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THE UNKNOWN CHRIST OF HINDUISM

Towards an Ecumenical Christophany

R. Panikkar

Second Edition

τῷ ἀγνώστῳ Χριστῷ

But another
parallel quote
from Veda or Sūtra

μέσος ὑμῶν στήκει ὃν
ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἶδατε

Jn 1:26

In-between you stands whom
you know not¹

(1)

Μέσος : मध्य

In-between, in the middle, in the
midst, in the center: the mediator,
the madhyamaka, the middlemost.

It all happens in-between, in the inter-action, in the mutual relationship of the radical relativity of all things. And in-between is the One, in the Center, who makes the interrelation a creative and constitutive intrarelation: the One whom we do not know.

1. Cf. ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἔστιν.
The Kingdom of God is [neither among, nor within but]
between you.

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Preface

I know, O Arjuna, the beings of the past, the present and the future, but no one knows me.

Bhagavad Gītā 7.26

And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?

Mt 25:38

There has been a fellow traveler in my journeys to the different lands of Man. Child of my time and environment, I thought I knew well who that companion was in my intellectual and spiritual incursions of over a half-century ago. A critical moment for me was when I reached ^{my} ~~an~~ ancient human dwelling at the peak of my life: my companion disappeared. I had often preached about Emmaus. But that settlement was my own village. And so instead of going back to a City of Peace, in case I might find my partner again, I proceeded, alone, to a Battlefield torn apart by

fratricidal warfare. Shocked and pained I refused to take a stand and to struggle for any of the parties. The Black one wanted to convince me to be a warrior in the Field of Righteousness. The White one wanted me to be a brahman in favour of what seemed to me an unjust status quo. Both were my kith and kin, but I remained a conscientious objector, mistrusted by both. Perhaps a third great Symbol in the form of Compassion was taking hold of me. Risking my life in offering my services to everybody without accepting their respective dialectics, I found myself suddenly in the World of Time. And from there the Sacredness of everything, even of the Secular, dawned upon me ...

This book tells something about this adventure.

* * * *

Why a second edition of a book written a quarter of a century ago in our time of rapid social and individual change? Because of a personal problem of conscience. Person here does not mean my singularity, but my relationship with the World. The most positive way to overcome a tradition is not to step out of it (as if it were a bullock cart) or to cancel one's membership (as if it were a club), but to live that tradition, i.e. to 'pass it on', to continue it, to climb to the top where other peaks are visible and/or to descend into the deep where the throbbing of the World is perceptible. I feel that I owe it to many to explain my continuity in spite of the mutation that has taken place in me and in our World.

I can only be free of a certain type of Christianity-- and of Hinduism (and from a Buddhist and a Secularist persuasion, for that matter) if I become a better Christian and a better Hindu.

If we write a book with our life and pay for it with our blood, if intellectual activity is lived life and suffered experience rather than ^amere secretion of the brain, so to say, then ^{what}(we wrote ^s part of what we were; and what we were, we still are. It is of no avail to repudiate it.

The problem of conscience is this: many people in all walks of life, East and West, having gone through a similar process, have either abandoned 'religion' altogether, or have turned to the 'scientific' study of religion. To offer my personal alternative, in which I see reflected the plight of many, seemed a moral imperative sufficient to justify turning from my many other 'duties' and 'callings' in order to dedicate my time to revising this edition.

The criteria for revising this book followed two principles and avoided a third. The present edition has endeavoured 1) to make explicit what was written too cryptically in the first version; 2) to keep from the first edition all that the author still believes can truly be said; and 3) not to elaborate or change the text according to his present vision.

The prefaces which were written for different translations from 1957 to 1976 have been reorganised so as to form the first part of the Introduction. The second part is formed from scattered notes accumulated over the years as reactions

to the text. The bibliography has been updated and foot-
notes added here and there as hints for further study.

My wish is that just as the first edition contrib-
uted towards a more critical Christian self-understanding
at a very crucial time, this revised version may offer a
new step towards a fuller grasp of our itinerant condition.
It is an invitation to a contemplative insight into that
Mystery that can only be named in the vocative and whose
name is a Supersname chiseled in a white pebble that can
only be properly kept in the cave of the heart--of the World.

R. P.

Santa Barbara

Easter, 1979

Introduction

Not by speech, not by mind,
not by sight can He be apprehended.
Only by him who says: HE IS
can He be comprehended.

KathU II,3,12

In the ages that are past He
let all the peoples follow their
own ways, and yet He did not leave
Himself without testimony.

Acts 14:16-17

1. Traditum: Burden of the Past

"God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the World."¹ We

Footnotes (Introduction):

1. Heb 1:1-2.

may surmise that the Son has inspired not only the prophets of Israel but also the sages of Hinduism, and that he has been present in all the endeavours of Man, for we are certain that "upholding all things by the word of his power"² he has not forsaken anybody. We believe that the Logos himself is speaking in that religion which for millennia has been leading and inspiring hundreds of millions of people. Vāc, the Logos, is the Firstborn of truth³ and was with the Absolute since the beginning.⁴

The present study does not claim to unveil this mystery or to dictate the language that the believer in Christ is to use, since only the Holy Spirit inspires the words of his living witnesses, and He takes care to tell us not to think beforehand of what we to say or of how we are to present it.⁵ In this investigation we propose to examine a few ideas regarding three particular aspects of the question.

The first chapter describes the Hindu-Christian encounter on its ontological and existential level, with the intent to show that there is a living Presence of that Mystery which Christians call Christ, in Hinduism.

Presence does not necessarily mean historical presence. Christians should find no difficulty in admitting this, for the best case in point is precisely the Eucharist, which celebrates Christ's real Presence without identifying it with his historical reality. The Western world is, by

Footnotes (Introduction):

2. Heb 1:3.

3. Cf. TB II, 8, 8, 5; RV I, 164, 37.

4.

*cd
majas
Alondra*

5. Cf. Mt 10:19-20.

and large, influenced by an exaggerated historicism, as though historicity were the only coefficient of reality.

Christians in general are well acquainted with the idea that Christ will come at the end of time and that all religions may be pointing towards Him, who is the expectation of the peoples.⁶ This idea, however, should not overshadow the complementary and in a way previous, truth that Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning. He could not be the Omega of everything if he were not the Alpha too.⁷ Christ, from a Christian point of view, is not only the ontological goal of Hinduism but also its true inspirer, and his grace is the guiding, though hidden, force urging Hinduism toward its full manifestation.⁸ He is the 'Principle' that spoke to Men and was already at work before Abraham.⁹ He was present in the stone that Moses struck with such diffidence,¹⁰ and he acted in Moses himself when he chose to share the life of the people.¹¹ His name may have had many sounds, but his presence and effectiveness were always already there. The encounter is not ideological, but takes place in the deepest recess of reality--in what Christian tradition calls the Mystery.

The second chapter of this study deals with the complementary question of the doctrinal relationship between Hinduism and Christian faith. I.e., we are not comparing two doctrines, but trying to spell out what is the Christian's attitude towards Hinduism as a full-fledged, legitimate and valid religion. This faith presents itself in Christianity

Footnotes (Introduction):

6. Cf. Gen 49:10; Is 2:2, 11:10, 42:4, 49:6, 55:5, 60:3-5; Lk 2:30-32; Mt 12:21; Rom 15:12, etc. It is well known that similar prophecies are to be found in almost all world-religions: of the Coming One, the Center, the Symbol...
7. Cf. Rev 1:8, 21:6, etc.
8. Cf. Jn 1:1, 1:9-10, etc.
9. Cf. the Vulgate rendering of Jn 8:25, though it does not correspond to the Greek. See also Jn 8:58.
10. Cf. I Cor 10:4; Ex 17:6; Ps 18:2, etc.
11. Cf. Heb 11:24-26. Though 'Christus' here may mean the 'anointed', the author of Hebrews undoubtedly meant Christ.

as the catholic, the full and universal religiousness. In fact, Christianity lived from within does not consider itself as one religion among others, or even as a prima inter pares. Christianity is convinced that it bears a message of integral salvation for Man and thus sees itself as the fullness of all religion and the perfection of each religion. Insofar as it expresses true Christian faith, Christianity relates to other religions neither in simple contiguity, nor with total rejection nor with absolute dominance. It is a sui generis relationship, which we shall try to describe in the particular case of Hinduism. This investigation will shed light, we hope, not only on the speculative problem itself, but also on the matter of the 'salvation' of 'non-christians' and on the missionary approach to 'non-christian' religions. We shall let the reader, however, draw most of the conclusions himself. An analogous inverse relationship, i.e. of Hinduism to Christianity, also suggests itself, but as it lies beyond the scope of this study to develop the idea, its mere mention must suffice. It should however be clear from the very beginning that the Christian attitude not only does not contradict the corresponding Hindu attitude, but elicits it in a homeomorphic way.¹² Just as, if I really love you I will have to allow you to love me; so if I want to communicate the best I have to you--even if I want to convert you--I will have to let you also communicate your best to me--even to the point of converting me.

Footnotes (Introduction):

12. By homeomorphism we understand the 'topologically' corresponding (analogous) function within another setting, Hinduism in this case.

The differences, however, are generally complementary. In a word, if Hinduism claims to be the religion of truth, Christianity claims to be the truth of religion. Hinduism is ready to absorb any authentic religious truth; Christianity is ready to embrace any authentic religious value. The genuine Christian service is to call forth that 'truth' of Hinduism without destroying the latter's identity. To Christianity, Hinduism in turn offers the authentically Hindu gift of a new experience and interpretation--a new dimension, in short--of the Mystery. The 'catholicity' of Hinduism calls forth the true 'catholicity' of Christianity, while the truth of Christianity calls forth the truth of Hinduism. The passage from a narrow catholicity and an exclusive 'truth' to a full catholicity and recognition of illimitable and ungraspable truth is the Paschal adventure of every religion. A growing Christianity is also a Christianity moving towards a greater fullness. This is the mystery of the Cross.

But these thoughts should not be misinterpreted. Christianity can be experienced in two ways: either as a religion (and then it cannot claim to be of a different nature from the other religions), or as a tangible, historical and thus concrete and dynamic expression of the ultimate Mystery which reveals itself in Christian faith--i.e. Christianity may be seen as a concrete embodiment of (Christian) faith. This would apply equally, mutatis mutandis, to

Hinduism: it may be experienced either simply as a religion among religions, or as a tangible, concrete and dynamic expression of the ultimate Mystery, through which one may reach the all-embracing transcendent--i.e. Hinduism may be seen as a concrete embodiment of (Hindu) faith.

It should be made clear from the outset that when we speak of Hinduism and Christian faith, we do not refer to a rivalry between two religions, but to the relationship between the deepest faith of the followers of the Vedic tradition, and a faith which Christians cannot help but call 'Christian'. This is why the title of the second chapter, in spite of the ambivalence of the expression, remains unchanged. We should also stress that throughout this book the adjective 'Christian' does not denote a monopoly of prerogatives reserved for the adepts of Christianity but that it indicates anything bearing the richness of that reality for which Christians have no other name than Christ.

And rightly so. The great danger today in the study of the encounter of religions lies in either chopping off all differences for the sake of reaching understanding, or in basing such understanding on a minimalistic structure that afterwards proves incapable of sustaining any religious life, thus precluding any truly religious encounter. Certainly there are different symbols and different names. We have several options. They oscillate between two extremes: a) my symbols are the best, they are unique, so yours are inadequate or even wrong; b) each group of symbols and names

is mutually incommensurable and satisfactory for the particular tribe that professes them. The first may easily lead to fanaticism, the second to agnostic relativism. The entire hypothesis of this book consists in enlarging and deepening the power of the symbol so that each symbol--even if it directly connotes the environment for which it stands--opens up experiences and realities not (yet) intended in the actual lived symbol. My contention is that in our present times, a Christ symbol valid only for Christians would cease to be a living symbol, even for Christians--or at least for all those for whom the Christian commitment is not a sectarian religiousness.

And again, the same would apply to Hindu symbols. To want to keep the boundaries of Hinduism within the ethnic, geographical and cultural limits of an old and immutable tradition would not do justice to the insight of ^{the} / sanātana dharma. The validity of the sanātana dharma / ^{does} not imply the rigidity of an unchangeable social and doctrinal structure, but an everlasting claim that it is (the) right dharma. Though Hinduism is more flexible in doctrine than Christianity, sociologically or culturally it is more resistant to change.

To put it in a more general vein: to speak of Christ seems sectarian to some because of the abuses and misunderstandings perpetuated with that name. Many would not object if I were to say the same things about God, instead. Of course others would prefer to speak of the omnipresent Spirit that unites us without distinction. Herein lies the problem.

I am reminded of the reaction of an African tribe when they were accused of being polytheist. They replied that the One and only God, supreme Creator of the Universe, in whom we all are, presents no trouble and needs nothing, whereas the different Gods of the particular spheres need attention, propitiation and worship. Just as there is a peculiar link between God and the Gods, there is a subtle relation between the concrete name we use to express the theandric mystery and the nameless and utterly transcendent Reality^{itself}--whether you use the name Krishna or that of Justice, or Woman. But this use of different names is not without consequences. We may concur that we all 'mean' the 'same', though from different angles and with different understanding. This, however, is not convincing, firstly, because the relationship between the name and the named is deeper than that between a material thing and its term as a nominalistic tag. Secondly, and more importantly, the sphere of religion is not the realm of pure intentions and unutterable ideas, but the human terrain of everyday life's joys and strains, great decisions and dull routine in the concrete interaction of Men, Earth and Powers. If we speak of the Encounter of Religions we cannot remain in ivory towers or hidden caves: the place for the encounter is properly in the bazaar, the marketplace, the civitas and the fields.

The third part of this book deals with a concrete example of the encounter of a Vedāntic tenet and a Christian dogma. It endeavours to show, in one particular case, what

could well be shown in many others: the presence of a religious truth within more than one religion, and the possibility of unveiling that truth to the mutual enlightenment of all concerned. Now, when a religious truth is mutually recognised and thus belongs to both traditions, it will be called in each case by the vocabulary proper to the particular tradition recognising it. If Christians, believing in the truth of their own religion, recognise truth outside of it, they will be inclined to say that a 'Christian' truth has been discovered there. In this sense the third part of this book will discover a 'Christian' truth in the Hindu tradition.

The language of this study has to be understood from its background, and remembering its goal:

The background is constituted, on the one hand, by the horizon of the world religions, especially the luxuriant world of Hinduism; and on the other hand by the present-day problematic concerning general questions of philosophy and theology of religion.

The goal of this study is not to obtain agreement at the cost of fundamental Christian or Hindu principles. On the contrary, it is an attempt to arrive at a certain understanding without renouncing any of the specifically Christian or Hindu truths. This perspective tries not to make the Christian position seem unnecessarily difficult or complicated, or the Hindu way too exotic or unfairly sectarian and sophisticated. What Christian doctrine on the one hand and Hindu doctrine on the other hand, propound as

universal truth have often come to be thought of as particular and limited--if not bigoted--points of view, whereas in actuality they are both formulations, necessarily limited by cultural factors, of a more universal truth.

