drab asceticism has afflicted the Mediterranean lands which once were bright with physical joys, so that in modern Italy and Greece black clothing often covers those fine bodies in which the ancients rejoiced. As Dr Macleod says, much of our religion and prayer was conceived in medieval terms when life was dull, brutish and short. But for us, ‘matter is so marvellous . . . modern man is earthed, materially environed. His devotions are transmuted’.

Modern prayer must be set in, and not against, the world. There is no biblical justification for the view that the purest kind of prayer is that of the ‘religious’ in the monastery. In fact while this may have its place, it is a type of its own, and not the ideal of which the layman’s
prayer is a pale copy. The Bible knows nothing of monas-
terries, but it has plenty of prayers. Some of the finest are
prayers of laymen, like David, and there is no suggestion
that the Sadducee priest in the temple prayed better than
the heretic Samaritan, but rather the contrary. It was
said of workmen that ‘in the handiwork of their craft is
their prayer’.

This does not mean that retreats and withdrawals from
daily activity are not necessary. In fact the Bible has
many examples of these, perhaps more than are usually
considered. Moses withdrew to the mountain on a number
of occasions, Elijah to the wilderness for three years, and
Paul retired to Arabia before starting his mission. Jesus
not only went into the desert for forty days after his
baptism, but on many occasions during his busy ministry
he went out before daybreak or aside into a desert place,
for prayer and communion with God.

There is a good deal of mental and spiritual discipline
in the Bible that contrasts with the slack spirituality of
many modern Christians, who are content to gabble off a
childhood prayer or two. Fasting was undertaken at
special times, both individual and communal. But it will
be remembered that Jesus told men to dress in their best
and hide their fasting from men. Spiritual training is not
for its own sake, or simply for self-improvement; it is
directed towards God, ‘be not seen of men to fast, but of
thy Father’. Biblical religion is God-centred, and this
moulds all its attitude to prayer and spiritual exercises.

Prayer is not meant to create another world different
from that of every day, an escape from grim reality, or a
refuge for conscience from dishonest deals done in a
worldly life. The Hebrew prophets poured scorn on
hypocrisy, declaring that God did not want the sabbaths
of the dishonest and would not hear their prayers. True
prayer was expressed by helping the suffering and living
daily in the divine presence. ‘What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God’.

An Indian Christian, after a long visit to Europe, was asked what he found lacking in Western Christianity. After some pressure he admitted to being shocked at finding that ‘Western Christians never meditate’. For if prayer is the chief characteristic of Western devotion, in the East it has always been meditation.

Prayer as petition, asking, is the chief kind of prayer with which most Christians are familiar, and its weaknesses and limitations are apparent. The saints have practised quiet, and spent hours in adoration, but this has seemed beyond the time and ability of the layman. Only the Quakers, among Protestants, have made the prayer of quiet and concentration, waiting on God, the regular and principal part of their worship. For most others prayer consists in talking, informing God, and not staying for an answer.

Prayer as petition and adoration forms part of worship in eastern devotional cults. In time of need the sick or distressed call on God. The Hindu poet Tukaram prayed, ‘Give me an alms, O God, love from thy loving hand’. And the modern Rabindranath Tagore said, ‘This is my prayer to thee, my Lord, Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows’. * But very soon petition merges into adoration, and the main burden of the prayer is not gifts but knowledge and union. The classic prayer of the first Upanishad is, ‘From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality’.

* Gitanjali, p. 28.
Even in Buddhism there is petitionary prayer in time of need, for this is an irrepressible human reaction to suffering. But most Buddhist devotion aims at union with the Buddha and his way. Every day millions of Buddhists repeat the formula, 'I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Doctrine for refuge, I go to the Order for refuge'. Gifts of flowers, incense, paper lanterns and candles are laid in front of the many images of Buddhas, and these actions help to focus faith on the Buddha and he is contemplated in silence or to the murmur of sacred texts.

Tillich has emphasized that there are elements common to Christianity and Hinduism, but possessed by each in different proportions. Prayer is present in both, but stressed more in Christianity. Meditation is present in both, but practised far more in Hinduism. Quaker silence, and some techniques used in the Latin and Greek churches, resemble those of India. But Western Protestantism in general has become weak, if not bankrupt, in its spirituality. And here the practice of meditation could do much to fill the gaps.

The practices of Yoga shape a large part of Indian meditation, though not all, and many methods may be called Yoga that differ considerably from one another. In the ruins of the Indus civilization, remaining from some 4,000 years ago, have been found small seals engraved with a cross-legged figure like the later yogis, the practitioners of Yoga. This is often identified with the god Shiva, the 'lord of yogis' (maha-yogi), and whether this is so or not the seals show that this way of sitting cross-legged has been practised for millennia in India. That there is little trace of Yoga practices in the Vedic hymns suggests that the Aryan invaders of India were unconcerned with it, but it comes to the surface again in the Upanishads, the Gita, many later writings, and especially the famous Yoga Sutras.
The great classical authority was Patanjali, whose Yoga Sutras (aphorisms) were compiled somewhere about the beginning of the Christian era. These are in four short books, but there have been detailed commentaries and long studies made of them. Patanjali set out Yoga as a method for attaining perfection, achieved by controlling the physical and mental elements of human nature. It is a practical way of showing how salvation can be attained through disciplined activity.

Yoga has often been associated with a philosophy called Samkhya, the ‘enumeration’ of twenty-five elements of reality. Samkhya, like Buddhism, ignored Brahman, but (unlike Buddhism) it insisted on the reality of the multitude of conscious beings or souls, and sought their release from the bondage of illusion. The Yoga system, however, was not content with a godless scheme and it introduced the Lord (Ishvara) as the object of devotion. Popular Buddhism also introduced Buddhas and similar beings for devotion.

Yoga is a name given to many kinds of discipline, physical and spiritual. It means control or discipline (related to the English word ‘yoke’), and so it is control of mind and body. Yoga also means ‘union’, yoking, and there are practices which seek to lead man into conscious union with the divine. The yogi (or yogin) can be anybody who follows one of a number of ways of discipline. Unfortunately the word yogi is also used loosely to describe any ascetic, and often the eccentric practitioner of extreme forms of Yoga, such as standing on one foot, holding up the arms till they are paralysed or hanging head downwards over a fire. The search for occult powers (siddhis) has been as tempting in the East as in the West. Travelling in an ‘astral’ body, levitation, burial alive, and the like are believed in all over India as they were in the European Middle Ages and still are widely today. It is
noteworthy that some of the sanest English practitioners of Yoga play down this magical side. E. Wood in his Pelican on Yoga quotes only a childhood recollection of levitation and is very hesitant about other phenomena. And Theos Bernard, an athletic Yoga experimenter, says, ‘during my study of the science of Yoga I found that it holds no magic, performs no miracles, and reveals nothing supernatural’.*

A good deal of popular Yoga is what Father Déchanet, in his book *Christian Yoga*, aptly calls ‘profane yoga’. This is chiefly Hatha (‘forceful’) Yoga. Hatha Yoga may go to extremes, making bodily contortions in painful positions, but it seeks by exercises to control the processes of the body and so stimulate the mind. This should lead to Raja Yoga, the ‘royal way’ of full realization in the divine. Hatha Yoga includes breathing exercises, retention of breath, timing of inhalation and exhalation, sitting cross-legged, twisting into various postures (asanas) and standing on the head. Further practices are twisting the tongue backwards, cutting the tongue string, and exercising abdominal and anal muscles. Arthur Koestler and other globe-trotters have had little difficulty in ridiculing some of these practices and so declaring that Indian Yoga has nothing to teach the West. Koestler’s account of what may appear revolting techniques are mainly taken from the serious descriptions practised by Theos Bernard and described in his book *Hatha Yoga*.

Some of these physical Yoga exercises appeal to Western students, and there are well-known public figures who declare that it is beneficial to stand on one’s head every morning. Others maintain that the breathing exercises are the most important, and they compare these and some of the simpler postures to Swedish drill. Whether the various Indian timings of respiration, for example the

* *Hatha Yoga* (Grey Arrow, 1960), p. 118.
1–4–2 rhythm of inhalation, retention and exhalation, are really beneficial and correspond to natural bodily rhythms, is a matter that has not yet received the scientific attention that it deserves. These are ancient Indian practices, but they need serious investigation in the light of modern knowledge of human physiology. What is clear, however, is that Yoga is not asceticism but a method of development. As one Indian writer put it, ‘when Yoga came through the door, asceticism went out through the window’. Yoga could not be done on iron rations, it needed nourishing food, and therein lay its sanity.

This profane and muscular Hatha Yoga, however, has no necessary spiritual value, though it must help mental quiet if physical calm is obtained; in fact calm in some form is a pre-requisite of meditation. Yet the classical texts say little or nothing of the athletic kinds of Yoga. Yoga is not mentioned in the Vedas, but it came up, as if from some Indus-culture depth, in the later classical Upanishads. When the youth Nachiketas persuaded Death to reveal the mystery of the undying soul, Death said, ‘he who is hard to see, dwelling in the depth [Brahman], by considering him as God, through the Yoga-study of what pertains to self, the wise man leaves joy and sorrow behind.’

The Shvetashvatara Upanishad gives simple instructions for Yoga meditation which leads to the knowledge of God. One should hold the body steady, restrain the vicious horses of the senses, sit in a clean level spot, out of the wind and near a river, breathe quietly through the nose, then as when the dust is cleaned from a mirror it shines brightly, the yogi sees the nature of the soul; he knows God and is released from all fetters.

The Bhagavad Gita calls itself the Scripture of Yoga, and part of its great importance is that it says nothing
of the magical powers after which so many have gone astray. Also the Gita insists that Yoga does not mean renunciation of the world and its works; on the contrary, one should do the works proper to one’s station, for God himself never ceases from working. So Arjuna was told, ‘fixed in Yoga, do thy work, abandoning attachment, with an even mind, for this is Yoga indeed’. Because of this Yoga was open to both sexes and all classes; women and the lower castes could follow the Yoga of devotion. The Yoga of knowledge of the scholars, the Yoga of works of the moralists and rulers, could both lead to the final goal of salvation. But the highest yet broadest Yoga of all was devotion through love.

The sixth chapter of the Gita gives simple directions for Yoga meditation, comparable to those of the Upanishad quoted above. The yogi should choose a quiet place and a firm cushioned seat (there is no mention of sitting cross-legged). He should be still, body and head motionless, eyes gazing in front, fearless and controlled in thought, and intent on the Lord. Similarly the Yoga Sutras teach an eightfold method of continence, observance, sitting posture, breath-control, withdrawal of the senses, fixed attention, contemplation, and concentration or release (samadhi).

What does the yogi meditate upon, when his body is still and mind concentrated? There are various Buddhist systems, and their general answer is that the goal is nothingness, the void, complete clearing of the mind from all objects of thought and hence of any creation of Karma which would bring about a further rebirth. The use of images, however, suggests that the Buddha is the object of meditation for many people. In Patanjali’s Yoga the Lord (Ishvara) is the teacher of Yoga, the motive of action and the means of obtaining release. But this has been criticized as simply using the Lord as a
means to the liberation of the soul, and not as the supreme and final object. This thought is shocking to monotheists of the Western tradition, for it is a ‘stop-gap’ deity.

There is no doubt that in the Gita the Lord is no longer a mere means to a goal, but the final object of Yoga and all living. Krishna is the Great Master of Yoga (Maha-yoga-ishvara), and those who fix their minds on him are ‘the most perfect in yoga’. The final verse, which is reverenced as containing a summary of the whole Gita doctrine, says, ‘abandoning all other duties come to me alone for refuge; I will save thee from all sins, sorrow not’. And Ramanuja in his commentary on the Gita says that the yogi who worships in faith, with his inmost soul lost in God, is more integrated than all others. Other yogis may be different among themselves, but compared with the yogi of devotion all the rest are like mustard seeds beside the great mythical Mount Meru.

It is here that meditation and prayer join up again, for as the prayer of quiet or the rapture of adoration can pass into meditation, so the meditation of devotion that has God as its object, turns into prayer. This shows that Yoga can be adapted for Christian purposes, which has been forcefully argued by Father Déchanet in Christian Yoga. He seeks to adapt some of the milder physical exercises of Yoga to establish a harmony of body and mind, ‘the redemption of the body’, uniting body and spirit in efforts of integration and meditation. And then one proceeds to joining with God in his work of grace. While adopting some of the methods of yogic meditation, Déchanet insists that the contents, the object of meditation, must for Christians be the revelation of God in Christ. ‘All this will distinguish our private meditation from that of the Brahmanic yogis. Admittedly we shall come to the idea, as they do, that our God is the Inef-
fable and Unutterable; but his countenance will be for us something other than the “countenance of silence” spoken of by Ramakrishna. We shall “look on” our God, we shall “see” him living in Holy Scripture and in his creation."

In recent years numbers of visitors to India have tried to discount Indian spirituality. Books like *The Lotus and the Robot*, *In Search of a Yogi*, and *Hunting the Guru* tell of travels through India looking for the great spiritual treasures of the East and ending in disillusion. Perhaps this is a reaction from the uncritical acceptance of all things Indian as perfect, which marked some earlier theosophical and Neo-Vedantic writers. Perhaps also, these journalists were looking for magical or supernatural feats, levitation and the like, which we have seen are deplored by the greatest authorities and not mentioned in the classical texts. The conclusion seems to be that the East can teach us nothing. But in previous chapters we have tried to show that there are numerous Indian doctrines which may be useful in the modern reconstruction of thought. And in the practices of mental control and meditation, so widespread in the East, there are many lessons to be learnt.

Some kind of Yoga or controlled meditation seems to be essential to Western Christianity, and it has been neglected for too long. Meditation on Christ leads to that communion which is the goal of prayer, but which common petition too easily neglects. And meditation is not simply for monks, or yogis in the jungle. It has been seen that the Gita laid it down as the highest way for all classes, and another ancient text said, ‘It is for children, adults and the aged, for the well and the ill, for the poor and the rich’.

For busy people a ‘quiet time’ is essential, if they are to

keep their balance and avoid nervous breakdowns. Yet not just quietness, but concentration and devotions lead into becoming ‘in tune with the infinite’. Certainly this demands time, but it does not mean withdrawal to a monastery. At home or in any quiet place body and mind control can be practised. Most people are too restless, they find it hard to concentrate their gaze for a few moments on an object like a pencil; it is much harder to concentrate the whole mind. This demands practice, but if it is done then the quiet comes out into daily life. Some mystics have called this ‘mental prayer’, and Fénelon said, ‘let your mental prayer spread over all your daily occupations’. However, this is not just to avoid becoming involved in ‘worldly’ affairs, but to give serenity in the busiest life. Businessmen and politicians can practise this if they are willing to sacrifice a little. U Nu, till lately Prime Minister of Burma, used to spend two hours in meditation every morning before beginning his daily work, and the time was gained by rising early. World affairs might be better conducted if other statesmen did likewise.
CHAPTER NINE

AUTHORITY AND MYSTICISM

It is a curious fact that Christianity alone of the world's religions has codified its principal beliefs into short statements in Creeds and imposed them on its members. These credal statements are not merely standards of doctrine, and a guard against heresy to be accepted by the clergy only as leaders of the church. When the new Canon of Southwark objected to 'assent' to the Thirty Nine Articles, The Spectator took the opportunity of objecting to the burden imposed by credal statements on ordinary Christians. The creeds are put into catechism and baptismal rite and they form part also of many regular church liturgies which the laity attend. Statements about God, necessarily imperfect and often badly dated, risk offending the thoughtful and replacing experience of God.

This is not essential nor has it always been so. Dr Percy Dearmer, a great authority on Christian worship, said years ago that we ought 'to go back to the older liturgical tradition and not make the Creeds a necessary feature of all our services'. Until the Reformation the Apostles' Creed was only said privately at Divine Service, and there was no Creed at Matins or Evensong. The Roman Church performed its ritual without a creed in the Mass for a thousand years, and only inserts one now on Sundays and other special occasions. The so-called Athanasian Creed is dropping out of use, for few
can say today, ‘which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly’. Even in the revised form of the 1928 Prayer Book it is hard enough: ‘which faith except a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he will perish eternally’. Bonhoeffer in his outline for a book, never completed, proposed a revision of the Apostles’ Creed, to bring it more in line with biblical teaching and emphasis.

The Free Churches have given up using creeds in normal services, and they will no doubt beware lest they are imposed on them again in schemes for church union. The Quakers have thrown them over entirely, and even the more traditional Methodists only profess to hold ‘the fundamental principles’ of the historic creeds and do not use them in most services. Yet the World Council of Churches in its recent Basis has formulated and imposed a new statement of faith, of debatable orthodoxy.

Dr Dearmer was alive to the difficulty that many people, not only laymen, find in one or another article of the Creeds. Some clergy seem to think that they can defend doctrines by insisting on the repetition of formulas, but the result is that some of the best minds are lost to the church, and some of the younger people. The position of many people who would be Christians is, ‘I want to believe all I honestly and really can. Help me to believe’. The church should give some help, before it is too late, to the faith that lives in honest doubt. Dearmer said, ‘Perhaps if her own faith were stronger she would do so now’.*

The concern for Creeds, Confessions, Bases, is comparable with the care for organization and statistics that afflicts the church in the West. The organization into churches, with rolls of members, and endless committees, is part of the fever of activity which the Christian West

too easily substitutes for the knowledge of God. This is
religiosity of the kind that Bonhoeffer detested, and it is
difficult to find any link between it and the religion of
Jesus. Twice the present writer has had to do research
into the relative strength of different religious communi-
ties. Christians at once furnish rolls of members and lists of
churches, for they all count their membership, and often
publish the figures, some churches perhaps more honestly
than others. But Muslims, for example, have no lists of
members, and often they do not know how many mosques
there are in a town, let alone how many Muslims. There
may be four hundred million Muslims in the world, but
give or take a hundred million. Yet the power of Islam as
a world religion is not diminished one jot by this absence
of a vast organization such as we should impose if we were
to take it over. In fact, churches are run too much like
businesses, and creeds are like state laws, regarded as in-
fallible rather than as limited human aspirations after the
inexpressible.