The perspective of this book is clearly one of enlarging and deepening the Christian understanding of the Mystery of Christ. But another study, which the author has often been asked for, is not herewith intended: a book on Christ that Hindus might understand.¹³ I wonder whether such a book needs to be written at all, because it already exists: the śruti. As an introduction to it the author sometimes feels tempted to write a volume entitled The Unknown Christ of Christianity. He is coming to realise more and more not only that God is a 'hidden God',¹⁴ but also that the thirty hidden years of the life of Christ on earth have been continuing these twenty centuries...¹⁵ The Kingdom of God suffers violence¹⁶ precisely because it is within us,¹⁷ and unbeknownst to us it is the very field of our daily battle--our own being.

I would like to quote the words of an old Christian saint, though neither as an apology nor as justification:

As the physical eye looks at written letters and receives knowledge from them...so the mind, when it becomes purified... looks up to God and receives divine knowledge from Him. Instead of a book it has the Spirit, instead of a pen, thought and tongue:

Footnotes (Introduction):

13. See Th. Ohm, "Geben Sie uns ein Christusbuch," in
Der christliche Sonntag , vol. 13, no. 39 (1961), p. 306.
14. Cf. Is 45:15; KathU II,12; MundU II,2,1; SU III,7; III,11;
VI,11, etc.
15. Cf. Jn 7:3-5; Col 3:3, etc.
16. Cf. Mt 11:12; BG II,37-38.
17. Cf. Lk 17:21; SU VI,11-12; CU III,13,7; VIII,3,2-3, etc.

"my tongue is the pen" says the Psalm 45:1; instead of ink, light. Plunging thought into light... the mind, guided by the Spirit, traces words in the pure hearts of those who listen. Then it understands the words: "And they shall all be taught of God" (Jn 6:45) ¹⁸

I need hardly add that Christ will never be totally known on earth, because that would amount to seeing the Father¹⁹ whom nobody can see.²⁰ It was even good that Christ disappeared and went away;²¹ otherwise Men would have made him a king²² or a God.²³ As for why we still insist on speaking of Christ, we need only quote a Christian mystic who lived in a century in which his sentence might have sounded stranger than it does today: "A true Christian, who is born anew of the Spirit of Christ, is in the simplicity of Christ, and has no strife or contention with any Man about religion."²⁴

Because introductions are generally written as postfacts, the following considerations written for the Italian translation may still be appropriate here.

The injunction not to put new wine into old skins is more than a simple request for prudence.²⁵ It means-- at least to me--that life in its constant novelty cannot be squeezed into an old framework, that change cannot be measured by an obsolete gauge. It also means that content and form constitute a single thing so that any content which could not create, as it were, its own form, would appear as

Footnotes (Introduction):

18. Gregory of Sinai, Texts on Commandments and Dogmas 23,
in Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart,
trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London:
Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 42.
19. Cf. Jn 14:9.
20. Cf. Jn 1:18.
21. Cf. Jn 16:7.
22. Cf. Jn 6:15.
23. Cf. Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19; Mt 19:17.
24. J. Böhme, Dialogue on the Supersensual Life, trans.
William Law, ed. B. Holland (New York: F. Ungar, n.d.),
p. 1.
25. Cf. Mt 9:17.

a kind of existential lie, just as any form which expresses a content other than its own becomes mere hypocrisy. Truth, the African Augustine used to say, is "sine ulla dissimilitudo," without disguise.

Nonetheless, if people feel the need for a new wine (a better one)--that is, if life is change and movement--there will be some tension and polarity between content and container, symbol and symbolised, nāma-rūpa and avyakta. A living content, despite the fact that it depends for intelligibility on its form, will eventually have to break this very form. Likewise, though united with a particular content, a form which is to remain alive will sooner or later betray its own content. Yet what appears to be a vicious circle is in fact a vital circle. As the Epistle to Diognetes said long ago, it is not so much that the body contains the soul as it is the soul which contains the body.²⁶

When an author finally succeeds in expounding his insights, he is tempted to abandon them to their own destiny. He forgets that they are kept alive and vital only through a continuing relationship of life and of love with author and reader. The spoken word has to be proffered again and again, verbal discourse reiterated, or it sinks into a barren oblivion. A book, on the other hand, is in a different position since, though bearing a living word, it crystallizes the word in writing. Hence a book possesses a peculiar type of resistance as well as a stimulating flexibility: scripta manent, but habent sua fata libella.

Footnotes (Introduction):

26. "Inclusa guidem est anima corpore, sed ipsa continet
corpus; ... " VI

The written form itself is an expression of the mode of being of living discourse. The written form of the word should thus belong to its very morphé. Unfortunately, many modern cultures have almost forgotten the special sensitivity of the calligraphic arts which ties the content of a thought to the visible aspect of its written expression. The particular form as well as the general style in which the thought is clad, belong to the symbol and to the reality symbolised. With the use of the printing press, however, the whole thing is almost lost. As it is now, when a modern author abandons his manuscript--generally a typescript--to the hands--or more likely to the machines--of the publisher, his estrangement from the work is almost complete. It has been said--and significantly, not only said, but written--that "the letter killeth."²⁷ What kills, actually, is not the writing but the literal interpretation of the words themselves. If we want to overcome verbal estrangement and stagnation, we need a writing which can be continually re-written, that is to say, a thought which can undergo constant rethinking, and ideas which are not frozen once and for all but actually re-vised, re-envisioned. The spirit only gives life when it "consumes" the letter, like the biblical seer who swallows the book²⁸ or the upanishadic sage who eats all that can be eaten.²⁹ Hermeneutics without sacred communion does not lead to understanding. Have we not been witnesses all too often to the suffocation of the spirit when it is encapsulated; or to the limitation of an ideal

Footnotes (Introduction):

27.

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when it is formulated in logical terms; or to the degeneration of a prophet when his vision is transferred to the written page, or his call for reform is translated into organizations (however necessary such things may be at the time)? Are not books just another form of institution? But is it possible to do without them?

When, a quarter-century ago, I began to write the ideas expressed in this book, I had already lived them in various ways. Though gratifying to remember, it is not necessary to describe them now. But when I began to formulate these intuitions--was almost compelled to do so--my experiences had to be poured into "old skins," simply because there was nothing else available either for me, or for the public which I addressed. No wonder they burst the old skins and spilled the new wine...

Since writing this book, I have been engaged in obtaining new 'must' and in procuring new skins, but the human vineyard and the earthen containers remain more or less the same. The process may have been modified and the results may be more accurate, more suited to our times, but the grape is still ripened by the same sun.

I cannot provide new skins now, into which the reader could eventually pour new wine. The new skins are being made at the same rate as the must is fermenting into a new wine. This venture to discover or perhaps even create new forms of human consciousness--and corresponding new forms of religiousness--requires an intense collaboration. The continuing

demand for this book shows that many of us are already committed to the enterprise.

The only thing that I can do here is to point out some features pertaining to the container and the content. With regard to the skins, I would like to take into consideration the origin of the leather and the method of tanning. The former refers to my original audience, and the latter to the model of intelligibility which is emerging today in relation to this type of problem. As far as content goes, I would like to consider two wines of this new vintage: the significance of catholicity, and the significance of identity.

Let me explain these four points briefly. The first two are 'formal', that is, they refer to structure; and the second two are 'material', that is, they refer to content: The first point (a) is sociological, since it concerns the cultural ambience of the persons for whom I wrote, and even partially concerns my own situation. The second (b) is epistemological and concerns the theory which underlies understanding. The third (c) is theological, and treats the problem of the universality of a religion. The fourth (d) is philosophical, and is the problem of one's own identity.

(a) The sociological point is that although I wanted to help both Christians and Hindus to a better and deeper mutual comprehension, I allowed myself to speak mostly to

Christians and in the Christian language. I wanted in fact to show Christians that the ideas in this book do not dilute the Christian message or evade the "folly of the Cross" or avoid the Christian 'scandal'. To speculate on the latter as an excuse to condemn others or to stick stubbornly to one's own ideas, is not quite Christian scandal, but--to remain in the Pauline context--is prudence of the flesh. On the contrary, I maintained that to pretend to an exhaustive knowledge of the mystery of Christ, is to empty the Cross of its power. I still held that the 'old skins' should be taken from the Christian cellars so as to enable Christians themselves to keep their own identity without any alienation, and to open up to the understanding and insights of others without misunderstanding, not to speak of insulting them with an intolerable attitude of superiority. In a word, I tried to show that there is a way to accept totally the message of Christ without edulcorating it and to remain at the same time open to others, ready to accept them without patronising or co-opting them.

I wanted above all to say that the truth that we can honestly defend as universally valid, the truth that makes us really free, is an existential truth, not a mere doctrine. Thus, I also maintained that the true significance of orthodoxy does not consist in an objectified interpretation of a 'right doxa', understood as doctrine, but in an 'authentic glory' and in a 'considered opinion' (both meanings of the word δόξα) in something closer to an orthopraxis than to correct doctrinal affirmations, however true

these may be in their own domain.

Such a Christian perspective, nevertheless, has sometimes given--especially to Hindus--the impression that I was being "too Christian" and so ultimately unfair, though sympathetic, to Hinduism; that I had still not overcome the innate sense of Christian superiority, and that if there were 'dangerous' Christians today, they would not be the missionaries of the old school, but the more subtle ones like myself who would suck up the living sap of the Hindu dharma in order to neutralise its vitality.

Now, it is not sufficient to assert that such was not my intention, since that would only confirm the suspicion that an attitude of superiority was so rooted in Christian thought that it could not be eliminated even from an approach as open and sympathetic as mine. I do not deny that my opinions have evolved and my convictions deepened since then, but I have to stress that from the beginning, I have insisted on saying that the relationship between the two religious traditions, Christian and Hindu, is not one of assimilation, or of antagonism, or of substitution (the latter under the misnomer of 'conversion'), but one of mutual fecundation. What I confess here, however, is the use of a language that has often been ambivalent, sometimes even cryptic, as for example in the preface to the first edition where I wrote that "the 'book' on Christ already exists" without making it clear that in speaking of Hinduism I did not intend to refer to the Bible, but mainly to the

śruti, the Vedic and the other Hindu revelations.

Now, after this sincere confession, I can add that in practically all my writings, except in my scientific papers, I have made ample use of a linguistic polyvalence. Reality in fact has many layers, and consequently comes to expression with various levels of meaning. Words, when they are not merely algebraic signs (which I call 'terms'), have a constitutive polyvalence which depends not only on various possible contexts but also on the very nature of the reality they express.

My 'wineskins' were certainly made of Christian material. Should I now write another book for Hindus? Have I trusted them too much or relied on their tolerance to the extent that I have neglected to present the Hindu side adequately? Certainly it is not possible now to transform this book into something which it is not, and this for two reasons: in the first place, I am engaged in precisely this task elsewhere and, in the second place, I think that the present-day concern of Hinduism consists not so much in defending its own orthodoxy as in confronting the present kalpa without worsening human karma. I would say that the question of the existence of other beliefs has never been an ultimate problem for Hindu(s).

(b) The epistemological point is that the process used to tan the hides for the wineskins was also a fundamentally Western method. The principle of non-contradiction has served as 'tannic acid' and my intention has been to show that if Christ were not the monopoly of Christians,

nothing would be lost of his reality, his vitality and truth. The kingdom of God does not come when and where we look for it; in fact, as the Latin Vulgate says, "non venit regnum Dei cum observatione" or, the kingdom is not visibly noticeable, nor is Christ himself always recognisable.³⁰ The problem of identification by differentiation, as I have elaborated elsewhere, is typical of occidental Christianity.³¹ For Hinduism, on the other hand, the problem hardly arises. Hindus may be 'anonymous Christians', provided one also admits that Christians are 'anonymous Hindus'³² (though this expression makes little sense in a tradition which takes polynomy for granted, ever since the famous rgvedic saying "One is he whom the sages call by many names").³³ It is no great wonder, then, if in discussing a specifically Western Christian problem, I have used Western Christian categories. Reducing the epistemological problem to its bare essentials, I have tried to show in this book that though a Christian believes that "Jesus is the Christ," if it is more than an abstract affirmation, and if it expresses faith, then this sentence is not identical to "the Christ is Jesus." Similarly, I have maintained that the assertion "Christ is the Lord" cannot simply be reversed. It is not necessary, in fact, that the Lord be named Christ or acknowledge by this title, for the saving name of Christ is a supename, above every name.³⁴

Of course the Christian affirms that "Jesus is the Christ" and that "Christ is the Lord." Jesus, who is the Christ for Christians, is more than a Jesus of Nazareth,

Footnotes (Introduction):

30. Cf. Lk 24:13-16 ff.; Jn 20:14.

31. Cf. e.g. Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum.
Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Religionstheologie.
(Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber, 1964), pp.

32. As far as I know, Karl Rahner first developed this idea
in a symposium we had in Salzburg in
during which I already made this objection. Cf.
K. Rahner,

Schulken
zum

33. RV I, 164, 46.

34. Cf. my contribution to

Nazim
C. F. ...

in lieu of my promised Christophany still awaiting its
completion.

unresurrected. A Christian maintains, moreover, that the affirmations "Jesus is not the Christ" and "Christ is not the Lord" go against Christian faith and are incompatible with it. The Christian, however, cannot say that "Christ is only Jesus," philosophically because the is does not need to mean is-only, and theologically because in fact, the risen Jesus is more (aliud, not alius) than the Jesus of Nazareth, which is only a practical identification, different from personal identity. Neither can he say "the Lord is only Christ," because his knowledge of the Lord is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, there are not many Christs, nor are there many Lords. On the contrary, and this is the central argument of this book: "the Lord is" even though his name may not sound like "Christ" or any of its now familiar translations. The present work deals with precisely this delicate transplant.

As I have tried to explain on other occasions, every believer sees a tradition from the inside, so that for the believer, it becomes symbol of all that is true. Hence, if some truth is found 'outside', one is led to affirm that one can also participate in that 'external' truth, whether by incorporating it more or less directly into one's own religiosity, or by recognising that such truth is already present in one's own religion, though in another guise.

Now, entering into the heart of the problematic, a predominantly analytic mind may have some difficulty in accepting assertions such as "you too, are a Christian" or

"I too am a Hindu," because it gives these words a restrictive and exclusive meaning ("whatever a Christian may be, it is not a Hindu"). Hence, when I maintain that Christ is real and effective, though hidden and unknown, in Hinduism, I allegedly violate the 'sacred' Western canons used to identify Christ, since Christ is seen only in terms of differentiated identification instead of in terms of an identifying identity, as I have elaborated elsewhere.³⁵

This is also, of course, a semantic problem. And here I must confess that I have not always made the necessary clarifications and distinctions. When writing "Christianity" or "Hinduism,"^{for instance,} I should have differentiated more clearly between: 1) the social and historical expression of these religions--that is, Christianity as a particular church affiliation, or Hinduism as a particular Hindu ^{persuasion} ~~sect~~, a particular sampradāya or way of religious life; 2) the core of our commitment to a particular religion, which is not exhausted in its sociological garb but includes the sacramental or sacred structure, abiding through cultural and temporal fluctuations; and 3) the transcendent divine reality (whatever name we may want to give it, and whatever degree of reality we may be disposed to grant it), of which all the rest is but the expression, the manifestation, symbol or creation.