Such attention to doctrinal and organizational forms
is a Western rather than a Semitic trait. There is no
Creed in the Bible, Old or New Testaments, and the
early apostles had no hand in the formulation of the
‘Apostles’ Creed. Judaism got on without a Creed till
Maimonides in the thirteenth century A.D. put out his
thirteen propositions which came to be accepted as an
expression of orthodoxy. The Bible proclaimed the fact
of God, God as a living reality, and it gave the practical
commands not just to believe in God but to ‘love’ him,
and ‘love’ one’s neighbour. Although Jesus accepted these
as the greatest commandments, the Creeds told men to
believe and did not say that they should love. The neigh-
bour dropped out of sight, though the heretical
Samaritan had shown who he was.

Islam is a dogmatic faith, and the first ‘pillar’ of faith
is the Witness that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is his prophet. But that simple statement is all. The other four ‘pillars’ are concerned with practice: prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage. There were doctrinal debates in the early centuries, and some theologians set out articles of faith, though often with the proviso that this is so ‘yet without asking how’, and they were not laid upon the people. It is significant that the new ‘religion’ of today, Marxism, is credal and dogmatic, and arose in the West.

It is said that to be a Hindu one should be born into a caste and accept the authority of the Vedas. But in fact there is great variety within Hinduism, and even among the six orthodox systems of philosophy there are some which reject Brahman, and others which differ widely on monism or dualism. Most Hindus have the sketchiest notions of the Vedas, but are more attached to the Upanishads, the Gita, the Epic and Puranas, and later devotional writings. And today the caste system is in the melting-pot as never before.

Hindus proudly claim that their religion is non-authoritarian. The Hindu genius, they say, did not recognize external forms as essential to spiritual growth. Self-authenticating experience was the true authority of the Upanishads. It recognized no other sanctions, and it was not enforced as revelation.

Indian society has been highly organized, and the position of the Brahmins as the priestly caste has dominated Hindu society till modern times. Hinduism has been both a religious system and a way of life. But with all the attempts to apprehend the nature of the divine, in Brahman and personal gods and avatars, there has been no authoritative formulation of doctrine. Despite the arrogance of some Brahmins in different periods, yet tolerance is a characteristic of Hinduism. There has been
remarkably little persecution of variant teachings; no Inquisition, Crusades, massacre of St. Bartholomew, fires of Smithfield or persecution of Jews. The absence of a dogmatic church has not damped Indian religious fervour. Not only is there greater devotion in India than in much of Europe, but men talk more easily of religious problems and with an absence of self-consciousness. A casual acquaintance will ask, ‘what do you think of the soul, the atman?’ without causing the shudder produced by the fervent evangelist in the train who demands, ‘Brother, are you saved?’

Hindus call their religion ‘eternal Dharma’ (sanatana dharma). Dharma is a complex word (related to our ‘form’), meaning variously rule, order, law, virtue, doctrine and religion. It is both law and religion, and the underlying eternal principle of life and the universe. The ‘eternal Dharma’ is illustrated in great men, in the story of Rama and in Yudhishthira the king of righteousness of the Great Epic. In modern times Mahatma Gandhi and others embodied the eternal Dharma under new forms. Gandhi’s knowledge of other religions, especially Christianity, enabled him to interpret Dharma afresh. Gandhi said, ‘my belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the Scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason and moral sense’.

Gandhi spoke as a Hindu, yet one in whom some Christians saw one of the most Christlike of men. He was able to challenge the Brahmin priests, because of the freedom of interpretation traditionally allowed. He was able to receive and adapt truths from other religions and
teachers, from the Jains, Tolstoy, the Sermon on the Mount, and from the suffering and compassion of Jesus as well as his teaching. So Gandhi joined and extended the reform movement which had been going on within Hinduism for a century, and he showed that this great religious tradition can be purged and enriched. Every human institution becomes corrupt in time, but some accept new truths more easily than others. Gandhi strongly opposed the rigidity of the caste system; he called the outcastes 'God's people' (Harijans), leading them into temples and getting them a double vote. Yet in all this he sought to express the eternal Dharma, principles of righteousness and truth, expressed in the scriptures, in all religions, and in conscience.

The tolerance of Hinduism is objectionable to some who prefer a strongly dogmatic religion, though it can hardly be more unacceptable to humane people than the persecutions of the fanatics who pretended vainly that they could save the soul by killing the body. Nevertheless it may well be asked whether tolerance is not too easy, for both truthful and dubious statements may be allowed equally and considered to be of identical value. Curiously enough there is often an inconsistency here. It is commonly said in India that all religions are the same and equal. But the human sacrifices of the Thugs or the Aztecs were clearly barbaric practices, which were not equal in a moral sense to the actions of the Buddha or Gandhi. Yet if one protests that some religions are better than others, this protest is seized on as itself evidence of inferiority. It appears that only if one recognizes the equality of all religions is one's own religion good, otherwise it is inferior. All religions are equal, but some are more equal than others.

It is not claimed here, or anywhere in this book that Hinduism is perfect, or that Christianity is perfect. All
religions are the work of man, no doubt in response to divine grace, but they incarnate the invisible only imperfectly. So a plea must be made for tolerance, and for more freedom for experiment in religious matters. There may be more tolerance today than at some periods in the past, but liberty is a delicate flower and it needs constant care. The liberty to study other religions, and adapt some of their beliefs and practices, needs to be made more explicit and not left to an eccentric fringe.

The organization of religion may be necessary to some degree, but this turns easily into the 'religion' that Bonhoeffer deplored. His 'religionless Christianity' was meant to turn energies away from organization and dogmatism to life. 'Our relation to God is not a religious relationship... but a new life for others, through participation in the Being of God.'*

'Participation', this is the language of mysticism, the language of experience rather than external authority, an authority from within which is not enforced by a human agency.

Mysticism is a much abused word, and its origin in the Greek mysteries lends colour to the notion that it deals only with the dark and occult. Yet the Greek mysteries seem to have been the religious reaction of the old pre-Aryan Greek populations against the crude polytheism of the conquerors of which we read in Homer. Such warrior gods could not supply the needs of working humanity, and so in time the old cults of the mother goddess and the mysteries of initiation and new life rose up again. When Christianity spread into Europe it incorporated much of the old rite and symbolism, in its sacraments and devotions to the Mother and the dying and rising Lord.

* Letters, p. 165.
In India a similar process was at work, for the Indian Aryan gods of the Vedas drank hard and larded it over the blacker but more cultured tribes whom they had defeated. But the dark Indus-culture gods survived, in Shiva the lord of yogis, in Krishna the divine lover, and in the Great Mother. Here devotional mysticism flourished, both in the classical manner and in many popular forms.

But what is mysticism, and is it valuable? Occult and magical practices sometimes pass under that name, but they are aberrations and not the real thing. The Oxford dictionary defines a mystic in two ways. First, a mystic is ‘one who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the understanding’. If this means that the mystic grasps truth which reason cannot understand, it is doubtful whether this can be maintained, for reason must play a part in all understanding. Yet it may be that truths flash on the mind, for which there is no obvious or conscious reasoning. The intuitions of the scientist and the artist have their place here, and there is an important sense in which every scientific seeker after truth is a mystic. And the challenge which the mystic brings to authority arises from his first-hand experience of truth.

The dictionary then goes on to define a mystic as ‘one who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity’. This is clearly a much more religious kind of mysticism, and R. C. Zehner in his classic *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* firmly distinguishes religious mysticism from any other kind. Yet it is not always easy to see where the dividing line falls. Marghanita Laski, in her fascinating book *Ecstasy*, collected many examples of experiences of ‘transcendent ecstasy’, a timeless state of exaltation. Most of her acquaintances had had such experiences, with varying stimuli or ‘triggers’ of religion, music, art, nature, and
so on. Some of these were obviously religious, since they claimed contact with God. Others were closely akin, though their subjects were agnostic. They showed that experiences of exaltation are not confined to the strictly religious. But since it is only in religion that ‘union with or absorption into the Deity’ can be claimed, these experiences of agnostics would not fall within the dictionary definition. Perhaps they are ‘not far from the kingdom of God’.

Zahner would exclude Wordsworth from religious mysticism, yet Wordsworth was not only a Christian but to many he is the great high priest of the revelation of God in nature. The love of nature is a comparatively modern phenomenon, at least in the West though it is age old in China and Japan. Nature is a fact of life, its beauty can be appreciated, it can reveal God, even though one must beware of reading human attributes like love into nature. But the delight in mountains and sea in modern times, and the quest of beauty in holidays, is not unlike the religious pilgrimages of the past to miracle-working shrines. It is hard to exclude from religious mysticism verses such as,

I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts . . .
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Union with the divine, with the spirit that impels all things, would seem to be the proper goal of the mystic, artist or scientist. But doubtless there are different ways of apprehending this. The Upanishads sought unity and identity with Brahman, not as an individual person separate from us, but as the root of all knowledge, the
essence of our self, the principle of the universe. This has been called the mysticism of absorption into the deity, and its non-duality led sages to believe that they could gain all knowledge and power; hence it could easily degenerate into pride and magic. This fatal attraction of knowledge and power is not unknown to politicians and scientists.