Now in comparing Christianity and Hinduism, as in our case, we should carefully specify which of the three levels or aspects we are dealing with. To be sure, the

Footnotes (Introduction):

35. Singularity & Indivisibility

three are intertwined, so that a believer accepts the lower simply because he believes it gives concrete expression to the higher; but when crossing the boundaries of a religious tradition we cannot ignore such distinctions. A non-Hindu, for example, who sees the caste system and the non-killing of cows simply as sociological or dietary problems misses the point altogether, as does a non-Christian who sees in the Eucharist just a meager meal. Obviously, we cannot confront Canon Law with the Upanishads, or the present-day caste system with the Sermon on the Mount, or the Crusades with Advaita...

(c) The third point, regarding the nature of the vineyard itself, concerns the theological problem of understanding catholicity. Synthesizing and simplifying a little, we could say that the concept of catholicity has fluctuated with the political and historical conditions of the times. It is not surprising then, that during the Colonial and Imperial period of the Christian West, the geographical expansion of the 'Christian' nations was accompanied by the concept of catholicity as a geographical universality. The Catholic religion was in fact considered to be a geographically universal religion and thus had the right--even the duty--to spread throughout the entire world. Still, it is not necessary to recall the Greek origins of the word in order to understand that this geographic, extensive and almost quantitative meaning was and is not its only meaning.³⁶

Footnotes (Introduction):

36.

'Catholic' in fact also, and perhaps mainly, means 'perfect', complete, i.e. a way of life, a religion, a revelation which has in itself all that is necessary to lead Man to Man's goal, by yielding the fulfillment of the human being, by caring for every aspect of human existence, and thus providing a way which will enable Man to become what Man is meant to be. Secundum totum, as St. Augustine literally translated it. 'Catholic' is thus the opposite of 'sectarian', of the 'partial aspects' of religion. Here, the quality of Catholicism is stressed, and for that reason, its oneness, uniqueness. But a thing is unique precisely because it is in-comparable. If it were comparable, it would cease to be unique; it would be more or less similar to another, not unique.

My teologumenon, then, was that the catholicity of Christianity does not need to be interpreted in geographical terms. In point of fact, the modern emphasis on local churches, the mystical comprehension of the sacramental nucleus of Christianity, and religious pluralism (which now appears to be an obvious necessity), makes accepting this meaning almost a matter of course. In one sense, there is no catholic (universal) religion; but in another sense, the authentic and true religiosity of every person is catholic.

I would make an analogous statement about Hinduism. The Hindu concept of universal dharma is not a geographical idea. The historians of religion find it difficult at times

to understand the existential character of Hinduism which, though it may not be strictly ethnic or historical, is tied to the populace of India.³⁷ Traditional Hinduism does not proselytize because dharma (religion) comes with the free gift of existence. It is meaningless to want to change a person totally, into something that person is not.

I am well aware that his point needs much more elaboration, but I am also convinced that what I say does not in the least dilute the Christian exigency, nor does it weaken the Hindu point of view. Today, encounters among religions can no longer follow in the wake of political events: rather, these encounters must condition events. The days of Christian and Hindu empires are over; consequently, it is only fair that the last remainder of Christian 'imperialism' recede completely in order to allow emulation, complementarity and mutual fecundation among religious traditions.

(d) The last point, the philosophical, is that the new must that I have tried to ferment in this book, perhaps without sufficient clarification, may be a new consciousness of the unity of Man, not only in the spheres of biology, history or politics, but also, and fundamentally, on the religious plane. As long as the peoples of the world are not considered to be on the same existential level with respect to religion, there can be no firm base for human dignity. There is something terrifyingly consistent in asking whether the religious outsider (infidel, slave,

Footnotes (Introduction):

37. Cf. my chapter "Fenomenología existencial del hinduismo,"
in Misterio y Revelacion (Madrid: Marova, 1971), pp.

black, mlecchā, kafir, goy, etc.), has a human soul or human rights. 'Hell' would be an intellectual aberration if the damned were to have the same human dignity as the elect. If my religion is the epitome of perfection and this perfection is what makes the human being a really complete human being, then it is only too logical that "extra ecclesiam nulla salus,"³⁸ that the outsiders do not have the same rights as the citizens. I am not saying that to avoid such inhuman consequences there should be just one religion, or that all religions are equal, or that I defend a theory that all races of humankind are equal. Some are doubtless stronger, richer, more beautiful according to one standard, and others are better according to another. I believe, nonetheless, that the equality of every human being qua human being cannot logically be upheld if we are not ready to accept the equality, i.e. the parity of all races with respect to the radical value of 'humanness'. Similarly, religions can differ among themselves, but if they are concerned with the dignity and destiny of Man, if they are different expressions of a constitutive human dimension, they are equal insofar as they are expressions of that same fundamental human religiousness. Equal does not mean equally good (or bad), but being on the same level in order to deal with the ultimate human problems.

A Christian, religiously speaking, is not 'better off' than a non-Christian. On the other hand, we should not throw everyone indiscriminately into the same bag. If

Footnotes (Introduction):

38. "Outside the Church there is no salvation." This opinion is not exclusive to Christians, but exists similarly in almost any religion, and is consistent in spite of its 'brutality'. There are, of course, many ways of getting around it. Cf. Ch. Journet

H. Küng seems to abjure it altogether, in

although the price for this is a break with tradition. My interpretation is to turn it around and affirm that the statement means that the Church is the locus of this place may be salvation, wherever/and however it may appear.

cf. Buber
Encontro
comprom
my b.
Küng
auth. see
ed. Devere

for a Christian, Christ is the ultimate and irreducible symbol, and if the Christian really believes in the dignity of Man, then this Christ can also be shared by others.

A similar argument applies to Hinduism. If there are karmic levels, as it were, then it is legitimate to believe that somebody may not be as advanced as you are on the path to mokṣa. But ways towards participation in the paramam gati or highest goal must be open to any being in which humanness is actual or potential. Similarly, although the preaching of the dharma has different connotations in Hinduism than it has in Buddhism or Christianity, the thrust towards universal peace and fellowship nevertheless pervades Hindu religiousness.

Here it would seem, however, that one must renounce Christ or one's own symbol in order to remain completely faithful to it, as some Christian mystics suggest, or ultimately sacrifice God, as the example of the Trinitarian 'economy' implies (God the Father sacrificing his Son). But then where does identity lie? Only in differentiation? What makes one reality equal to another, and what differentiates them? Only the external parameters of space and time? Have we not perhaps converted the variety of the world into dialectical differences and then wondered why we cannot find any dialectically convincing solutions?

Or, to turn to our problem, where does the identity of Christ lie? If he is already present, what, it is often asked, is the 'use' of Christian missions?

It is not the task of this Introduction to give answers, but only to pose problems in the light of the present work. My first reaction to the specific problem of the missions is to call to mind the Gospels on one hand, and the Bhagavad Gītā on the other, in order to learn the meaning of spontaneity and of detachment from all results, and of acting out of love.³⁹ To seek to justify Christian missions by counting the 'converted' souls would today be not only untheological, but unethical as well. In the second place, the Christian mission--if we still want to use this language--is not finished, nor is that of Hinduism. Human solidarity must impel people to share experiences, material and spiritual goods; and this mutual interpenetration may guide us towards building a true family of Man. Whoever has something to share is blessed in the sharing.

In the course of this Introduction I have subjected my book to an almost ruthless critical attack. Let me say in its defense, however, that I have remained true to the title. I speak neither of a principle unknown to Hinduism which may be alive in every human being, nor of a dimension of the divine unknown to Christianity, but of that unknown reality which Christians call Christ, discovered in the heart of Hinduism, not as a stranger to it, but as its very principle of life, as the light which illumines every Man who comes into the world.⁴⁰ A Christian master said: "anything superior and anything divine, inasmuch as it is superior and divine, is unknown, hidden and veiled."⁴¹

Footnotes (Introduction):

39. Cf. BG II, 47 ff.; Jn 15:12ff.

40. Cf. Jn 1:9.

41. "Omne superior et omne divinum, in quantum huiusmodi,
est incognitum, latens et absconditum." Meister Eckhart,

2612
28

I remain faithful not only to the title but also to the reality, to the Mystery, which is the mystery of Christ. Most of the negative criticisms of this book came from a narrow, partial, merely historical... precisely, from the prevailing microdox conception of that Mystery. But "Whoever believes in me, does not believe in me, but in Him" (Jn 12:44); "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (Jn 15:5). And as Nicholas of Cusa wrote of the second text: "... so that there be Christ's humanity in all Men, and Christ's spirit in all spirits; thus anything at all may be in him, that there may be one Christ out of all."⁴²

A Christ who could not be present in Hinduism, or a Christ who was not with every least sufferer, a Christ who did not have his tabernacle in the sun,⁴³ a Christ who did not represent the cosmotheandric reality with one Spirit seeing and recreating all hearts and renewing the face of the earth, surely would not be my Christ, nor, I suspect, would he be the Christ of the Christians...

Varanasi-Rome-Santa Barbara
1957-1976

2. Tradendum: The Challenge of the Future

"Cuius vultum desiderat universa terra"--whose face the entire Earth desires--so sings the Latin Church at Christmas. Now this Face, of which the same Liturgy also sings:

Footnotes (Introduction):

42. "... ut sit una Christi humanitas in omnibus hominibus,
et unus Christi spiritus in omnibus spiritibus; ita ut
quodlibet in eo sit, ut sit unus Christus ex omnibus"

De docta ignorantia III, 12.

43. "Et posuit in solem tabernaculum suum..."

Théâtre
Alphonse
Perrault
M. - vent

"Laetentur caeli et exultet terra ante faciem Domini, quoniam venit"--the Heavens rejoice and the Earth delights before the Face of the Lord, for he comes. In much of the Christian consciousness, this Face has been objectified. This is one of the side-effects of a pan-scientistic mentality and its invasion of extra-scientific realms. Once the face becomes a picture, the icon an idol, the encounter an idea, Christ an object and reality a thought--once the logos subordinates the spirit, to put it in traditional theological vocabulary, the dilemma becomes unavoidable: either give up the universality of Christ, for contemporary consciousness cannot accept a single ideology for the entire planet; or give up Christianity, for the very essence of Christian self-understanding is that Christ is the universal redeemer, the single mediator, the only-begotten of God, etc.

The gist of this book is that the concreteness of Christ (over against his particularity) does not destroy his universality (over against his generality) because the reality of Christ is revealed in the personal experience of his uniqueness. This experience of the uniqueness of Christ, which is another name for Christian faith, cannot be rendered by the concept of uniqueness, which is a contradiction in terms. A concept leads to intelligibility by comparison and discussion. A concept of something which is both a class of its own and no-class among classes is an impossible concept. Something is unique when it is irreducible, incomparable, incommensurable to any other parameter of under-

standing. Uniqueness is neither one nor many. It transcends the classical opposition between monism and dualism. One or many saviours, one or many ways are meaningless words in the realm of any ultimate human experience. What I propose is both the traditional Advaitic solution and the equally traditional Christian answer: religious truth is existential and non-objectifiable. But I would like to present the thesis without having to adopt either the Advaitic metaphysical stance or the Christian position, though the endeavour cannot dispense with a certain spiritual or mystical insight into the nature of reality. The symbol of the face may be enlightening. A face is a real face when it is more--or less--than the physiognomy of the human head. It is a face when it is a face for me, with a uniqueness of its own. The face is concrete and not particular; it is that face only for me--it is meaningless to say that you have discovered 'another' face in it. In both cases it is a face when it speaks, responds and is alive with the life that also flows in me.

style { Rather than being a new thesis, this is a revival of an old emphasis in a dimension that has been neglected in recent times. Could we say that there has been a 'strategic' retreat in Christian theology? A retreat from the ^{claiming to be} true, unique and even absolute religion to being just another among many? Yes and no. Yes, insofar as many a Christian believer and theologian sincerely believed Christianity to be true, unique and absolute. But no,

26,5
31

insofar as that belief was a correct insight expressed in an inadequate and even false manner. The essence of this book is to show a possible middle way between totalitarian exclusivism and libertarian equalitarianism.

This study differs from many of the works that have appeared in recent times in its 'interior' character. It deals with more than phenomenology, with more than an 'exterior' description of how religions should behave after so many centuries of mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. These approaches are legitimate and urgent, but the character of this book lies elsewhere. It is certainly not a devotional or pious work and yet it emphasizes the interior and personal aspect of religion. It speaks to the 'bona fide' Hindu and Christian who are no longer mutually unsympathetic, but who do not wish to dilute their own religiousness or to lose their own identity, in spite of being ready for openness and even conversion should such an event come to pass.

There are ex-Catholics, ex-Marxists, ex-Buddhists and so forth, but I know of no ex-mystic. Once an authentic mystical experience has come upon you the transformation is irreversible.

The thesis of this book is a mystical one. It can have different expressions; it needs better and more accurate formulations, but the core remains... I do not say that it remains 'the same': endurance is not permanence, continuity is not conceptual identity.

The Christ of whom this book speaks is the living and loving reality of the truly believing Christian in whatever form the person may formulate or conceptualise him. As a Christian, one does not give the existential and primal allegiance of one's entire being to an idea or a formula, but to a reality that surpasses--not 'denies' or 'refuses', but 'surpasses'--all understanding. And yet names and formulas are not without a bearing on reality itself.

The thesis of this book was and is that the Christian, in recognising, believing, loving Christ as the central symbol of Life and Ultimate Truth, tends towards the very Mystery that attracts every other human being trying to overcome the present human condition. 'Mystery', though it belongs to a certain tradition, stands for that 'thing' which is called by many names and is experienced in many forms; thus it can be called neither one nor many. The problem of the one and the many appears at the second stage, when the conceptualising mind starts functioning in a certain way.

I do not defend the naive and uncritical opinion that 'there is' one 'thing' which Men call by many names--as if the naming of the Mystery were simply a matter of attaching tags that culture or language puts at our disposal. This is, incidentally, not the meaning of that oft-quoted Rigvedic verse "(God is) One (though) the sages call it by many names."⁴⁴ On the contrary, each authentic name enriches and qualifies that Mystery which is neither purely

26,6a

~~32a~~

Footnotes (Introduction):

44. RV I, 64, 46.

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26,7
33

transcendent nor purely immanent.

In Christian language--which is a legitimate, though not unique way of true and meaningful discourse--I would say that the paradigm for this Mystery is the Trinity. Rather than being a single center, in which all ultimate human experiences converge in a unity (which ultimately could not escape a certain monism), the trinitarian paradigm allows for infinite diversity. The 'persons' of the Christian Trinity are infinitely different--nothing is finite in the Trinity--so that the very name of person (pace Aquinas) is equivocal. In this model, the harmony or concord of a non-mathematical Oneness is not broken.

In Indian language, I would say that the paradigm for this Mystery is the advaitic intuition, which cannot be called either 'one' or 'two'. The Mystery towards which the religious experience of Humankind tends, is neither the same nor different, neither one nor many: it is non-dualistic. It allows for pluralism, the modern secular word I would use to express the same issue.

We cannot merely 'talk' about this Mystery in an 'objective' and nominalistic way. Our discourse is not 'about' something that merely 'is' or 'is there'. Rather it is a disclosure of a reality that I am and you are. The Mystery is not objectifiable because 'you' and 'I' are constitutively part of it. Nor is it merely subjective, because 'we', the subject(s) are not all there is to it.

If the Christian reaches or comes into contact with

that Mystery in and through Christ, how can I still maintain that ^{there is} the hidden and unknown presence of Christ in Hinduism--or in any other religion for that matter? Is Christ not merely the Way? Does not the traditional Christian liturgy always end "per Christum Dominum nostrum," through Christ our (and not the universal) Lord?

Here, perhaps, the thesis of the book appears most strikingly. The Way cannot be severed from the Goal. The spatial metaphor here may be misleading if taken superficially. It is not simply that there are different ways leading to the peak, but that the summit itself would collapse if the paths disappeared. The peak is in a certain manner the result of the slopes leading to it. Our position distinguishes itself here from the nominalistic one mentioned before. In Christian terms: "Philip, he who sees me has seen the Father."⁴⁵ In Hindu parlance the other shore is already here, realization is not another thing, there is nowhere to go: reality is.⁴⁶ ^{the} In/Buddhist manner: samsāra is nirvāṇa and nirvāṇa is samsāra.⁴⁷

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And yet, the goal cannot be identified with any of the ways or means ^{Though} to it. / Christ is the Mystery in the sense that to see Christ is to reach the Mystery, still the Mystery cannot be totally identified with Christ. Christ is but one aspect of the Mystery as a whole, even though he is the Way when we are on that way. There are 'many' paths only when they are not real paths but only lines on a map. For the actual wayfarer, there is only one way.

26,8,2
~~34a~~

Footnotes (Introduction):

45. Jn 14:9.

46. Cf.

47.

cf. El
S. 1. 1. 1.
and D. 1. 1.

Not only is it unique, it is only a way if it opens onto the summit. For the speculative mind, it is a pars pro toto, for it is in and through this aspect that the Christian becomes the Mystery. At this summit, the Christian and the Mystery are inseparable, indistinguishable; thus you discover Christ in all those who have reached the Mystery even if their ways have not been the Christian one. Likewise you will have to concede that the Hindu who has reached realisation, become enlightened, discovered Ātman-brahman or whatever--has realised the ultimate Mystery. Only for the Christian is the Mystery indissolubly connected with Christ; only for the Vaishnava is the Mystery indefectibly connected with Vishnu or whatever has been the particular form for 'attaining' mokṣa. This would also apply for the so-called unbeliever, atheist, humanist. or whatever--but we do not need to elaborate any further here.

If I am concerned that the Cross of Christ not be rendered powerless and banal, "ut non evacuetur Crux Christi" is not for a 'parti-pris' or a sectarian use, but just the opposite. Precisely because we are at the edge of a mutation in human civilization, no religious tradition, in my opinion, is capable of sustaining any longer the burden of the present-day human condition and guiding Man in the 'sea of life'. It is important to stress continuity in depth and to discover the profound ties of the human traditions that link Men together. Our deepest human fellowship does not arise from our all having stomachs or liking a comfortable bed, but from our having a common

dissatisfaction, uneasiness, desire for joy, thrust towards More. In my own words, fellowship arises because we all have faith in spite of the diversity of our beliefs.

I tried to say everything in the title of the book. But was it cryptic or apocalyptic, concealing or revealing? Significantly enough, not many critics pondered the subtleties of the genitive. My main concern was not to speak of 'Christ', unknown in Hinduism, i.e. of the Christ well-known by Christians who was unknown to Hindus, but rather to present the Unknown-Christ of Hinduism, i.e. the mysteric aspect which is also present in Hinduism, according to the mystical understanding of the Christian tradition. Christians will have to call this mysteric aspect 'Christ' from the moment they come to the belief that Hinduism is a true religion. The title is not, as is often misquoted from memory, The Hidden Christ, as though Christians knew the secret and Hindus did not. I wanted to underscore the presence of the one Mystery (not necessarily the 'same' Mystery) in both traditions. Now, this Mystery is not a purely transcendent divine reality in / ^{which} we all worship or recognise in our different ways, one and the same transcendent 'God'. It is equally immanent and 'this-worldly', it has a 'sagunic' character and even a historical dynamism. I wanted to stress that we meet not in a transcendent ground where differences matter no longer, where we are no longer in and of this world--but here in this world where we are fellow pilgrims, where we commune in our humanness, in the

samsāric adventure, in our historical situation.

If this study, therefore, is so irenic, why did I use the name 'Christ'? Why not Rama? Or why not a neutral word not so loaded with the burden of history?

I shall answer these briefly in the reverse order. First of all, I used the name 'Christ' precisely because of the burden of history. Symbols are not created at will, nor are they the product of single individuals. Christ has been and still is one of the most powerful symbols of humankind, though ambivalent and much-discussed. Christ is a historical name, and carries with it the heavy reality of history, good and bad. The negative aspects add to its reality as much as the positive ones. That the historical name of Christ has little to do with the problem of the so-called historical Jesus hardly needs mentioning here.

Secondly, in spite of its ambivalence the power of that name refers to the very problematic we are dealing with. The living Christ of the Christian generations has always been more than a remarkable Jewish teacher who had the fortune or misfortune of being put to death rather young. Any Christ less than a Cosmic, Human and Divine Manifestation will not do.

Thirdly, I have not chosen any other name because the discourse is mainly directed towards deepening and enlarging that particular symbol and no other. The book was as I have said, intended principally though not solely, for a Christian readership.

Fourthly, Christ is still a living symbol for the totality of reality: human, divine and cosmic. Most of the apparently more neutral symbols such as God, Spirit, Truth and the like, curtail reality and limit the center of life to a disincarnate principle, a non-historical epiphany, an abstraction.

Here, Christ stands for that center of reality, that crystallisation point around which the human, the divine and the material can grow. Rama may be another such name, or Krishna, or (as I maintain) Īśvara, or Purusha, or even Humanity. But God, Matter, Consciousness or mere concepts such as Future, Justice, Love are not the living symbol that our research required.

The symbol we chose saves us from those pitfalls of pseudo- or one-sided mysticism that Martin Buber, among others, spoke against. The name of Christ will not allow thought of an apersonal, undiscriminated ^{ultimately,} (inhuman) unity, nor will it allow for an ultimate duality. The same Christ "sits at the right hand of the Father,"⁴⁸ is the Firstborn of the Universe,⁴⁹ born of Mary;⁵⁰ he is the Bread,⁵¹ as well as ^{the} hungry, naked or imprisoned.⁵²

Within the Christian tradition this Christ is incomprehensible without the Trinity. A non-Trinitarian God cannot become incarnate. A non-Trinitarian Christ cannot be totally human and totally divine. The first case would be a monstrosity, as Jews and Muslims rightly point out when criticising 'incarnation' in a monotheistic framework; the

26, 12, a
~~38a~~

Footnotes (Introduction):

48.

49. Jn 1:1, etc.

50. Mt 1:20ff.

51. Jn 6:35.

52. Mt 25:36, etc.

second case would be a docetistic farce, as Hinduism and Buddhism point out in criticising the Christian position as theohistorical imperialism, from a merely historical viewpoint. Why should one avatāra consume all the others?

I am only reflecting the Christian tradition if I consider the symbol Christ as the symbol 'recapitulating' in itself the entire reality, created and uncreated. He is at the center of the divine processions, being 'originated' and 'originating' (in the consecrated language, being begotten and co-inspiring), at the center of time, gathering in itself the three times and being present in each case in the corresponding way at the beginning, at the end and in between throughout; at the center of all the realms of being--the divine, the angelic, the human, the corporeal, the material. There is not a single 'type' of reality which is not re-presented in Christ. I have been quoting not only John and Paul, but the Greek and Latin Fathers, the Scholastics and the Renaissance writers, the representatives of the devotio moderna, Spanish and French spiritualities, the Rhinelanders, Lutherans and modern theologians. Christ is not only the sacrament of the Church, but also the sacrament of the World and of God. Any other conception of the symbol Christ falls short of what the Christian tradition has overwhelmingly understood this symbol to be.⁵³

The thesis of the Unknown Christ is that whether we believe in God or Gods, there is something in every

Footnotes (Introduction):

53. I cannot resist the temptation to quote a text which ties all the mentioned threads together, even historically, since it comes from the transitional period between Past Ages and Modernity:

"Nam et congruum fuit ut qui est imago Dei invisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae, in quo condita sunt universa, illi copularetur unione ineffabili qui ad imaginem factus est Dei, qui vinculum est omni creaturae, in quo conclusa sunt universa," Pico della Mirandola, Heptaplus, Exp. V, c. 7 (apud H. De Lubac, Pic de la Mirandole, Paris: Aubier, 1974, p. 182, who in previous pages gives generous quotations for the Christian tradition). Erasmus wrote: "nos vetera instauramus, nova non prodimus" and De Lubac comments "instauration n'est pas restauration," op. cit., p. 241.

26, 14
40

human being that does not alienate Man and yet allows Man to reach the fullness of being. Whether the way is transformation or other process, whether the principle is a divine principle or a 'human' effort, or whether we call it by one name or another is not the question here. Our only point is that this cosmotheandric or Trinitarian, purushic or Īśvaric principle exists.

Christians have called it Christ, and rightly so. My suggestion is that they should not give it up too lightly and be satisfied simply with Jesus--however divinised. It is in and through Jesus that Christians have come to believe in the principle that they call Christ, but this Christ is the decisive reality.

I repeat: it is not that this reality has many names as if there were a reality outside the name. This reality is many names and each name is a new aspect, a new manifestation and revelation of it. Yet each name teaches or expresses, as it were, the total Mystery.

I may venture a metaphor: each religion and ultimately each human being stands within the rainbow of reality and sees it as white light--precisely because of seeing through the entire rainbow. From the outside, as an intellectual abstraction, I see you in the green area and you see me in the orange one. I call you green and you call me orange because when we look at each other we do not look at the totality, / ^{we do not} intend to express the totality--what we believe--but we evaluate and judge each other. And though

it is true that I am in the orange strip with all the limitations of a saffron spirituality, if you ask my colour, I say "white!"

The 'Unknown Christ' remains unknown and yet continues to be Christ. Just as there cannot be a plurality of Gods in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic conception of God (they would coalesce), there cannot be a plurality of 'Christs' (they would have to be somewhat united). Either the Christian will bring his conception of Christ to other peoples and religions (as Christians sometimes understood their mission to be, for reasons not to be explained here), or he will have to recognise the unknown dimensions of Christ.

The author has been surprised at the enormous number of book reviews and studies occasioned by the original English version of his book. He has learned from all of them and is grateful not only for the great commendations he received but also for the sharp criticisms. Nevertheless, one thing seems to have been achieved by this study: one can no longer bypass the problem stated by it and go on doing 'missiology' or comparative religion in the 'old' manner. In this sense, whatever merits or defects this book may have, it has done away with many aspects of a certain innocence or self-complacency. At present the writer would be much more radical in his approach, but to preserve intermediate steps in respect for the rhythm of the cosmos and of history is, as always, an indispensable

26,16
42

condition for the very possibility of further progress.

In patience we shall save our lives.⁵⁴

Barcelona

15 August 1979

26, 16, a

~~42a~~

Footnotes (Introduction):

54. Lk 21:19.

The Unknown Christ

Prolegomena to an
ecumenical christology

[Second Edition of
The Unknown Christ of Hinduism]

R. Panikkar

Foreword

"God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world."¹

We can only surmise what the Son has inspired the ^{not} "prophets" of hinduism to utter and how he has ^{been present in all the endeavour} ~~taken care of his children in India;~~ ^{of man, for} but we are certain that "upholding all things by the word of his power"² he has not forsaken anybody. We believe, further, that the Logos himself is speaking in that religion which for millennia, ~~even before Jesus,~~ has been leading and inspiring hundreds of millions of people.

The present study does not claim to unveil this mystery or to dictate the language that the believer in Christ is to use, since only the Holy Spirit inspires the words of his living witnesses, and He takes care to tell us to take no thought for what we are going to say or how we are going to present it.³ In this investigation we propose to examine only ~~some~~ ideas regarding three particular aspects of the question.

The first chapter, by way of introduction, describes the hindu-christian encounter on its ontological and existential level, with the intent of showing that there is a living Presence of Christ in hinduism.

Christians in general are well acquainted with the idea that Christ will come at the end of time and that all

Footnotes:

1. Heb. 1:1-2.
2. Heb. 1:3.
3. See Matt. 10:19-20.

religions may be pointing towards Him, who is the expectation of the peoples.⁴ This idea, however, should not overshadow the complementary, and in a way, previous truth that Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning. He could not be the Omega of everything if he were not the Alpha too.⁵ Christ, is not only the ontological goal of hinduism but also its true inspirer, and His grace is the guiding, though hidden, force urging hinduism toward its full manifestation.⁶ He is the 'Principle' that spoke to Men and was already at work before Abraham.⁷ He was present in the stone that Moses struck with such diffidence,⁸ and he acted in Moses himself when he chose to share the life of his people.⁹ His name ^{has many sounds} ~~may not have been known~~, but his presence and effectiveness were already there.