But it has been seen that there were other equally important strands in Hindu thought, of unity but not identity with the divine. Man is not the creator of this universe, and however much he is akin to the creating spirit he is not identical. So his relationship to the divine must be one of dependence; even if he is of the same nature he is different in degree. So some of the later Upanishads and the Gita describe the relationship of man to God as one of faith and devotion. This is expressed in personal terms, which must be used in some way as the highest symbolism of which man is capable. So Arjuna says, 'bowing down and prostrating my body before thee, adorable Lord, I seek thy grace... Bear with me as a father to his son, as a friend to his friend, as a lover to his beloved'.

Just how this comes about is expressed, as well as possible, by Ramanuja in his 'modified non-dualism'. This might be called a typical Indian compromise, the kinship of divine and human, yet their difference. It is the difference between unity and identity. According to the pure monists man is the divine, identical, 'that thou art'. But Ramanuja would say that this is not so, for however near the holiest and wisest man may be to the divine, however much his Atman is absorbed into Brahman, or the human spirit partakes of divinity, yet on this earth at least he is limited, creaturely and dependent. But the dependence is one of love, in which the fullness of the godhead becomes his in the relationship of
grace and love. So the mystic is said to 'attain my being' and 'enter into God'.

There are those who maintain that mysticism is foreign to Christianity, yet there are many echoes in the New Testament to some of the phrases which have been used above. The epistle of Peter speaks of becoming 'partakers of the divine nature'. Paul wrote of being filled with all the fullness (pleroma, a word from the mysteries) of God, and of Christ dwelling 'in your hearts through faith'. The Fourth Gospel says 'abide in me, and I in you'. And so on.

Christian mysticism has a long and honourable history, but it has generally held a position this side of Ramanuja, feeling that there is unity with God in the highest realms of mysticism, but never identity. The strongly personal character of Bible religion, and the stress on transcendence in the Old Testament, made it impossible for the mystics to imagine that they could become God.

Karl Barth, the Swiss prophet of modern theology, but too transcendent and exclusive in his emphasis, has consistently opposed mysticism, and some of his followers are even more extreme. But against this Tillich has asserted that 'without a mystical element—namely, an experience of the immediate presence of the divine—there is no religion at all'. Tillich recognizes the centrality of mysticism to Hinduism, and he says that 'Christian theologians were and are right in criticizing the non-personal, non-social and non-historical attitude of the mystical religions, but they had to accept the counter criticism of the mystical groups that their own personalism is primitive and needs interpretation in transpersonal terms'.

This criticism is directed first against the pure monistic forms of mysticism, but also against the non-social attitude, of which more in the next chapter. Christianity needs to get beyond its cruder personal terminology, and also its authoritarian and anti-mystical ways. It has been
seen that there is a long tradition of Christian mysticism, and much of this has been in revolt against the formalism and corruption of the church; examples like Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila are abundant. The Methodist revival was a similar revolt in England against formalism, and its stress upon experience of God found enduring expression in mystical verse.

That mysticism can be unsocial and a merely private experience is true, and this fact shows that the balance must be kept between the individual apprehension of God and its expression in social service. Not all mystics shut themselves away as did Teresa. Catharine of Siena, for example, was a lay saint dedicated to the service of others. The strong moral sense of the Bible kept Christianity alive to the needs of the world. In India the devotional cults were open to anyone, but the idea of redeeming society had to wait till Gandhi. As Tillich says, the polarity of different religions means that some stress the personal and others the social, and both need to learn from each other to make up what is lacking in their own tradition.

Mysticism seeks union with God, the ground of the universe, revealed as love in his Incarnation. But this is not the preserve of a few specialists, who have time for this in monasteries or retreats. For all religion is concerned with the meaning of life, the knowledge of God, and not merely as a philosophical explanation but as a living experience. Every sincere prayer is mystical, and the difference between the ordinary believer and the expert is simply a matter of degree. From the first personal religious experience there is a growth into mystical union, as one passes through the Ashrams or ‘many mansions’ of this life and the next.
CHAPTER TEN

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Nowhere have the attacks on traditional Christianity been more severe than in the realm of morality, and perhaps nowhere is there less certainty about the future. Typical of this was the controversy that greeted Professor G. M. Carstairs’ Reith lectures This Island Now. In his first lecture Professor Carstairs suggested modification of traditional views as consonant with the teaching of Christ that charity is greater than chastity, rather than the views of his ‘intemperate disciple St Paul’. Critics were quick to point out that it was in fact the ‘intemperate’ Paul who said that charity was the greatest virtue and that Jesus never uttered these precise words. Yet there was more to it than this, for Paul undoubtedly gave some sanction to the view that celibacy was better than marriage which was a second best: ‘it is good for a man not to touch a woman... but if they have not continency, let them marry’. Whereas the whole teaching and action of Jesus was charity towards the fallen, and caring for their needs equally with the self-righteous. Yet Paul also, in his complex way, pointed towards this, as we shall see.

The bishop of Woolwich, of course, after his support of a notorious publication, is very much concerned with moral revolution, which is no wind of change but a real gale. He sees the danger of Christianity being identified simply with the old morality, and declares that this morality is sub-Christian. The view can no longer be
held that right and wrong were declared once for all by God, written by his own hand on tablets delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai. Even if this myth is rejected, the notion still obtains that certain things are always right because they are written into the universe and are 'given', whereas other things are wrong, sin, and 'nothing can make them right'. This makes a rigid attitude, which insists, for example, that marriage is always indissoluble and indelible, independently of the quality of the personal relationships which compose it. Holy wedlock may be unholy deadlock, but nothing can be done about it. Every other promise and contract, however sacred, may be broken and forgiven, but not this. Cruelty may pile up, but nothing can be altered.

This is not just because of the teaching of the Church, it is said, but because the Bible says so. And not only Moses, but Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is elevated into a new and higher Law, far more difficult than the old one, and producing more scruples and anxiety. Yet this is such an obvious travesty of the teaching of Jesus that it must be examined, for that very Sermon criticizes those who are 'anxious overmuch'; the 'take no thought' of the old translation is better rendered 'be not anxious', as in most modern translations.

A new understanding of the teaching of Jesus is essential, and his moral teaching has been rarely explained so well as in a little book by T. E. Jessop, former Professor of Philosophy at Hull, entitled Law and Love. Jesus is often represented as a great moral teacher, says Professor Jessop, but 'it is doubtful whether any great religious prophet uttered fewer moral directions'. Jesus is thought to have said much about sin, but in fact he used the word very rarely, and when he did it was in the positive context of telling some anxious neurotic that his sin was forgiven, declaring God's generosity in a way that the Pharisees
thought blasphemous but which brought hope to the despairing. So Jessop adds, 'It is often said nowadays that the Church is losing her power because she no longer talks enough of sin. It seems to me, on the contrary, that the word has been over-used. The fulminating use of it in the pulpit is a cheap way of imitating the externals of prophecy, and the lavish application of it in our meditations to all our faults is a sure way to morbidity and a common way to religious mania'.

Far from giving moral laws 'which never shall be broken', the teaching of Jesus was occasional and directed to the need in question, for 'circumstances alter cases'. Jesus was opposed to legalism, and to elevate his words or actions on particular occasions into universal laws is a betrayal of his mind. The Mosaic law said 'thou shalt not kill'. Jesus made that into the positive attitude 'love your enemies'. Yet most Christians have subscribed to the theory of the Just War, and would kill in the last resort in defence of the weak. This is in agreement with the view of the teaching of Jesus as arising from particular incidents, and allowing for circumstances to alter cases. But when it comes to sexual morality many Christians have, in theory at least, let themselves be persuaded by celibate legalists into saying that divorce is always wrong. Exceptions can be imagined for every other commandment, why not for this? The statement of Jesus against putting away one's wife seems harsh, but this comes in the Sermon without the context of its utterance. For scholars say that all the sayings of Jesus were given for particular occasions, some of which are known and others are not; only later were they gathered together into collections like the Sermon. The early church recorded these words, but they found the absolute prohibition of divorce too severe, and inserted the words

permitting it at least on account of 'fornication' (in Matthew 5, 32; but not in Mark 10, 11).

The actions of Jesus, which are the clearest guide to his words, show that he was far more generous to the fallen than most of his followers have been, for their moral stiffness inhibits forgiveness. Alone among the world's great religious teachers Jesus went as easily to the moral outcast as to the professionally religious who had an interest in debating theological and moral questions. Rough fishermen could hardly have seemed the best material for a church, but even less were those who are more forcibly described in modern language as political traitors and common prostitutes. Yet among these people Jesus found a generosity and desire for God that the withered hearts of the righteous excluded. The words spoken to the woman who washed his feet with her tears can be taken to their full extent, 'she loved much'.

Like Jessop, D. M. Mackinnon and H. A. Williams in Objections oppose the legalism and obligation that characterize so much Christian moral teaching. 'Principles' and 'duty' are spoken of too easily as if these were the infallible guides to Christian relationships. Henry Ford is reported to have said, 'when a man talks to me of principles I reach for my gun'. And there is no doubt that many harsh things have been done in the name of principle, the application of inflexible rules that can go contrary to charity. Wordsworth's dreadful line, often used as a hymn, 'Duty, stern daughter of the voice of God', represents to some people their religion. It is a body of rules, unpleasant but to be endured, and performed without exception, as far as possible. So the sweat and strain, that bring people to the psychiatrist's couch, come from a solemn and hard religion which is far removed from the joy of the Gospel.

It should be noted that Paul, for all his clanking
energy, taught on similar lines to the Gospel. For his debates about the Law, and curious arguments about circumcision which sound strangely in modern ears, are really against the morality of legalism. The seventh chapter of Romans shows the struggle that legalism produces in a nervous person: 'I had not known sin except through the law'. Then the following chapter triumphed in the release that came when faith in Christ enabled him to live without care. Like Augustine he could then, 'love God and do as you like'. Orthodox Judaism is still bound by many legal prescriptions that Christians got rid of in the first century, thanks to Paul. Legalism crept into the church again, for it is easy to make rules, and 'compound for sins they are inclined to, by damning those they had no mind to'.

Traditional Christianity came to tie up its notions on sin and legalism with what was known as the scheme of salvation and atonement, which looks fearful enough as set out baldly by Dr Bezzant. Satan was alleged to have fallen from heaven, after rebellion against God, and he took his revenge by persuading Adam and Eve to disobey one absolute command of God. This brought the Fall, whereby not only these parents of mankind but the whole human race became corrupt, wholly inclined to evil, under the curse and guilt of Original Sin, and just objects of the divine damnation. To restore his thwarted purpose God sent his Son, and he made a perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's honour and appease his legitimate anger. Those, and those alone, who accepted this scheme could find salvation.

Although this scheme was widely held, and is now tacitly abandoned or neglected by many Christians, fortunately no church ever officially adopted any one theory of the Atonement. Varieties of Ransom, Sacrifice, Satisfaction, Substitution, and Moral Example theories have
been put forward as explanations of the death of Jesus, and to tie it up with the mechanics of salvation. Yet the repeated teaching of Jesus was that man needs simply to repent to obtain God’s pardon; then the penitent must also be forgiving towards other people who have offended him. Both in Old Testament and New God forgave men their sins when they repented, without waiting for any appeasing of his anger, and the Gospels carry this further by removing it all outside the sacrificial system. It is a tragedy that theologians later put the theory of a satisfaction of God by sacrifice back again.

Not only the cult of sin-anxiety, but the cult of suffering and sacrifice is dangerous, says Professor Mackinnon, for those who are ‘encouraged by the doctrine of redemption through sacrifice to propagate such falsehoods as the thesis that pain ennobles’. Self-sacrifice can too often be a form of masochism, and devotion to the dead Christ can take unhealthy forms. An independent historian, not necessarily a theological one, might hold that Jesus never foresaw his death, for the Gospels were written thirty years and more after the event and may have introduced predictions of the cross. The whole life of Jesus, his teaching and actions, might take on a different emphasis if viewed in themselves and apart from the tragedy of the unexpected end. For his followers have often called him Lord, Lord, and do not the things that he told them.

However, the social bearing of Christianity is not doubted today, and it is stressed more than at many periods in the past. If Freud and Jung have taught some of the mysteries of the sub-conscious, Marx and others have shown that history is more than a chronicle of battles. The Marxist ideal of an earthly paradise, the kingdom of heaven on earth, with the salvation not merely of the individual but of society, has clear roots in Hebrew prophecy and the teaching of Jesus. Marx be-
lieved that this would come inevitably, because of the fundamental goodness of man; though Marxists strangely betrayed this faith by persecuting other classes than the manual workers and forcing their own cause onwards by violence. Christians have taken more account of human weakness, and this century has revealed almost unexpec
ted baseness in human nature. Christians believe in the kingdom on earth, but it is from God. In modern terms this does not mean a second advent on the clouds, but a working of the spirit of God from within. In his book *The Convergent Spirit* Professor Zehner has shown how this can be understood by combining Marxist ideals with the teaching of Teilhard de Chardin of the spirit of God working upwards through evolution.

Christian concern with social justice has been seen all down the ages, though with very bad lapses and periods of almost complete forgetfulness. Although Christianity was a missionary religion, in the sense that the Good News was for all men, it forgot this for centuries in the Middle Ages, and afterwards it adopted missionary methods that tended towards imperialism. Some other religions were missionary, Islam just as imperialistic, but Buddhism penetrating much more peacefully right across Asia. Christian missions helped to lay the foundations for modern medical and educational services in most African and many Asian countries, and they opposed evils of human sacrifice, caste and child-marriage. They were also often intolerant and abusive of beliefs and practices that they little understood. Yet future historians of those continents will probably look back on their positive achievements, as we look back to the Romans, and con-
sider them good on balance.

It is common form to denounce the present age as selfish, materialistic and irreligious. Yet Tillich says that religious indifference cannot last, for men will always
search for the meaning of their existence, and while traditional religious forms may lose their power, new religious elements will appear. 'Such elements are the desire for liberation from authoritarian bondage, passion for justice, scientific honesty, striving for a more fully developed humanity, and hope in a progressive transformation of society in a positive direction.'*

Hindu morality has not been necessarily better than Christian, or Indian society more perfect than European. But the different ways in which moral and social problems have been approached are interesting and can be studied without bestowing either exaggerated praise or blame. Just as there is an extremism which thinks everything oriental mysterious and ideal, so there is another which sees only the beggary, dirt, superstition, idolatry and class-oppression. But it is irrelevant, if there is oppression, to point to European slave-trading or Inquisition, the persecution of the Jews or the torture of Algerians. Reformation is needed, in India as in Europe, and all religions need raising by the best ideals wherever they come from. Yet India has produced great cultures, and these are proof of joy in work and high ideals cherished over long periods of her history.

Dharma has been mentioned, the virtue and righteousness which are fundamental to the understanding of Hindu culture and religion. The Great Epic (Mahabharata) might be called the Book of Dharma, for in it difficulties of right living were worked out with great subtlety. Dharma is the ideal which flourishes in the best periods, but towards the end of each world-cycle it declines; men neglect religion, sons kill fathers and fathers sons, wars break out, property is stolen, morality

*Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions, p. 14.*
is flouted, caste duties are not observed, and tyrants rule the earth who are strangers to the eternal Dharma. But it is just when there is such a decline of Dharma that Vishnu comes in an Avatar, to restore peace, prosperity and faith to the world.

The traditional Hindu Dharma is that of ‘class and the stages of life’. The system of hundreds of castes that exist today is of doubtful origin. Many of these castes are occupational, but they have their own marriage and food taboos. The classical scriptures only know of four castes, the Brahmin priests, the warrior rulers (kshatriyas), the farmers and merchants (vaishyas), and the serfs (shudras). These castes were founded partly on the Aryan conquest and the colours of the mingling races, and partly on function. They were an attempt at recognizing the different qualities of men and the tasks appropriate to them. That prohibitions of inter-marriage could not be strictly enforced is shown in the Laws of Manu, which gives names for the offspring of mixed unions (like the ‘coloured’ people of South Africa today). That all castes, including the servants, could have full access to devotional religion was the work of the Gita.

As there were four classes, so there were the four stages of life, spoken of in Chapter 7. Although India has given an emphasis to ascetic practices as fervently as anywhere else, yet celibacy was quite unusual. It was the duty of the normal man to marry and raise children, and only retire from the world when his son’s sons appeared. Further, the four legitimate pursuits of virtue, love, wealth and salvation were models for all. Many, even of the priestly caste, did not pass through the four Ashrams and follow all four pursuits, but all were legitimate.

Yet problems of Dharma remained. Like the Law it tended to be regarded as an inflexible ideal, an order from the gods that never could be broken. In the Great
Epic, Yudhishthira the Just, the Dharma-raja, the incarnation of the god Dharma, struggled with these problems. He belonged to the warrior caste, and the war in which he was engaged would lead to the slaughter of millions of men. This made him despair of Dharma, and declare that it was nobler to take no delight in wealth or war, in virtue or pleasure. This seems like a Buddhist abstraction from activity and a search for Nirvana. Yudhishthira accepted the commandments of purity, wisdom, self-control and avoidance of anger. But his problem was a real problem, the problem of every soldier, every believer in a just war, every Japanese Samurai who sought to reconcile absolute obedience to the emperor with the peaceful ideals of Buddhism.

Yudhishthira was proud also of his own truthfulness; men trusted him because he had never told a lie. Yet once on the field of battle he was persuaded by Krishna to lie, and this brought a further conflict in his soul. For if the Lord told him to lie, his conscience condemned him and showed a higher standard. This led Yudhishthira to doubt the value of the warrior’s Dharma which leads him to war; nothing is more evil, he said. And in the end of the Epic the whole warrior race was destroyed so that there might be no more obligation to war. So India worked out the conflict of force and compassion, a conflict that is reflected in the better known Gita, where Arjuna struggled with the problem but did not there receive the full answer.

When Yudhishthira finally died, having cursed the warrior class and departed into the forest with his wife and brothers, a final compassionate touch appeared. A stray dog attached itself to him and would not leave him. At the gates of heaven the god Indra told the hero to send the dog away, for there is no place for dogs in paradise. But Yudhishthira protested that the dog had been loyal,
and that he could not give up one who was friendless or afflicted or unskilled in his own defence, even if it cost him his own life and happiness. Because of his compassion the dog was admitted to heaven, and then proved to be the god Dharma himself in disguise. This charming story shows that the king was faithful and true to all creatures, men and animals, and forgot himself in the process.