The second part of this study deals with the complementary question of the doctrinal relationship between hinduism and christian faith. By its very nature this faith presents itself in christianity as the catholic, the full and universal religion. In fact, ~~the Divine Will itself has so shaped the nature of christianity that we cannot consider it~~ ^{does} as one religion among others, or even as a prima inter pares. Christian faith ^{sees itself} ~~is~~ the fullness of all religion, and ~~is~~ thus as the perfection of each religion. In so far as it expresses true christian faith, christianity relates to other religions neither in simple contiguity, nor with total rejection nor with absolute dominance. It is a sui generis relationship, which we shall try to describe in the particular case of hinduism. This investigation will shed light, we hope, not

from a christian
view point,

Footnotes:

4. See Gen. 49:10; Is. 2:2, 11:10, 42:4, 49:6, 55:5, 60:3-5; Hag. 2:8; Luke 2:30-32; Matt. 12:21; Rom. 15:12, etc.

5. See Rev. 1:8; 21:6, etc.

6. See John 1:1', 1:9-10, etc.

7. See the vulgate rendering of John 8:25, though it does not correspond to the greek. See also John 8:58.

8. See Cor. 10:4; Exod. 17:6; Ps. ^{18:2} [17:3 (DV)], etc.

9. See Heb. 11:24-26. Though 'Christus' here may mean the 'anointed', the author of Hebrews undoubtedly meant Christ.

only on the speculative problem itself, but also on the matter of the 'salvation' of 'non-christians' and on the missionary approach to the 'non-christian' religions. We shall let the reader, however, draw most of the conclusions himself. An analogous inverse relationship, i.e. of hinduism to christianity also suggests itself, but as it lies beyond the scope of this study to develop the idea, its mere mention must suffice. →^{3,1}

In a word, if hinduism claims to be the religion of truth, christianity claims ~~its faith~~ to be the truth of religion. Hinduism is ready to absorb any authentic religious truth; christian faith is ^{ready} ~~able~~ to embrace any authentic religious value. The genuine christian service is to call forth that 'truth' of hinduism without causing (it) to lose anything of its universality; to christianity, hinduism offers the authentically hindu gift of (its) 'catholicity'. The 'catholicity' of hinduism calls forth the true 'catholicity' of christianity, while the truth of christianity calls forth the truth of hinduism. The passage from a narrow catholicity and an exclusive 'truth' to a full catholicity and recognition of illimitable and ungraspable truth is the Paschal adventure of every religion.

But these thoughts should not be misinterpreted.

^{and} Authentic ~~living~~ christianity is experienced two ways: either as a religion (and then it cannot claim to be of a different nature from the other religions), or as a tangible, historical and ^{thus} ~~perhaps~~ concrete and dynamic expression of the ultimate Mystery which reveals itself in christian faith--i.e.

2

It should be clear however from the very beginning that the Christian Thesis does not only not contradict the corresponding ~~homeomorphic~~ Hindu Thesis, but elicits it in a homeomorphic way. ⁽¹⁾/₍₁₎ By homeomorphism we

understand the corresponding 'analogous' function in within another setting, hinduism in this case.

the same that if I really love you I will have to allow that you also love me, if I want to communicate the best I have to you, even if I want to convert you, I will have to be open that you communicate also your best to me, even up to the point of converting me.

the differences, however are generally complementary. [In a word] $\rightarrow 3$

christianity may be seen as ^{The concrete embodiment} ~~an aspect~~ of (christian) faith. This would apply equally, mutatis mutandis to hinduism: it may be experienced either simply as a religion among religions, or as a tangible, concrete and dynamic tradition, an expression of the ultimate Mystery, through which one may reach the all-embracing transcendent, -i.e. hinduism may be seen as ^{The concrete} ~~an~~ ^{embodi-} ^{ment} ~~aspect~~ of ~~that ultimate unnameable~~ ^(hindu) faith, ~~which we call~~ ~~"christian."~~

It should be made clear from the first that when we speak of hinduism and christian faith, we do not refer merely to a rivalry between two religions, but to the relationship between the deepest faith of the followers of the vedic tradition, and a faith which christians cannot help but call 'christian'. This is why the title of the second chapter, in spite of the ambivalence of the expression, remains unchanged. We should also stress that throughout this book the adjective 'christian' does not denote a monopoly of prerogatives reserved for the adepts of christianity but that it indicates anything bearing the richness of Christ. —→ 411

that reality for which christians have no other name than

412

The third part of this book deals with a concrete example of the encounter of the vedic tradition with ^{The} christian ~~faith~~. It endeavours to show in one particular case what could well be shown in many others, namely the presence of 'christian' truth within other religions, and the possibility of unveiling that truth to the mutual enlightenment of all concerned. A mutually penetrating truth could equally be called ~~hindu~~ ~~as christian~~.

And, finally, a word of explanation for the reader: if the author speaks a language that baffles some people,

4

And rightly so. The great danger today in the study of the encounter of religions is either to chop off difference for the sake of reaching understanding or to build the basis on a minimalistic structure that afterwards proves incapable of sustaining any religious life & thus any ^{truly} religious encounter. Certainly there are different symbols and different names. Neither the symbols nor the names are the same. We have several options they oscillate between the ~~two~~ extremes:

- a) my symbol & my names are the best & unique so that yours are inadequate or even wrong;
- b) each symbol & name is incommensurable & then good for the particular tribe that professes them.

The first leads to fanaticism, the latter to eclecticism.

may easily ~~may~~
The entire hypothesis of this book consists in enlarging & deepening the symbolic power so that each symbol even if it directly connotes the environment for which it is symbol, it ~~symbolizes~~ ^{opens up} however to experiences and realities not (yet) included ~~it~~ in the actual lived symbol. In our case my contention is that a symbol Christ would only for Christians would cease to be a living symbol also for Christians — or at least for all of those for whom their Christian commitment is not to a sectarian religiousness. And again the same would apply to Hindus.

Unborn
Purusa

To put it in a more general vein: To speak of Christ appears sectarian to some, because the abuses and misunderstandings of ~~that~~ perpetrated with that name. Many would not object if I were to speak about God and say more or less the same things. Others would, of course, prefer to speak about the Spirit, even if with a capital letter for the Spirit is everywhere and unitary in without distinctions. But here is the problem. And my reaction is like that of an African tribe when asked if they were not in fact 'polytheist' for they only worshipped and danced to the many Gods of the universe. They replied that the one and only God in which we all are created no trouble and need nothing whereas are the different Gods of the particular spheres that needed attention, propitiation and worship. But the same that is a very peculiar link between God and the Gods there is also a subtle relation between the each time concrete name we use to express the transcendence mystery and the nameless and utterly transcendent Reality. You may prefer to say Krishna or Justice or Woman. Ultimately we may all 'mean' the same one we have so much 'abstracted', 'spiritualized', 'thin' our thoughts; but the real sphere not only of contention or worship but also of life & human interaction is that which is expressed in the relationship between the Name and the Named.

it is because the special background and the particular goal of this investigation require it.

The background is constituted on the one hand by all of the various religions, especially the luxuriant world of hinduism; and on the other hand by the present-day problematic concerning general questions of philosophy and religion. These two factors have induced the author to use a language comprehensible to all, if sometimes with special definitions, even though it may sometimes disorient those who do not know the whole picture. A specifically christian terminology without such explanation might otherwise give birth to suspicion and unfortunate misunderstandings.

The goal of this study is not, however, to obtain agreement at the cost of fundamental christian or hindu principles. On the contrary, it is an attempt to arrive at a certain understanding without renouncing any of the specifically christian or hindu truths. This perspective tries not to make the christian position seem unnecessarily difficult or complicated, or the hindu way too exotic or unfairly sectarian and sophisticated. What christian doctrine on the one hand and hindu doctrine on the other hand, propound as universal truth have often come to be thought of as particular and limited--if not bigoted--points of view, whereas in actuality they are both formulations, necessarily limited by cultural factors, of a universal truth.

The present study therefore will present, without neglecting philosophical considerations, a specific theological message in a language that can be understood by christian and

non-christian readers and which will help them to better fathom their own faith with relation to other religions. Whatever may be the merit of this investigation, the author is convinced that its orientation will be the one to offer possibilities first of dialogue, then of greater understanding and finally of agreement--all necessary steps to a real "conversion."

It goes without saying that we do not intend to identify the thesis of this study with the catholic answer as such. The author believes that his thesis derives naturally from traditional ~~christian~~ doctrine^s, but this does not mean that it is the only possible one.

Banaras, Easter, 1957

Five years is not too long for a study of this kind to be delayed pending modifications of hurried or insufficiently ~~objective~~ ^{elaborated} conclusions. Yet it has only been necessary to make a few minor adjustments and some bibliographical additions since then.¹⁰ In the meantime, the author has prepared other books dealing ultimately with the same problem of the christian encounter with hinduism.¹¹ God willing, he also hopes to show concrete instances of this encounter with reference to the central problems of time, creation and the sacraments. (+)

But another study, which he has often been asked for, has not been completed: a book on Christ that hindus might understand.¹² He wonders whether this book will ever be written because that 'book' on Christ already exists--the śruti. As an introduction to it the author sometimes feels tempted to write a volume called The Unknown Christ of Christianity. He is coming to realize more and more not only that God is a 'hidden God',¹³ but also that the thirty hidden years of the life of Christ on earth have been continuing these twenty centuries...¹⁴ The Kingdom of God suffers violence¹⁵ precisely because it is within us.¹⁶

I would like to quote the words of an old christian saint, though neither as an apology nor as justification:

As the physical eye looks at written letters and receives knowledge from them...so the mind, when it becomes purified...looks up to God and receives divine knowledge from Him. Instead of a book it has the Spirit, instead

Footnotes:

10. The last two chapters of this book were accepted by the Lateran University, Rome, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate in Sacred Theology.

11. Die vielen Götter und der eine Herr (Weilheim: O. W. Barth, 1964); Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum (Freiburg i. Br. : Karl Alber, 1964); Māyā e apocalisse. L'incontro dell'induismo e del cristianesimo (Rome: Abete, 1966); Kerygma und Indien. Zur heilsgeschichtlichen Problematik der christlichen Begegnung mit Indien (Hamburg: H. Reich, 1967; Offenbarung und Verkündigung. Indische Briefe (Freiburg: Herder, 1967; and lately in a more general way The Intra-religious Dialogue (New York, Paulist Press, 1976).

12. See Th. Ohm, "Geben Sie uns ein Christusbuch," in Der christliche Sonntag, vol. 13, no. 39 (1961), p. 306.

13. See Is. 45:15.

14. See John 7:3-5; Col. 3:3, etc.

15. See Matt. 11:12.

16. See Luke 17:21.

⊕ of Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics (New York, Paulist Press, 1979)

of a pen, thought and tongue: "my tongue is the pen" says the Psalm 45:1; instead of ink, light. Plunging thought into light...the mind, guided by the Spirit, traces words in the pure hearts of those who listen. Then it understands the words: "And they shall all be taught of God" (John 6:45)..."¹⁷

Having completed this study the author hopes to be a little more free to enter into that blessed ignorance and sacred silence. May the reader accompany him!

Rome, Easter, 1962

In revising this text for the spanish edition, the author finds it his pleasant duty to thank all those who by their positive and negative criticisms have helped to unveil a little more the unknown Christ of this world of ours.

Without making any substantial change, though the text was written almost fifteen years ago, certain phrases have been reshaped to facilitate understanding of what the author attempted--sometimes too timidly--to say.¹⁸

I need hardly add that Christ will never be totally known on earth, because that would amount to seeing the Father¹⁹ whom nobody can see.²⁰ It was even good that Christ disappeared and went away;²¹ otherwise Men would have made him a king²² or a God.²³

Our study describes but an intermediary stage in the pilgrimage of mankind towards the Unknown. We trust that

Footnotes:

17. Gregory of Sinai, Texts on Commandments and Dogmas 23, in Writings from the Philokalia on prayer of the Heart, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 42.

18. I would especially like to thank M. Vesci, to whose intelligent criticism are due some of the modifications introduced here.

19. See John 14:9.

20. See John 1:18.

21. See John 16:7.

22. See John 6:15.

23. See Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Matt. 19:17.

the Unknown Christ has accompanied us on our road, and that he has accompanied all ~~Men~~.²⁴ As for why we still insist on speaking of Christ, we need only quote a christian mystic who lived in a century in which his sentence might have sounded stranger than it does today: "A true christian, who is born anew of the Spirit of Christ, is in the simplicity of Christ, and has no strife or contention with any ~~Man~~ about religion."²⁵

The author has been surprised at the enormous number of book reviews and studies occasioned by the original english version of his book. He has learned from all of them and is grateful not only for the great commendations he has received but also for the sharp criticisms. Nevertheless, one thing seems to have been achieved by this study: one can no longer bypass the problem stated by it and go on doing 'missiology' or comparative religion in the 'old' manner. In this sense, whatever merits or defects this book may have, it has done away with many aspects of a certain innocence or self-complacency. At present the writer would be much more radical in his approach, but to preserve intermediate steps in respect for the rhythm of the cosmos and of history is, as always, an indispensable condition for the very possibility of further progress. In patience we shall save our lives.²⁶

R. P.
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Easter and Shivaratri, 1968.

Footnotes:

24. See Mark 16;12-13; Luke 24:15 and 24:35.

25. J. Böhme, Dialogue on the Supersensual Life,
trans. William Law, ed. B. Holland (New York: F. Ungar, n.d.),
p. 1.

26. Luke 21:19.

An Epilogue as Preface to the Italian edition

"In the evening you shall be proved in love" wrote Juan de la Cruz. Almost a quarter of a century has elapsed since this book was conceived, so I may be allowed to speak of the evening of this essay and perhaps confess the lack of love that a mature reader may detect. I think that it is and always was there, but perhaps not transparent enough: a love not only for Christ and Ísvara, but also for hinduism and christianity and contemporary Man in his quest for harmony and meaningfulness in the whirlpool of our present world. The theses of this book should be understood over against a bhakti background and not interpreted as a jñānic commentary exclusively. As for the karmic effect that this book has scattered, the fact of its survival after so many years and its appearance in so many languages speaks for itself.

The injunction not to put new wine into old skins is more than a simple request for prudence. It means--at least for me--that life in all its constant novelty cannot be squeezed into an old framework, that change cannot be measured by an obsolete gauge. It also means that content and form constitute a single thing so that any content which could not create, as it were, its own form, would appear as a kind of existential lie, just as any form which expresses a content other than its own becomes mere hypocrisy. Truth, (used to say) The African Argentine, is "sine ulla dissimilitudo", without disguise.

Nonetheless, if people feel the need for a new wine (a better one), that is, if life is change and movement, there will be some tension and polarity between content and container, symbol and symbolized, nāma-rūpa and avyakṛta. A living content, despite the fact that it depends for intelligibility on its form, will eventually have to break this very form. Likewise, though united with a particular content, a form which is to remain alive, will sooner or later betray its own content. Yet what appears to be a vicious circle is in fact a vital circle.