The second epic, Ramayana, the story of Rama, is also beloved in India as a great triumph of virtue (dharma) against the vice (a-dharma) of the wicked Ravana who stole Rama’s wife, Sita, who is a model of chastity. Rama has been celebrated in devotional movements, in poems and plays, in temples, sculptures and painting. This epic was so popular that it spread from India across south-east Asia, where Rama plays are still performed today. In Indian villages the story of Rama is told in many dialects, and the great autumn Dasehra festival is celebrated in his honour. Mahatma Gandhi held out the ideal of the reign of Rama (Rama-rajya), the kingdom of truth and non-violence, to guide India to independence and justice.

The moral teachings of Hinduism are also set out in semi-canonical scriptures called ‘tradition’ (smrīti), which are only a little less sacred than the ‘revealed’ Vedas and Vedanta. The law books or aphorisms (sutra) are a number of codes of which the most famous are the Laws of Manu, probably compiled shortly before the Christian era but containing much older material. Like the Bible, the law books contain various matter, some concerned with priestly ritual, some with the duties of rulers, and some of more general concern. The general trend is that one should do the duty (dharma) appropriate to the class in which one is born. It is only by fulfilling this proper duty that there is hope of rebirth to a higher class.

The moral teaching of the Vedanta is not great and
there is a striking contrast between the Hebrew scriptures, where in the best passages morality is entwined with religion, and the Hindu scriptures where they are often separate. However, the Vedanta are concerned with investigations into the nature and meaning of man and the universe, whereas the Bible prophecies are often preachings directed to personal and national conduct. The Hindu ideal, said the great scholar Dasgupta, was that of ‘personal and individual liberation’. The yogi was compared to a lonely rhinoceros who lived apart, not teaching but seeking. Even the Gita says that one should be ‘unconcerned, standing apart, the same to friends and foes’.

But it has been said earlier that there are many other strands in the Epic, which includes the Gita. Men are told not to return anger for anger: ‘let him bless when he is cursed’. One should ‘conquer evildoers by saintliness, conquer the miser by gifts, conquer falsehood by truth’. One of the most famous teachings is that of non-violence or non-killing (a-himsa). This is mentioned as one of the virtues in the Gita, it is a negative principle in the Laws of Manu, and it became a chief doctrine of the Jains. The Jain religion is a small but ancient Indian faith which exhorts men to follow the Jinas, the ‘conquerors’ who have overcome Karma and attained to Nirvana. A principal way of avoiding evil Karma was by non-violence to all living creatures. This involved vegetarianism, since taking life was strictly forbidden for any purpose. No Jain could engage in hunting, fishing or shooting, or even in farming since he might kill an insect by accident when ploughing the land.

The Jains became noted for their care of animals, especially their bird and animal hospitals. While non-violence was at first negative, it could and often did develop into positive compassion for all creatures. The
Buddhists also developed non-violence, with emphasis on compassion. The famous Indian Buddhist emperor Ashoka, in the third century B.C., not only renounced war and forbade hunting and animal sacrifices, but he built hospitals for men and animals, dug wells, built rest-houses and planted shade trees for travellers. He was a notable example of a humane ruler making enlightened social legislation, and H. G. Wells called him one of the six greatest rulers of history.

It is notorious, however, that Indian society by the nineteenth century was burdened with heavy social evils. There had been no Reformation or Enlightenment such as swept away the superstition and oppression that flourished in medieval Europe with its dirt and plagues, witch-hunts and burnings. Hindu society had languished under the rule of Muslim Moguls and European imperialists, and lacked the responsibility of self-rule. Both the Christian missionaries and the humanist administrators who went to India were shocked by evils such as widow-burning, untouchability of outcastes, temple prostitution, and the fanaticism of devotees who killed themselves under Juggernaut temple cars (at Puri on the east coast where the Jagannatha temple is dedicated to a form of Krishna-worship).

Reform began with the Brahma Samaj, the ‘society of one God’, in 1830, and before long some of these abuses were swept away by the reformers co-operating with the government. The Brahma Samaj also initiated religious changes such as teaching the existence of one God, rejecting idolatry, and instituting communal worship and religious instruction. Later the Ramakrishna Mission taught not only a universal religion, but coupled this with missionary activity and social works. These reforms undoubtedly show the influence of some Christian social ideals and, as Tillich says, in all Asiatic religions the
indirect civilizing influence of Christianity has been more significant than its missionary work. The masses in south India have been open to evangelizing influences but, apart from some outstanding individual converts, it is Christian humanism that has most influenced the educated classes.

The most famous reformer was Mahatma (great-soul) Gandhi, whose work was almost as important religiously as politically. R. C. Zaehner aptly calls Gandhi ‘Yudhish-thira returned’, for like the famous Epic king, Gandhi sought to put into practice the Dharma of his conscience, even above orthodox religious precepts. His idea of God was based on his conscience (though no doubt influenced by other religious ideas), and he put this before the God of the philosophers or the Lords of the devotional schools if he found conflict between them. ‘To me God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality; God is the source of light and life, and yet he is above and beyond these. God is conscience.’ Both Gita and Gospel had contributed to this view.

Gandhi made non-violence into a great principle of action, positive concern as well as negative refusal to fight. For he taught love to enemies, truthfulness and courtesy at all times. Against the Brahmins who closed temples to the untouchables he used the weapons that all India understood, self-denial and fasting, and so the temple doors opened to ‘God’s people’. There is no question of Gandhi’s debt to the Gospel and the Jains, Tolstoy and Ruskin, yet he remained a Hindu. While criticizing the Brahmins and rejecting parts of their teaching, he saw that there must be some religious teachers, and he exhorted the Brahmins to retain the respect of the people by teaching only what is good and agrees with conscience. While rejecting caste prejudice Gandhi supported the division of society into classes as making for order; this
would be the society most consistent with Dharma. Hindu rites, including images, were necessary symbols to enable man to apprehend the eternal. All religions are true, and all are imperfect. To Christian missionaries, among whom he had great friends, Gandhi said that they must take the beam out of their own eyes, be much more humble, and identify themselves with the masses. He delighted in praying with followers of other religions, seeing each as following its own Dharma.

Gandhi’s greatness lay as much in his life as in his words, and he sought to unite religion and social reform in the service of others. He founded Ashrams or religious communities open to all people, of both sexes and all classes. Rabindranath Tagore too, the great poet and mystic, founded the university of Shantiniketan along traditional Indian lines, teaching religion and contemplation, but translating them into creative action and social service. Modern philosophers like Shri Aurobindo and saints like Ramana Maharshi have founded similar Ashrams.

Hindu morality, like the Hebrew, is determined by religious ideas. There is not ethics without God, for morality is found not so much in formal laws as by living in the spirit of truth and virtue. Both Gandhi and Tagore saw the essence of Hinduism to be in the first verse of the Isha Upanishad:

All that we see in this great universe is permeated by God.
Renounce it and enjoy it.
Do not covet anybody’s wealth or possession.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

RELIGIONS AND TRUTH

'What we call Christianity has always been a pattern—perhaps a true pattern—of religion', wrote Bonhoeffer from his prison. Our kind of Christianity is a late Western European or American organization that is far removed from the Christianity even of the Reformation, let alone the Middle Ages or the second century. This is inevitable, but it should give rise to reflection before setting forth our brand of church as suitable to be imposed on all the world.

More than this, the 'religion' of which Bonhoeffer wrote, or 'religiosity', easily blinds men to the difference between formal acts of worship and the teaching of Jesus. Going to church, being baptized, getting on a membership roll, may constitute an outward adherence to an organization, like joining a club, but it does not necessarily make for Christian living. And in addition the whole cumbersome organization of the church tends to hinder its true purpose. So Bonhoeffer said, 'The church is her true self only when she exists for humanity. As a fresh start she should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. The clergy should live solely on the freewill offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling'.

It must be said that Bonhoeffer wrote with the German state churches in mind, and many churches elsewhere, perhaps most, have no endowments and their clergy live
on freewill offerings. Moreover the corporate nature of churches helps them to organize appeals for help to the hungry and oppressed, the refugees and the sick, in which they have been foremost. Nevertheless, the endless committees, conferences and societies tend to become ends in themselves, membership of which is a substitute for Christian activity. In other words, the form often needs breaking, to enable the spirit to work in new ways.

The distinction of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’, so beloved of past moralists, has been a barrier behind which Christians have often sheltered, thinking of themselves as living a ‘spiritual’ life, unworldly and not ‘carnal’. If they did engage in mundane affairs they told themselves that they were not really interested: ‘our hands are but engaged below, our hearts are still with thee’. Or they might use worldly things as ‘occasions of evangelism’, for the service of the church.

Today Christians are more ‘secular’, wholly belonging to the ‘world’. What then is the significance of the church in a ‘religionless world’? asks Bonhoeffer. Clearly radical reforms are needed, not merely of organization, but of outlook. If it is not possible to dispense with the church in some form or other, then it must be outward-looking and working, and not turned in upon itself; not just content to keep meetings going, collections up, and membership rolls as honest as may be. Like its Master, the church came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to save others by losing itself.

The editor of *Prism* has said that ‘there are many men who find traditional religion and spirituality meaningless’. And when this is now being said openly ‘there is an almost audible gasp of relief from those whose consciences have been wrongly burdened by the religious tradition’. The various religious controversies of these times have shown that there is much more kinship than might have
been thought between the honest agnostic struggling with his doubts, and the honest Christian struggling with his faith. The latter has only found, like Browning’s Bishop Blougram, that doubt has its problems and its despair, ‘belief, like unbelief before, shakes us by fits.’ So the thoughtful Christian makes his journey through life, travelling light, holding perhaps only a few beliefs as essential, but clinging to them as matters of life and death.

The intellectual revolution of today, with the masses of new knowledge coming from many quarters, must bring about changed views and should encourage an openness to truth wherever it may be found. It has been argued from the beginning of this book that one of the great new facts of our time is the knowledge of eastern religions that has now become so easily available. Of all these religions Hinduism is the most unusual and thought-provoking, for Islam shares many biblical beliefs with Christianity, and Buddhism was derived largely from Hinduism.

Hinduism, however, is not static, and we must look beyond Hindu as beyond Christian religiosity. A century ago it would have been thought preposterous to suggest that anything could be learnt from Hinduism, and there are still those who think this. Not only are there fundamentalist missionaries who believe that all other religions are of the Devil (and most of the Christian churches too other than their own), but more sophisticated writers have suggested that Indian spirituality can teach us nothing new. This may be partly true. Christianity allows for the immanence as well as the transcendence of God, though the God ‘up there’ has been more prominent and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the Cinderella of Christian thinking. Meditation is practised here, though
much less than formal and repetitive prayer. There are mystics in both religions, and reformers too.

More serious has been the criticism that many Indian holy men seemed to have little idea of benefiting anyone beyond themselves and were unconcerned with social evils. Similar criticisms have been made of the enclosed and contemplative orders of monks and nuns in the West, and many churches have appeared to exist largely for mutual improvement and their own preservation. But two wrongs do not make a right, and a good deal of Indian religiosity has been selfish and ingrown. Modern reforms have been influenced by the West, and ultimately by the Hebrew prophets and Jesus with their concern for righteousness, where justice for the poor and oppressed were seen as more important than temple-treading.

But looking beyond ‘religion’ or religiosity, the search for truth about the universe has been pursued in India with a determined intensity hardly paralleled elsewhere. This still continues and few countries have had as President such an eminent philosopher as India has in Dr Radhakrishnan, so great a writer on the whole extent of Indian religious philosophy and so charming an interpreter of the East to the West. It is not necessary to praise all Hindu ‘religion’ as do some enthusiasts. Many educated Hindus have broken with the old traditions. Even knowledge of the ancient scriptures has been much less perfect than might be imagined. Gandhi nourished his life on the Gita, and selections from the Upanishads and epics which formed the core of his scriptural authority. Many young Hindus today follow a similar selective method. Like Gandhi, they know the Gospels well, and some passages from other religions. They tend to regard all religions, in their higher teachings, as leading to truth. Like us they are seeking the profoundest facts of life.
That some Indian teachings can have a universal appeal has been shown by the popularity of many publications and translations of selections from their scriptures in modern times. The idea of an immanent and transcendent Brahman, ‘smaller than the small, greater than the great’, conscious and intelligent and pervading all things, can help in giving a more subtle idea of God. The unity of God and the soul has an important bearing on belief in eternal life, so often neglected nowadays. Meditation and mystical union can provide a fuller content for prayer life. Personal relationships with God, and his revelation and grace to men, have been stressed in Hindu doctrines of Avatars and devotion. A Christian can find valuable leadings in all these, not to make him abandon his own faith but to enrich it. This is what Tillich calls the third and best way of approaching another religion, to engage in a dialogue with it, rejecting only what is contradictory to one’s own faith, and accepting whatever is consistent or complementary to it.

Faced with this mysterious universe, man seeks to understand something of the meaning of ultimate reality. Nature seeks to speak to him in its beauty. Other religions and philosophies bring more light and revelations. If God makes himself known at all, and he can hardly be God if he does not do so, then it will be ‘at sundry times and in divers manners’. Some of these revelations may resemble one another, but they will not be identical. The love of Krishna for Radha, the compassion of the Buddhas, the love of God taught by the Muslim Sufis, all these are akin to Christian belief in the grace and love of God; but there are important and characteristic differences as well as resemblances. The ‘man Christ Jesus’ is unique in his own way.

This is not the place to work out a new apologetic for particular religious faith, though it is needed today. But
while there are special claims that each religion makes, this is not to say that there are no other Avatars and prophets, no other revelations or truths. Such negatives are harmful and distract from positive conviction. The belief that God is love is central to Christianity, and it depends upon the revelation in Jesus. This is frankly incredible, as Dr Robinson says, unless this love is 'the nature of ultimate reality'. It is not claimed that all of God can be seen in a human life, but simply that the perfect life reveals the essence of his nature. There is support for this faith in the revelations found in other religions also and whatever light they can give may be welcomed.

At the end of his lectures on the encounter of world religions, Tillich emphasizes the importance of dialogue between the faiths. This will consider their truths, judge their weaknesses, and purge Christianity of useless elements. Modern secularism also has played a part in cleansing religions of accretions that are not fundamental to their being.

Not conversion but dialogue, says Tillich. For one religion to destroy all others would impose a particular religious answer upon the answers of other religions. For secularism to destroy all religions is impossible, because 'the religious principle cannot come to an end. Yet the question of the ultimate meaning of life cannot be silenced as long as men are men'. But neither will a mere mingling of religions be suitable, on the principle of accepting the lowest common denominator, for that would destroy the dynamic element of each. And by being better Christians we may understand more of what Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam have been saying, and have the humility to learn again from the 'Gentiles'.

In the first chapter of this book it was argued that the modern confrontation of the world religions may constitute a third Reformation of Christian thinking. This
may not be obvious, as other reformations were not at their beginnings. And it is still largely confined to the laity, as other movements of thought have often been. But the laity have to make their own adjustments to the ideas of Yoga, Brahman and Nirvana that press upon them, in the absence of sympathetic guidance from professional teachers.

There are movements of revival in eastern religions. In many parts they may be stagnant or degenerate and their leaders reactionary, but they are also putting out new forms of life and sending out missionaries again. It is not so long since it was assumed that Islam would collapse, especially with the abolition of the caliphate in Istanbul in 1924. But there have been Islamic revivals even in secular Turkey, and Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism have provided the motive power of modern nationalist revolutions. It is the close connexion of religion with political movements in many countries that shows how firmly entwined religion is with all forms of national life. Religion has to face the criticisms of modern education and new kinds of social organization, but it has profound reserves in its serious concern with the greatest problems of human existence.

Eastern religions are making converts in the West, as yet on a very small scale. But they interest a much wider audience than their immediate followers. This is not only because of their distinctive teachings or unusual practices, such as yoga, but because most of them have an undogmatic attitude towards religious truth. The over-confident dogmatism of some Christians, who assume that they are right and everybody else wrong, is repulsive to many people who are seeking for truth and are suspicious of glib answers. They are more likely to be attracted by those who accept that there is truth in all religions. This brings a new approach to religious teachings, and gets
rid of the superiority and scorn for others which hinder learning about religion.

This third Reformation is like the release of classical knowledge at the Renaissance, for the East is now open to the West. Compared with this new approach to human and religious problems it might seem that Christian preoccupation with domestic squabbles and church unions is too narrow and parochial. Certainly it will be a tragic waste if energy is spent in uniting in attempts to destroy the religions of the east, in new crusades based largely on misinterpretations. What is needed is more factual knowledge of eastern teachings, fair appraisal and comparison with Christian teaching, and mutual learning. Then it will be possible to take up the great opportunity open to the faiths of the world to found better societies, in which men can seek the weightiest matters, ‘justice, mercy and faith’.
INDEX
INDEX

Absolute, the, 37
Adwaita, non-duality, 36f., 46f., 99, 128
Ahimsa, non-violence, 142, 144
Apostles' Creed, 81, 119, 121
Appasamy, A. J., 19
Archer, W. G., 19, 103
Arjuna, epic warrior, 59, 84f., 128
Aryan Indians, 17, 32, 54f., 68, 86, 111, 126, 139
Ascension, the, 24
asceticism, 100, 104, 108, 114
Ashoka, king, 143
Ashram, stage, retreat, 101f., 130, 139, 145
Athanasiian Creed, 51, 119f.
Atman, soul, 34, ch. 3, 123
Atonement, 135f.
Avatar, descent, incarnation, 55, 59, ch. 5, 99, 139, 150
historicity of avatars, 69, 72

Bannockburn, battle, 11
Barth, K., 27, 129
Bary, W. T. de, 160
Beautiful Names of God, 51
Being, necessary, 9, 27f.
being, not from non-being, 35, 44, 58
Being-awareness-bliss, 60
Bernard, T., 113
Bezzant, J. S., 25f., 51, 77, 82, 135
Bhagavad-Gita, 12, 18, 49, 55, 66f., 84f., 99, 114f., 139, 142
birds on tree, 58
Bonhoeffer, D., 10, 29f., 62, 66, 82, 93f., 107, 120f., 125, 146f.
Brahman, spiritual power, divinity, 33f., 47f., chs. 2 and 3
Brahmin, priests, 102, 122, 139, 144
Brahmo Samaj, reform society, 20, 143
breath control, 113f.
Brunner, E., 81
Buber, M., 41
Buddha, Gautama, 70f., 78, 88, 92
Buddhism, 48, 69f., 87, 97, 101, 111f., 115, 137, 140
Bultmann, R., 10, 28, 40, 62, 82