When an author finally succeeds in expounding his insights, he is tempted to abandon them to their own destiny. He forgets that they are kept alive and vital only through a continuing relationship of life and of love with author and reader. The spoken word ^{has to} ~~can~~ be proffered again and again, verbal discourse ~~can be~~ reiterated, otherwise it sinks into a barren oblivion. A book, on the other hand, is in a different position since, though bearing a living word, it crystallizes the word in writing. Hence a book possesses a peculiar type of resistance as well as a stimulating flexibility: scripta manent

The written form itself is an expression of the mode of being of living discourse. The written form of the word should thus belong to its very morphé. Unfortunately, however, many modern cultures have almost forgotten the special sensitivity of the calligraphic arts which ties the content of a thought to the visible aspect of its written expression. The

etc.
Hakent rna
L. Hella

particular form as well as the general style in which the thought is clad, belong to the symbol and to the reality symbolized. With the use of the printing press, however, the whole thing is almost lost. As it is now, when ~~the~~ a modern author abandons his manuscript-- ^{generally a} typescript-- to the hands of the publisher, his estrangement from the work is almost complete. It has been said--and significantly, not only said, but written--that "the letter killeth." What kills, actually, is not the writing but ~~literal under-~~
~~standing~~, the literal interpretation of the words themselves. If, ~~then~~, we want to overcome ~~all~~ verbal estrangement and stagnation, we need a writing which can be continually rewritten, that is to say, a thought which can undergo constant ^{rethinking} revision, and ideas which are not ^{frozen} ~~established~~ once and for all. The spirit only gives life when it "consumes" the letter, like the biblical ^Sheer who swallows the book. Hermeneutics without sacred communion does not lead to understanding. Have we not been witnesses all too often to the suffocation of the spirit when it is ^{encapsulated}; or to the limitation of an ideal when it is formulated in logical terms; or to the degeneration of a prophet when his vision is transferred to the written page, or his call for reform is translated into organizations (however necessary such things may be at the time)? Are not books just another form of institution? But is it possible to do without them?

— generally, to the machine —

but actually re-visioned

on the upanishadic sage that eats all that can be eaten

letter quote

When, a quarter century ago, I began to write the ideas expressed in this book, I had already lived them

in various ways, which is gratifying to remember, but which I do not think necessary to describe now. But ^{when} I began to formulate these intuitions--was almost compelled to do so--my experiences had to be poured into "old skins," simply because there was nothing else available, either for me, or for the public which I addressed. No wonder they burst the old skins and spilled the new wine everywhere. After awhile, there appeared a german edition of the book, an italian one as part of a larger work, then a spanish edition, and the french one, others partially translated into hindi, polish, etc. For each of the full-length versions I did some mending of the skins, hoping that the stitches would hold. I had thought this would be the end of it, but apparently it was not So here I am doing more patching. In fact, after re-reading the new italian translation ~~by my good friend Caterina Conio, who has had access to the 'vinyard'~~^e, I have made further modifications, though of a secondary nature. ^{The italian text is} ~~I offer here~~ (a revised version, not a new edition. It may, as a testimony from the past, perhaps help us to better face the future.

Since writing this book, I have been engaged in obtaining new 'must' and in procuring 'new skins', but the human ^evinyard and the earthen containers remain more or less the same. The process may have been modified and the results may be more accurate, more suited to our times, but ~~all the same~~^{same}, the grape is ripened by the (sun.

In this epilogue which serves as a prologue to the new italian version, I cannot provide new skins into which the reader could eventually pour wine. The new skins are being made at the same rate as the must is fermenting into a new wine. This venture to discover or perhaps even create new forms of human consciousness--and corresponding new forms of religiousness--requires an intense collaboration. The continuing demand for this book shows that many of us are already committed to the enterprise.

The only thing that I can do here is to point out some features pertaining to the container and the content. With regard to the skins, I would like to take into consideration the origin of the leather and the method of curing. The former refers to my original audience, and the latter to the model of intelligibility which is emerging today in relation to this type of problem. As far as content goes, I would like to consider two bouquets of this new vintage: that is, the significance of catholicity and the significance of identity.

Let me explain these four points briefly. The first two are "formal," that is, they refer to structure; and the second two are "material," that is, they refer to content:

The first (a) is sociological, since it concerns the cultural ambience of the persons for whom I wrote, and even partially concerns my own situation.

The second (b) is epistemological and concerns the theory which underlies understanding.

The third (c) is theological, and treats the problem of the universality of a religion.

The fourth (d) is philosophical, and is the problem of one's own identity.

The sociological point is that

(a) although I wanted to help both christians and hindus to a better and deeper mutual comprehension, I allowed myself to speak mostly to christians and in the christian language. I was in fact anxious to show christians that the ideas in this book do not dilute the christian message or evade the "folly of the cross" or avoid the christian "scandal." To speculate on the latter as an excuse to condemn others or to stick stubbornly to one's own ideas, is not quite christian scandal, but--to remain in the pauline context--is prudence of the flesh. On the contrary, I maintained that to pretend to an exhaustive knowledge of the mystery of Christ, is to empty the cross of its power. I still held that the "old skins" should be taken from the christian heritage, so as to enable christians themselves to keep their own identity without any alienation, and to open up to the understanding and insights of others without misunderstanding, not to speak of . insulting them with an intolerable attitude of superiority. In a word, I tried to show that there is a way to accept totally the message of Christ without edulcorating it and to remain at the same time open to others, ready to accept them without patronizing or co-opting them.

I wanted above all to say that the truth that we can honestly defend as universally valid, the truth that makes us really free, is an existential truth, not a mere doctrine. Thus I also maintained that the true significance of orthodoxy does not consist in a ^{objectified} ~~degenerate~~ interpretation, ^{of} a 'right doxa', understood as doctrine, but in an 'authentic glory' and in a 'considered opinion' ^{(both meanings of the} ~~in a word~~, in something closer to an orthopraxis than to correct doctrinal affirmations, however true these may be in their own domain.

Such a christian perspective, nevertheless, has sometimes given--especially to hindus--the impression that I was being "too christian" and so ultimately unfair, although sympathetic to hinduism; that I had still not overcome the innate sense of christian superiority, and that if there were "dangerous" christians today, they would not be the missionaries of the old school, but the more subtle ones like myself who would ^{suck} ~~dry~~ up the ^{living} sap of the hindu dharma ^{in order to neutralize its vitality.}

Now, it is not sufficient to assert that such was not my intention, since that would only confirm the suspicion that an attitude of superiority was so rooted in christian thought that it could not be eliminated even from an approach as open and sympathetic as mine. I do not deny that my opinions have evolved and my convictions deepened since then, but I have to stress that from the beginning, I have insisted on saying that the relationship between the two religious traditions, christian and hindu,

is not one of assimilation, or of antagonism, or of substitution (the latter under the misnomer of 'conversion'), but one of mutual fecundation. What I confess here, however, is the use of a language that has often been ambivalent, sometimes even cryptic, as for example in the preface to the first edition where I wrote that "the 'book' on Christ already exists" without making it clear that in speaking of hinduism I did not intend to refer to the Bible, but mainly to the śruti, the hindu revelation.

Now, after this sincere confession, I can add that in practically all my writings, except perhaps in my scientific papers, I have made ample use of a linguistic polyvalence. Reality in fact has many layers, and consequently comes to expression with various levels of meaning. Words, when they are not merely algebraic signs, have a constitutive polyvalence which depends not only on various possible contexts but also on the very nature of the reality they express.

that I call
terms

My "wineskins" were certainly made of christian material. Should I now write another book for hindus? Have I trusted them too much or relied on their tolerance to the extent that I have neglected to present the hindu side adequately? Certainly it is not possible now to transform this book into something which it is not, and this for two reasons: in the first place, I am engaged in precisely this task elsewhere and, in the second place, I think that today's application of hinduism consists not

so much in defending its own orthodoxy as in confronting the present kalpa without worsening human karma. I would say that the question of the existence of other beliefs has never been an ultimate problem for hinduism.

The epistemological point is that

(b)/ The process used to tan the hides for the wineskins was also a fundamentally western method. The principle of non-contradiction has served as 'tannic acid' and my intention has been to show that if Christ were not the monopoly of christians, nothing would be lost of his reality, his vitality and truth. The kingdom of God does not come when and where we look for it; in fact, as the latin vulgate says, "non venit regnum Dei cum observatione" or, the kingdom is not visibly noticeable, nor is Christ himself always recognizable. The problem of identification by differentiation, as I have elaborated elsewhere, is typical of occidental christianity. For hinduism, on the other hand, the problem hardly arises. Hindus may ~~indeed~~ be 'anonymous christians', provided one also admits that christians are 'anonymous hindus' (though this expression makes little sense in a tradition which takes polynomy for granted, ever since the famous rgvedic saying "One is he whom the sages call by many names"). It is no great wonder, then, if in discussing a specifically western christian problem, I have used western christian categories. Reducing the epistemological problem to its bare essentials, I have tried to show in this book that though a christian believes that "Jesus is the Christ," if it is more than an abstract affirmation, and ^{if it} expresses

complete
with my
notes

faith, then this sentence is not identical to "the Christ is Jesus." Similarly, I have maintained that the assertion "Christ is the Lord" cannot simply be reversed. It is not necessary, in fact, that the Lord be named Christ or acknowledged by this title, for the saving name of Christ is a super^fname, above every name.

Of course the christian ~~has to~~ affirm^s that "Jesus is the Christ" and that "Christ is the Lord." Jesus, who is the Christ of the christians, is more than a Jesus of Nazareth, unresurrected. A christian ~~could~~ maintain^s, moreover, that the affirmations "Jesus is not the Christ" and "Christ is not the Lord" go against his faith and are incompatible with it. The christian, however, cannot say that "Christ is only Jesus," because in fact, the risen Jesus is more than the Jesus of Nazareth, which is only a personal identification. Neither can he say "the Lord is only Christ," precisely because his knowledge of the Lord is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, there are not many Christs, nor are there many Lords. On the contrary,^{and} this is the central argument of this book: "the Lord is" even though his name may not sound like "Christ" or any of its now familiar translations. The present work deals with precisely this delicate transplant, but to go further here would be to enter directly into the subject itself.

As I have tried to explain on other occasions, every believer sees his own tradition from the inside, so that for him, it becomes symbol of all that is true. Hence,

(aliud, not
alius)

if he finds that there is some truth 'outside' he is led to affirm that he can also participate in that 'external' truth, whether by incorporating it more or less directly into his own religiosity, or by recognizing that such truth is already present in his own religion in another guise.

Now entering into the heart of the problematic of our book, a predominantly analytic mind may have some difficulty in accepting assertions such as "he too, is a christian" or "I too am a hindu," because he gives these words a restrictive and exclusive meaning ("whatever a christian may be, he is not a hindu"). Hence, when I maintain that Christ is real and effective, though hidden and unknown, in hinduism, I violate the 'sacred' western canons used to identify Christ, since Christ is seen only in terms of differentiated identification, instead of in terms of an identifying identity, as I have elaborated elsewhere.

This is also, of course, a semantic problem.

And here I must confess that I have not always made the necessary clarifications and distinctions. When ^(writing,) I say "christianity" or "hinduism," I ~~mean~~ ^{should have more clearly distinguished:} ^{for instance,}

1) the social and historical expression of these religions: that is, ~~I refer to~~ christianity as a particular church

affiliation; or ~~I think of~~ ^{hinduism as} a particular hindu sect as a particular sampradāya or way of religious life;

2) the core of our ^{commitment} ~~devotion~~ to a particular religion, ^{which is not its sociological garb, but}

the sacramental or sacred structure, which abides through cultural and temporal fluctuations;

my answer
to Coward
in 20 September
2nd copy from
paul

3) the transcendent divine reality (whatever name we may want to give it, and whatever degree of reality we may be disposed to grant it), of which all the rest is but the expression, the manifestation, symbol or creation.

Now in comparing christianity and hinduism, as in our case, we should carefully specify which of the three levels or aspects we are dealing with. To be sure, the three are intertwined, so that a believer accepts the lower simply because he believes it gives concrete expression to the higher; but when crossing the boundaries of a religious tradition we cannot ignore such distinctions. A non-hindu, for example, who sees the caste system and the non-killing of cows simply as sociological or dietary problems misses the point, as does a non-christian who sees in the Eucharist just a meager meal. Obviously, we cannot confront Canon Law with the Upanishads, or the present-day caste system with the Sermon on the Mount, or the crusades with advaita . . .

(c) The third point, regarding the nature of the vine^eyard itself, concerns the theological problem of understanding catholicity. Synthesizing and simplifying a little, we could say that the concept of catholicity has fluctuated with the political and historical conditions of the times. It is not surprising then, that during the colonial and imperial period of the christian west, the geographical expansion of the 'christian' nations was accompanied by the concept of catholicity as a geographical universality. The catholic religion was in fact considered

to be a universal religion and thus had the right--even the duty--to spread throughout the entire world. Still, it is not necessary to recall the greek origins of the word in order to understand that this geographic, extensive and almost quantitative meaning was and is not its only meaning. 'Catholic' in fact, also and perhaps mainly means "perfect," complete, i.e. a way of life, a religion, a revelation which has in itself all that is necessary to lead Man to his goal, by yielding the fulfillment of the human being, by caring for every aspect of human existence, and thus providing a way which will enable Man to become what he is meant to be. Secundum totum, as St. Augustine literally translated it. 'Catholic' is thus the opposite of 'sectarian', of the 'partial aspects' of religion. Here the quality of catholicism is stressed, and for that reason, its oneness, uniqueness. But a thing is unique precisely because it is in-comparable. If it were comparable, it would cease to be unique; it would be more or less similar to another, not unique.

My teologumenon, then, was that the catholicity of christianity does not need to be interpreted in geographical terms. In point of fact, ^{the} modern emphasis on local churches, the mystical comprehension of the sacramental nucleus of christianity, and religious pluralism (which now appears to be an obvious necessity), make accepting this meaning almost a matter of course. In one sense, there is no catholic ^(universal) religion; but in another sense, ^{the authentic} every personal religiosity is catholic.

(of every person)

I would submit an analogous proposition regarding hinduism. The hindu concept of universal dharma is not a geographical idea. The historians of religion find it difficult at times to understand the existential character of hinduism, which, though it may not be strictly ethnic or historical, is tied to the populace of India. Traditional hinduism does not proselytize because dharma (religion) comes with the free gift of existence. It is meaningless to want to change a person totally, into something he is not.

I am well aware that this point needs much more elaboration, but I am also convinced that what I say does not in the least dilute the christian exigency, nor does it weaken the hindu point of view. Today, encounters among religions can no longer follow in the wake of political events; The day of christian and hindu empires is over; consequently, it is only fair that the last remainder of christian 'imperialism' recede completely in order to allow emulation, complementarity and mutual fecundation among religious traditions.

They have to condition them.

The last point, the philosophical, is that
(d) / the new must that I have tried to ferment

in this book, perhaps without sufficient clarification, may be a new consciousness of the unity of Man, not only in the spheres of biology, history or politics, but also and fundamentally on the religious plane. As long as the peoples of the world are not considered to be on the same existential level with respect to religion, there can be no firm base for human dignity. There is something terrifyingly consistent in asking whether the religious

outcast (infidel, slave, black, mlecchā, kafir, gov, etc.) has a human soul. I am not saying that there should be a single religion, or that all religions are equal, or ~~that~~ I defend the theory that all races of humankind are equal. Some are doubtless stronger, richer, more beautiful according to a certain standard, and others are better according to another. I believe, nonetheless, that the equality of every human being qua human being cannot be logically upheld if we are not ready to accept the equality,

i. e. The evenness of all races with respect to the radical value of "human-ness." Similarly, religions can differ among themselves, but if they are concerned with the dignity and destiny of Man, if they are different expressions of a constitutive human dimension, they are equal insofar as they are expressions of that same fundamental human religiousness. Equal

does not mean equally good (or bad) but that they are on the same ground level to deal with the ultimate human problems. A christian, religiously speaking, is not "better off" than a non-christian. On the other hand, we should not throw everyone indiscriminately into the same bag. And if for a christian, Christ is the ultimate and irreducible symbol, and if he really believes in the dignity of Man, then he must share 'his' Christ with others.