Carstairs, G. M., 131
caste, 70, 85, 102, 115, 122, 124, 139, 144
celibacy, 96f., 98, 103, 131, 133, 139
Chardin, Teilhard de, 44, 137
chosen people, 14
church-going, 107, 120f., 146f.
creeds, 119f.
cyclic existence, 98f., 138

Dasgupta, S. N., 142, 160
Dearmer, P., 119f.
Déchanet, J. M., 113f., 116f.
de-mythologizing, 28, 62, 72, 74, 107, 132
Devil, 21, 26, 75f., 93, 95, 107, 135, 148
devotion, 48, 51, 59, 60, 100, 104, 126, 150
dharma, virtue, law, religion, 20, 102, 123, 138f., 140f., 144
dialogue of religions, 22, 151
divorce, 132f.
docetism, 63
duty, 134
INDEX

Epic, see Maha-bharata and
Ramayana
eternal life, 83, 92
Evans, C. F., 9
evil, 49, 53, 76
existence, meaning of, 42, 138

Fall, 95, 135
Father-figure, 31, 37, 52
flesh, 93f., 96, 103, 108
Freud, S., 27, 76, 136

Gandhi, Mahatma, 19, 73, 103, 123,
141, 144, 149
Gita, see Bhagavad-Gita
God, a Being, 28, 47
de-personalizing fails, 61
different from soul, 47, 49, 60,
128
Father-figure, 31, 37, 52
intervening, 26f., 107
Personality in, 9, 18, 38, 49,
52, 58, 60, 91, 150
proofs of, 27, 34
Goddess, see Mother
gods, how many are there? 32, 54
grace of God, 48f., 87, 91, 150
guru, teacher, 17, 102

Hades, 79
heaven, 24f., 75f.
hell, 26, 75
Hill, W. D. P., 160
Hinduism, 17, 32, 54f., and
throughout
humanism, 41, 144
Hume, R. E., 7, 17
Huxley, A., 18, 46
Huxley, J., 33
Hymn of Creation, 32, 35

image of God, 9f., 29, 31
immanence, 38, 63, 148
incarnation, ch. 5
Indra, god, inquiring about soul,
43f.
Indus valley culture, 54f., 86, 111,
114, 126
Inge, W. R., 76

Isherwood, C., 18, 46
Ishvara, lord, 48, 58, 99, 112, 115
Islam, Mohammedanism, 12, 31f.,
51, 64, 70, 81, 121f., 137, 148,
150, 152

Jain religion, 101, 124, 142, 144
Jehovah, 37
Jessop, T. E., 132, 134
Jesus Christ, ch. 5, 78, 97, 109,
132f., 149
Judaism, 42, 51, 79, 121, 135
Juggernaut, 143
Jung, C. G., 31, 136

Kalki, avatar to come, 67
Kama Sutra, 103, 104
karma, deeds, 87, 89, 115, 142
kenosis, emptying, 65
kingdom of God, 94, 97, 137
Koestler, A., 113, 117
Koran, 16, 31
Krishna, god, 55, 59, 68f., 84f., 116,
126

Laski, M., 126
levitation, 112, 117
life-affirmation, 95f.
lila, play of divine, 47, 100
Logos, 21
love from God, 53, 59, 130, 150
love to God, 49, 60, 115, 150

Mackinnon, D. M., 134, 136
Macleod, G., 93, 106, 108
Macnicol, N., 17, 160
Madhva, 48, 60
magic, 112f.
Maha-bharata, epic, 18, 55, 67f.,
138
Manchester, F., 17, 160
manifest or unmanifest God?, 59
Manu, Laws of, 103, 139, 141
marriage, 96, 102, 139
Marx, K., 15, 78, 121, 136f.
material and spiritual, ch. 7, 108
maya, illusion, transience, 47, 98f.
meditation, ch. 8
medium of Endor, 79
Messiah, 64, 81
Milinda, questions of, 88
Milton, J., 75, 95
miracle, 27, 72f., 107, 112f.
moksha, liberation, salvation, 91, 100, 109f.
monism, 36f., 46, 60, 99, 104, 108
monkish life, 87, 96f., 102, 149
monotheism, 51
morality, ch. 10
Mother-goddess, 31, 37, 55f., 125
Muhammad, 12, 63f., 121
Muslims, see Islam
mysticism, 30, 51, 125ff.

Nachiketas goes to house of
Death, 84, 114
name and form, 45
Neo-Vedanta, 18, 46, 117
Nicholas of Cusa, 21
nirvana, going out, 89f., 92, 142
non-duality, see advaita
non-violence, 142, 144
not this, not this, 36, 45, 85

occult powers, 112f.
old man in sky, 9, 29.
original sin, 135
Our Father in heaven, 24f.
outcastes, 124, 143, 144

pantheism, 17, 36f., 38, 46
Patanjali, 112, 115
Pharisees, 80, 133
pie in the sky, 77
Plato, 35, 86, 88
Prabhavananda, S., 17, 160
prayer, ch. 8
pre-existence, see reincarnation
progress, 98
prophets, Hebrew, 78, 97, 109, 149
Purana tales, 19, 55, 66, 68

Quakers, Friends, 110, 120
qualified non-dualism, 49, 59, 128

Radhakrishnan, S., 17, 149, 160
Rama, hero, god, 55, 67f., 123
Ramakrishna, 20, 56, 117, 143
Ramanuja, 49, 59f., 116, 128
Ramayana, epic, 18, 67, 141
Reformation, new, 13, 22, 151f.
reincarnation, 13, ch. 6, 100, 115
religion and religiosity, 9, 29f., 106f., 125, 146ff.
religious monk, 96, 108
resurrection, 80, 81, 94
Revelation, book of, 82f.
Robinson, J. A. T., see Woolwich
Rudra, god, 57

Sadducees, 80
salvation, 30, 82, and see moksha
samadhi, concentration, 115
Samkhya, 112
saving soul, 94, 97
Second Coming, 26, 72, 75, 96, 137
secularism, 41f., 147f., 151
Sen, K., 160
Sermon on Mount, 65, 73, 124, 132
sex, 94f., 103, 133
Shankara, 46f., 60, 99
Shiva, god, 54, 56, 111, 126
sleep and the soul, 44
social justice, 78, 97, 109f., 137, 149
Son of God, 63f.
Son of Man, 64
soul, ch. 3, 84f., 123
soul and Brahman, 45f.
stop-gap God, 30, 66, 94, 116
suffering, 71, 90
survival of death, ch. 6

Tagore, R., 56, 110, 145
that thou art, 46, 48
Theosophy, 20
Thirty-nine Articles, 10, 119
Thomas, E. J., 18, 160
Toynbee, P., 61
transcendence, 38, 40, 42, 105, 129, 148
transmigration, see reincarnation
Trimurti statue, 54
Trinity, ch. 4
INDEX

union with God, 49, 128f.
Unitarians, 51, 73
Upanishads, 15f., 33f., 43f., 66, 84f., 98f., 114, 127
‘up there’ God, 9, 24f., 34, 38, 40, 52, 63, 72, 74f.
Utley, T. E., 10

vale of tears, 77, 93
Vedanta, 16, 46, 99, 141f.
Vedas, 16, 32, 85, 112, 121, 141
Vidler, A., 13
Virgin Birth, 62f., 81
Vishnu, god, 48f., 54f., 67f., 99, 139

Wells, H. G., 143
Wholly Other, 27, 50
why is heaven not full? 83, 86
Williams, H. A., 134
Wilson, Harold, 16

wisdom of God, 57
Wood, E., 113
Woolwich, bishop of, 9f., 22f., 24f., 37f, 52, 62f., 75f., 106, 131f., 151
word of God, 57, 63f.
Wordsworth W., 127, 134
World Council of Churches, basis, 64, 120
world-denial, 96, 98, 100
worship and theology, 48, 60
Wren-Lewis, J., 63

Yoga, yoking, union, 48, 111f., 152
yogi, 56, 100, 142
Yudhishthira, king, 102, 123, 140, 144

Zaehner, R. C., 14, 42, 49, 60, 79, 126f., 137, 144, 160
Zimmer, H., 104
FOR FURTHER READING

Many of the Indian teachings discussed in this book have been treated in full detail and references in my *Upanishads, Gita and Bible*. A fine recent interpretation of doctrines for students is *Hinduism* (Oxford) by R. C. Zachner. K. Sen’s *Hinduism* (Pelican) is more historical, and S. Radhakrishnan’s *The Hindu View of Life* is typical of this author’s interpretation of eastern thought for the West. *Hindu Idealism* and *Hindu Mysticism* by S. N. Dasgupta (Chicago) are readable and scholarly. A selection of classical texts is in *Hindu Scriptures* (Everyman) by N. Macnicol, and a paraphrase translation in *The Upanishads* (Mentor). The Bhagavad Gita is best translated and annotated by W. D. P. Hill (Oxford), or more cheaply in *The Song of the Lord* (Murray). Expensive, but full and well written, is the symposium of many Indian religions edited by W. T. de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Columbia).
"A book that is shut is but a block"

GOVT. OF INDIA
Department of Archaeology
NEW DELHI.

Please help us to keep the book clean and moving.