Here it would seem, however, that one must renounce Christ in order to remain completely faithful to him, as some christian mystics suggest, or ultimately sacrifice God, as the example of the trinitarian 'economy' implies (God the Father sacrificing his Son). But then where does identity lie? Only in differentiation? What makes one reality equal to another, and what differentiates it? Only the external parameters of space and time? Have we not perhaps converted the variety of the world

into dialectical differences and then wondered why we cannot find any dialectically convincing solutions?

Or, to turn to our problem, where does the identity of Christ lie? If he is ^{already} present ~~now~~, what, it is often asked, is the 'use' of christian missions?

It is not the task of this prologue to give answers, but only to pose problems in the light of the present work. My first reaction to the specific problem of the missions is to call to mind the Gospels on one hand, and the Bhagavad Gītā on the other, in order to learn the meaning of spontaneity of detachment from all consequences, and of acting out of love. To seek to justify christian missions by counting the ^sould saved would today be not only untheological, but unethical as well. In the second place, the christian mission--if we still want to use this language--is not finished, nor is that of hinduism. Human solidarity must impel people to share experiences, material and spiritual goods; and this mutual interpenetration may guide us toward building a true family of Man. Whoever has something to share is blessed in the sharing.

In the course of this prologue, I have subjected my book to an almost ruthless critical attack. Let me say in its defense, however, that I have remained true to the title. I speak neither of an unknown principle ^{to} ~~of~~ hinduism which may be alive in every human being, nor of an ~~unknown~~

dimension of the divine ^{unknown to} in christianity, but of that
unknown reality which christians call Christ, discovered
in the heart of hinduism, not as a stranger to it, but as
its very principle of life, as the light which illumines
every Man who comes into the world.)

I remain faithful not only to the title but also to
the reality, to the Mystery, which is the mystery of Christ.
Most of the negative criticisms of this book came from a
narrow, partial, merely historical...precisely, from the
prevailing microdox conception of that Mystery. But:
"Qui credit in me, non credit in me, sed in Eum" (John 12:44).
"Ego sum vitis, vos palmites" (John 15:5). And as Nicholas
of Cusa wrote on the second text: "... ut sit una Christi
humanitas in omnibus hominibus, et unus Christi spiritus in
omnibus spiritibus; ita ut quodlibet in eo sit, ut sit
unus Christus ex omnibus" (De docta ignorantia III, 12).

A Christ who could not be present in hinduism, or
a Christ who was not with every least sufferer, a Christ
who did not have his tabernacle in the sun, a Christ who
did not represent the cosmotheandric reality with one Spirit
seeing and recreating all hearts and renewing the face of
the earth, surely would not be my Christ, ^{and I guess} would not be the
Christ of the christians ^{either}...

Santa Barbara, California

6th August, 1976

Feast of the Transfiguration
of the Lord

cf. Italian
of just
M. Eckhart's
quotation
& translation

translation

The Unknown Christ of Christianity

Preface to the second Edition

Chapter I

Encounter with India

I have been found by those who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.

Rom. 10:20¹

→ 22, 2

The Search for a Meeting-place

On the encounter between East and West there is an almost overwhelming amount of literature. This fact alone proves that the problem is not merely a burning question, but also that it appears today in an altogether new perspective.

We do not intend to complicate this already complex problem, but only to sketch out an answer to the following question: where do hinduism and christianity meet? In other words, what is the 'place' of encounter for a fruitful dialogue between hinduism and christianity? If christianity aspires to be the universal religion, what is the point of departure for an encounter with hinduism? Where and how can hinduism take up the challenge of the nature and presence of christianity? → 22, 1

22, 1

→ The meeting of religions is one of the most profound religious problems. Five possible solutions suggest themselves. The first, strict segregation, is hardly possible any longer because of the technological 'shrinking' of the world. Furthermore, today a proud isolation without care for others

If hinduism claims to be the sanātana
dharma the highest everlasting religion, how can it start
a true dialogue with christianity? Is there any way
for christianity to understand such a claim?

→ 27

Footnotes (Ch.I):

27 ✓
 1. See Is. 65:1; Rom. 9:30. Cf. avijñātaṁ vijñātām
vijñātam avijānatām, "It is not understood by those who
 understand it; it is understood by those who do not understand
 it." Kena Upanishad II.3. (referred to from now on as Kena Up.)
 ②

② KenU II,3

would be seen as impious egoism, and indeed would be the ruin of one's own religion.

A second solution, substituting one religion for the other, is unthinkable and would be wrong, creating only disorder and confusion on both sides. Missionary zeal without knowledge and love is disastrous. A christian wishing to undermine the foundation on which hinduism rests would not only be dishonest, working in conflict with the principles of his own faith, but he would also be doomed to failure. A hindu offering due resistance to such an undermining would be violating such fundamental principles of his own tradition as tolerance and openness.

A third solution, the persistent dream of a 'catholic embrace' simply disregards the very real conflicts inherent in the situation. As such, it is ~~dishonest~~ ^{unrealistic} and doomed as utopian schemes always are.

A simple peaceful co-existence, on the other hand, would at first seem a likely and practical solution, but it too is shortsighted. It would never satisfy the essential claim of christianity to embody the Mystery that God has revealed for the whole world,² and would in consequence be a source of internal corruption in christianity, or would lead to a need for external 'compensation' in the form of violent and illegitimate attacks upon other ~~faiths~~ ^{religions}. Nothing is so harmful as what modern psychology would call 'unnatural suppression' and 'pathological repression'. Either christianity gives up its claim to universality, catholicity, and then co-exists peacefully with other religions, or it has to explain its claim with a theory--in the classical sense of the word--

Footnotes (Ch. I):

2. See Matt. 13:35; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:8-9;
Col. 1:26; etc.

that shows the reasonableness and accuracy of such a claim. otherwise it will appear, as it has to some people, a fanatical and exclusive religion aiming to destroy everything that is not to its particular taste. [Nor could hinduism 'coexist' with a militant christianity claiming to have a 'right and duty' to the whole world. —————→ of ital. am. & complete

If christian ^{the fact would} ~~faith~~ abandoned ~~his~~ ^{the} claim to universal validity (and thus its right, or rather its responsibility to the whole world), it would no longer be christian. If hinduism, for its part, ceased to believe itself the religion best suited to hindus, it would no longer be hinduism. We have come full circle. It would seem that there can be no encounter between the two if each is to remain loyal to its essential nature.

The problem, then, is so acute that we cannot ignore it on the pretext that it is better not to disturb an apparent and superficial cordiality. If we do not face it with all humility and sincerity, we will never succeed in overcoming a basic uneasiness that will emerge only to damage and destroy both sides at critical points in the history of individuals and communities. Christianity wants the hindu to become a christian, ^{although it has} ~~not having~~ taken sufficient account of the fact that one can be christian in many very different ways. Hinduism, on the other hand, has no wish to convert the christians because to the hindu one cannot become what one is not; a christian cannot 'become' hindu any more than a hindu can 'become' a christian. Is there any solution to this problem? There remains only the fifth solution: interpenetration, mutual fecundation.

be interpreted as
a merely partial
disclosure of the
divine and had
to

There seem to be three indispensable prerequisites for this kind of encounter: a deep human honesty in searching for the truth wherever it can be found; a great intellectual openness in this search, without preconceptions or prejudices; and finally a profound loyalty toward one's own religious tradition. In the past, when people either lived in isolation or in subjection, the religious quest was mainly directed towards the unidimensional deepening of one's own religion. But the authentic religious urge of today can no longer ignore a certain thirst for open dialogue and mutual understanding. The religion of my brother becomes a personal religious problem for me also.

Thinking people of all religions are craving mutual help and enlightenment--not only under pressure of exterior events such as the present confrontations between traditional religions, but also for internal motives deriving from an intellectual and existential dynamism. On the intellectual plane, no religion can pride itself on having fully revealed the mystery of God and Man; on the existential plane, Man more and more suffers the attraction as well as the repulsion of other religions.

The first step of our ~~dialectical~~ process toward a solution to the problem consists in recognising that an authentic encounter can only take place where the two 'realities' are truly ~~united~~. Every encounter is necessarily reciprocal. I cannot meet a cinema artist on the screen, primarily because, though I may somehow come to 'know' him, he cannot meet me there. Christianity cannot meet hinduism if hindus simply ignore christianity; and vice-versa,

meeting each
other

hinduism will never be able to meet christianity if christians will not recognize and step out to meet hinduism. Any encounter requires a common denominator, a meeting-place.

cf. Italian

Christ, the Point of Encounter

The true encounter between christianity and hinduism is only possible where they really coincide. And they do not coincide on the doctrinal plane, but at a deeper level, which could be called the existential, or 'ontic-intentional' stratum.

The two sets of doctrine^s, despite certain undeniable resemblances, are far removed from each other, and yet in a certain sense have the same aim, and pursue the same goal. Moreover, they start from the same anthropological situation; they consider the same imperfect and vulnerable human being striving to reach fullness and perfection. Neither will contest that the 'ontic intentionality' is the same in both religions: ^{The greater possible} ~~total~~ union with the Absolute.

Words cannot adequately express this ontic intentionality, or goal of existence. Thus, for example, we have used the expression 'union with the Absolute', while a certain type of yogin would prefer to say 'pure isolation', and a buddhist, 'nirvāṇa'. ^{Some} ~~These~~ people will say that there is neither an Absolute with which one could be united, nor any duality to give any such union any sense; and yet the 'ontic' goal intended is one and the same: it is precisely that end, that final stage, towards which all are aiming from various angles of approach. In other words, christianity and hinduism meet in a common endeavour, which has the same starting

*cf. Italian
perhaps OK to
have a separate
re-encounter*

point and the same ontic goal. There is a single terminus a quo and one terminus ad quem in the ontic order, even though the interpretations of them differ.

We would like to develop this idea using a christian terminology. If we choose a christian point of view, it is not from a prejudice in favor of christianity. After all, christianity takes the initiative in encountering hinduism because hinduism so far has sought this type of meeting much less; consequently it is up to christianity to clarify its own position. Our thesis is simple, though the explanation of it cannot be simplistic: christianity and hinduism both meet in Christ. Christ is their point of encounter. It is not possible to prove this statement rationally. But we can try to show on the one hand that the two religions do not meet at any other point; and on the other hand that according to hinduism as well as christianity, if such an encounter is to take place it can only take place in Christ. —→ 32,1

32,1

Insufficiency of Doctrinal Parallelisms

Obviously, a real and living encounter cannot be limited simply to pointing out some similarities or common features on the practical or theoretical levels. Christianity and hinduism are two living religions, not to be confused with mere sets of concepts. Most of the common aspects are in fact common only when they have been separated from their respective contexts and are compared against an abstract and sterile background as unrelated to one religion as to the other. Furthermore, since the similarities would be selected

Were I to take a ~~to~~ corresponding Hindu symbol I could not possibly name it with one single word. Two reasons may be adduced for this difficulty. First, because Hinduism can hardly be called a religion. It is rather a bundle of religious traditions and we can fully sympathize with the instinctive reaction of ~~the people of India~~ the people of India to be levelled down to a single Hinduism. Strictly speaking Hinduism does not exist. And even if some analogous thought ~~consideration~~ should warn us of considering Christianity as a monolithic block, there is nevertheless the central figure of Christ — although diversely interpreted — that somewhat justifies this name.

And saying this we have already introduced the second reason. Hinduism has no a unifying symbol as Christianity. It has not only a plurality of symbols, ^(but) each symbol does not generally contain the pluralistic polyvalence that the symbol Christ shows. Within one single Hindu tradition the name of Rāma would be probably my choice. Rāma in fact is totally human and totally divine, Rāma is material and spiritual, temporal and eternal, etc. But again not all Ramologies would agree ①.

① The author hopes to be able to write a Rāmamandala pendant with or integrated in his Christophany. My working title is The Super-name.

for their similarity, the obscuring power of the syncretic intentionality is foremost. Whole sections of the 'encountered' fact are neglected or ignored/^{simply} because they are dissimilar, regardless of their relative importance to the people. This is not naked encounter so much as a sort of slanted journalism, ~~not honest seeing so much as wishful thinking~~. Such similarities then, can never be more than curiosities, conversational 'icebreakers', unless their relative importance is equal, and even then, ^{their} comparison, ~~is an academic matter~~.
 generally speaking, only a theoretical

As an example, the doctrine of grace in christianity perhaps meets an analogous doctrine in some of the most important branches of hinduism. Nevertheless in spite of some aims common to both doctrines, the importance of this similarity has perhaps been exaggerated, since it only offers a meeting-place for an academic and very philosophical or at least doctrinal discussion between experts in the two theologies. Important as it may be, this or any other doctrinal comparison can never be the ultimate basis of an integral encounter between the living religions, hinduism and christianity.

Comparisons offer starting-points for dialogue, but dialectical dialogue only constitutes an intermediate step in the whole endeavour, one which has to be followed by a profound investigation pursued to its farthest consequences, if real encounter is to take place. We do not mean to minimize the importance of theoretical studies. Mutual knowledge is indispensable, but knowledge must be at the service of reality and must be led by a higher wisdom, for any results in encounter will ultimately arise from and depend upon such wisdom.

add Italian → To outline the problem a little more exactly: the conclusions drawn from comparative studies of the two religions can be classified according to a simple dialectical scheme: either the two 'theories' under comparison will both be found to be right or they will not.

In the first case the identity may be either absolute, if the two theories are in fact the same; or it may be simply relative, if both perform the same 'function' within the different doctrinal frameworks. In the latter case, the two

theories would be equivalent rather than identical. Whether identical or equivalent, we shall have to proceed further until we arrive at the point where the two religions differ, and then seek the reasons for the difference. In spite of all theoretical equalities, we shall reach the point of an historical 'otherness', for one religion is not, in fact, any other. Let us imagine for a moment that Śāṅkara's vedānta is theoretically equal to Thomas Aquinas' scholasticism. In spite of such a theoretical parallelism the fact would remain that one is a hindu doctrine and the other a christian one. They would be the same intellectual garb for different historical realities.

If the two theories being studied in the dialectical light are not found to be equally right, the less accurate should disappear to make room for the other, or should at least be corrected by the more accurate. But in fact experience proves not only that we shall hardly be able to convince an opponent in this matter, but also that he will not be able to give up his doctrine because it is deeply rooted in the core of his ^{religion} ~~faith~~, which he holds from suprarational motives. Imagine a thomist constrained to admit that his proofs for the existence of God in fact do not prove anything. He should then give up those proofs, but of course he would never easily concede that God's existence cannot be 'proven'. Even dialectics has its limits: in the undeniable existence of the other and the ^{non-} ~~irrational~~ factors that hold him to his otherness.

The foundations of dialogue, then, are two: the basic tenets out of which the doctrines have been developed; and the reality, the existential truth which the doctrines try to explain. Both of these dimensions, then, transcend the doctrinal sphere. Either you have a particular conviction, or you have not; either that reality, that aspect of the truth has been revealed to you, or it has not. There is no room at this level for mere doctrinal discussion, for exclusively conceptual thinking. That belongs only to the intermediate stage between the existential ground of a faith transcending reason, and the practical application of that faith in daily life.

Inadequacy of Cultural Synthesis

style The deep encounter between hinduism and christianity cannot take place on the profane ~~secular~~ level of a merely cultural relationship. It is not about the meeting of two cultures that we speak, but the meeting of two religions. It is important to stress this point in our times, because there is a trend, a very well-intentioned but misleading tendency, to reduce the encounter of religions to a problem of the interrelation of cultures.

Indeed, hinduism has produced a hindu culture, and in spite of all our reservations, we cannot deny the existence of a christian culture, the fact that the so-called western culture is a product or at least a ^{by-product} ~~derivative~~ of christianity. But the laws of the interrelation of cultures ~~are not the same~~

Religion ~~is~~ and culture stand in a peculiar relationship.

1 - Religion shapes culture

2 - but culture makes possible religion to exist. Culture offers the boundaries within which a religion can operate

3 - They are neither separable nor identifiable

There is no R without C
no C without R

A R can shape, permeate,

"fermentate" many several Cs

A C. can host several Rs.

(most of)

4- ~~Every~~ R has a somewhat transcultural intention. It claims that it would persist even if that C were to be destroyed

(most of)

5- ~~Every~~ C has a pluralistic religious coefficient - it has a certain transreligious validity

De

are not the same as those of the meeting of religions. For the latter, allegiance to the past and fidelity to oneself even at the cost of the renunciation of many other values, play an important part; for the former, pragmatic criteria and purely cultural values are decisive.

[In the problem of the relationship of cultures we shall have to ask first of all what is suitable for Mankind, or for a certain country in these times of growth, in which no people or civilisation can shut itself off from the rest of the world. How can progress and welfare be reached in the social structure of a country facing the problems of today? This is the cultural question.] The meeting of cultures on the historical plane first makes possible the religious encounter; the religious question, on the other hand, has a tremendous influence on the cultural problem. But the guiding principles of the meeting of religions are of a different kind altogether.

The religious encounter engages the whole Man: when a true hindu and a true christian meet, they are in a very different--and much more delicate and dangerous--situation than are two professors or two scholars facing the problem of the interrelation of cultures. The latter, ~~un~~ ^{generally} ~~fortunately~~, operate under a certain estrangement from their own cultures when trying to find a synthesis or at least a syncretistic solution that would enable people to profit from an alien culture while retaining their indigenous values as much as possible. ^{But} (Even the encounter between cultures cannot be a purely academic matter; much less can the religious encounter be a summit meeting of great politicians with full

[] 22?
not relevant

This has to
be said
differently

cf 36.1 for
some
thoughts

power to find a peaceful solution among themselves. Rather, this must be an encounter of living and loving persons trying to show fidelity to the higher will of God, acting from the true humility of the non-egotistic attitude.

It is therefore in the religious spirit that we should promote the encounter between religions, dismissing all kinds of partiality toward our own religious tradition and all prejudice with regard to others, yet at the same time remaining faithful to our deep convictions. The meeting of religions is not an intellectual endeavour, not a simple practical problem but the fruit of experience and deep religious engagement. These are not mere moralistic admonitions but statements of ineluctible fact. Religion only is in religiousness, in the love for God and fellow beings, in seeing the Self in all and all in the Self--in that state whose very intention is already variously distinguished as 'blessed', as only given by the grace of God, etc. If the encounter does not occur in this humble spirit it is not a meeting of religions, properly speaking, but of Man-made ethical systems, cultural mores, etc., all existing on the conceptual or at least, conceptualizable, plane. Concepts, even concepts of God, ultimacy, the Absolute, though unavoidable up to a point, cannot be the heart of religion because ultimacy (whether 'immanent' or 'transcendent') is beyond all human understanding. Religions meet at their common source, not simply on the plane of ideas or ideals, but on the solid ground of religion. For the present we cannot develop this point any further.³ But what has been said leads directly to the second part of our statement.

FOOTNOTES (Ch. I):

3. I once attended a debate on religious problems, in which the dialogue was explicitly syncretistic: it was a matter of emphasizing points of contact. However, everyone was in discord regarding 'tolerance' and 'comprehension': tot capita quot sententiae! Though agreeing on a rather vague and liberal framework, everyone had his own opinion within it. Only a catholic priest and a buddhist bhikku, who held maximalist attitudes, found themselves in real agreement, and were the only two concordant voices in that gathering.

The Existential Encounter

We have tried to show that the true meeting of religions belongs primarily not to the essential but to the existential sphere. Religions meet in ^{the} ~~my~~ heart rather than in ~~my~~ ^{the} mind. By 'heart' we do not mean the realm of sentiment but the concrete reality of our lives. Encounter is the shock produced by the meeting of two differing realities, but the place where the encounter happens is one. Meanwhile since the destruction of one religion and its replacement by another has been shown to be unthinkable anymore (see p. 28), clearly religions cannot sincerely coexist or even continue as living religions if they do not co-insist (i.e., in dialogue

A christian will never ^{fully} understand hinduism if he is not converted to hinduism. Never will a hindu ^{fully} understand christianity unless he becomes christian.⁴ It is not necessary

however for everyone to 'meet' everyone else like this. Certain meetings would be extremely dangerous. Not everyone is able--much less obliged--to incarnate himself in another religion in order to re-evaluate, to redeem its authentic spirit. Since it is not just an individual but a collective and ecclesial endeavour, those involved will have to grasp the dynamics of the history of the encounter up until now, in order to catch and use its momentum if they are to continue it in a meaningful way.

Let us first describe this encounter from a general point of view in its fundamental existential dimension:

On the one hand, there is hinduism as a way of life,

of italics

There are, of course, levels of understanding as there are levels of conversion.

*

FOOTNOTES (Ch. I):

4. Regarding 'understanding as agreement', see
R. Panikkar, "Understanding as Commencement"

a path to mysticism, a religion leading the people of India towards their end, their fulfilment and salvation. "Leading" may be too strong a word: hinduism hardly commands or leads. The hindu will find mokṣa (salvation, liberation) if he lets himself be led, if he follows his own dharma. Moreover, fulfilment and salvation may be interpreted in completely different ways, some of which would not be recognised as such by hindus. On the other hand, there is christianity claiming to have an analogous saving function and trying to perform its 'duty' towards the people of hindu culture and religion. The two religions may agree or differ in details, but the historical, concrete and almost juridical fact remains that on the one side stands hinduism as an entity, as a way to 'salvation' or 'liberation', and on the other side stands christianity as an entity with the same claims. The indian by birth finds himself in the grasp of both.

The encounter may degenerate into a brutal clash. Hinduism follows a certain line of conduct and accepts a certain non-interfering pattern of life; christianity, however, intervenes, demanding that the course of hinduism be continued only in such a way as to 'reach christian fullness ^{so that} ~~and~~ the hindu pattern becomes converted into the christian one, since this is the only one that the christian can imagine. The initiative comes from christianity, so it is the duty of christianity to justify it. What, then, is the internal urge prompting christians to claim jurisdiction over the hindu too? Does christianity really want to destroy hinduism, are every one of its actions just tactics or expediences to increase its numbers by winning the hindu too over to

the christian cause, as the hindus have often felt? We do not seek here some historical justification, explanation or excuse for the fact that hindus have this impression of christianity: the possible abuses of a right or the dangers manifestly inherent in every dynamism are beyond the scope of these reflections.

Our problem, rather, is this: in this encounter is christianity justified at all in claiming rights to the hindu or to hinduism itself? Certain christians would rather speak of their duties toward the hindu and hinduism, but whether right or duty, it ultimately comes to the same thing. Rational proof of such a right or duty can hardly be given. Christianity is convinced that it has certain obligations, a conviction that belongs to its ^{self-understanding} ~~faith and~~ ^{is} a logical consequence of its nature: to entertain this conviction ⁱⁿ ~~as~~ fact (practically amounts) to embracing christianity. It is part of the often tragic tension of history that the encounter between religions is not a peaceful state but a painful growing and development.

Hinduism and christianity encounter not in agreement, but in the ultimate tension or opposition of two living religions. It will be useful, then, to clarify the different positions, exposing the exigencies of this encounter in all sincerity and openness. We shall try therefore to characterise the ultimate ground of the encounter between hinduism and christianity, first according to hinduism and then according to christianity.

The Hindu Ground of the Encounter

Hindus believe that their ^{religion} ~~faith~~ even has room for christianity within its multiform structure. (Doubtless the hindu idea of christianity does not coincide with the consciousness christianity has of itself, however.) This is why hindus feel that they are a tolerant people, while christians, perhaps misunderstanding the attitude, fear that this tolerance may be the oldest form of intolerance, which consists in allowing others to occupy only the place it assigns them.

italian ← Hinduism has not always taken the attitude we are about to describe. Though it is a typical hindu trait, it is especially characteristic of modern hinduism. In general, ~~philosophically minded~~ hindus are convinced that all religions are good in so far as they lead ~~men~~ to perfection. Therefore they welcome christianity as another religion, a younger sister of their own. They would be inclined to accept and even join with it if christianity would consent to give up its claim of exclusiveness and its consequent pretension of being the definitive religion. And if these hindus claim a certain greater comprehensiveness, a greater scope for their religion, it is in the areas of theological doctrine and of mystical consciousness; but this superiority--as that of the elder sister--is but a secondary feature in the relationship.

What hindus defend against christianity is the right of hinduism to be their religion, as the most perfect expression (or expressions) for them, of the sanātana dharma,

the eternal religion. Since hinduism itself is but a loose compound of many different ways to the ultimate, related only by the tradition of vedic authority, and since in at least one modern form, it recognizes other non-vedic religions as legitimate ways to that same ultimate, it finds almost incomprehensible the fact that other religions cannot accept this standpoint, that they refuse and repudiate the sincere and ~~democratic~~ cooperative attitude that hinduism offers. This seems to be because to christians, christianity is the way to fulfillment, whereas the hindus admit 'one way for me, another way for you'--our inspiration is the same, our end is the same, but this is necessarily a world of exuberant multiplicity and diversity--accept it as so given in Creation, and follow your path to the end. This is a pervasive attitude as can be seen in the fact that indians have made an institution of the different natures of Man on the practical plane in the caste-system, wherein (theoretically, at least) every individual fulfills his function in the cosmos by performing the duties most suitable to his nature. → taken

The Christian Ground of the Encounter

Christianity accepts the challenge of hinduism and we hope to show that it will be precisely in the framework proposed by hinduism that the two will meet. First we shall expound the christian position, and then christianity's answer to the hindu point of view.

We might perhaps explain the christian standpoint like this: hinduism and christianity, as two religions

(Hudson
Ground)

42
after
Italian

In short, we meet either at the end of
our journey (all rivers flow into the same sea) or
at the very beginning (all have the water from the
earth or the clouds as the unique source). It is only
in the 'interregnum' of our earthly pilgrimage
that the rivers go their different ways.

believing in God, undoubtedly meet in God. We do not mean that they meet in their respective conceptions of God, but in God the Absolute, the Ultimate. The Christian elaboration unfolds on the basis of encounter, which does not try to win the partisanship of the hindu, but only his understanding.

We all meet, then, in God. Not only is he omnipresent, but everything is in him, and we, with all our strivings and all our actions, are of him, in him, come from him and go to him. (One could just as well have said 'it' or 'her' in this context.) Now, there is only one link, one mediator between God and the rest, between the one and the many.

In other words, the meeting point cannot be only a transcendent platform, divine 'ground', a disincarnated place, as it were. God can eventually be the ideal, the end and goal, but transcendence obviously cannot be the starting point. We need a concrete meeting-place from the very first, which is more than just an idea or a concept and also more than just humanity with its material needs.

That theandric 'thing', the concrete connexion between the absolute and relative which all religions recognise in one way or other, we could call 'Lord'. But we dare to call it 'Christ', for on the one hand the christian concept of Christ, though of hebrew origin and connected with the judaic tradition, has precisely this function, and on the other hand there is hardly a better name to express what we want to say, in spite of the 'microdox' echoes of this word which may make it sound unfavorable to some people. Again as we emphasized earlier, the Christ we are speaking of is by no means

the monopoly of christians, or merely Jesus of Nazareth. We may be allowed therefore--while waiting for a clarification of the problem--to call 'Christ' what we consider the meeting point almost by definition, which at the same time meets the demands of christian theology.

that 'thing'

This, then, is Christ, from whom everything has come, in whom everything subsists, to whom everything that suffers the wear and tear of time shall return.⁵ It is ~~Christ~~ the embodiment of Divine Grace who leads every man to God; there is no other way but through him.⁶ It is ^{he} ~~the Spirit of Christ~~ Logos who inspires the prayers of Man and makes them 'audible' to the Father; it is he who whispers any divine inspiration and who speaks as God, no matter what form a person's faith or thought may have.⁷ ~~Christ~~ ^{he not} Is the Light that illumines every human being coming into this world.⁸

Is not this
what christians
call Christ?

Hence from the point of view of christianity, Christ is already present in hinduism. The Spirit of Christ is already at work in hindu prayer. Christ is already present in every form of worship, to the extent that it is adoration directed to God.⁹ The deep-thinking christian declines to judge hinduism: God alone judges, through Christ. So long as ~~men~~ are pilgrims on earth, christianity has not the right to separate the wheat from the chaff. Rather, in meeting and accepting hinduism as it is, the christian will find Christ already there.

FOOTNOTES (Ch. I):

5. Cf. ~~Śvetāśvatara Upanishad (Śvet. Up.)~~ ^{SU} II.4;
 III.3; III.9; III.11; III.16, etc.; ~~Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad~~
^{TU} ~~(Br. Up.)~~ I.4.7; II.4.5; ~~Taittirīya Upanishad (Tai. Up.)~~ II.6.1;
 CU ~~Chhāndogya Upanishad (Chh. Up.)~~ III.14.2.

6. Cf. ~~Kaṭha Upanishad (Ka. Up.)~~ ^{Kaṭh} II.23; ~~Mundaka~~ ^{Mund} ~~Upanishad (Mu. Up.)~~ III.2.3; Śvet. Up. I.6; II.4; III.4; III.8;
 III.12; III.20; Chh. Up. III.15.3; Bhagavad Gītā (BG) IX.23;
 X.10-11; XVIII.56; XVIII.58; XVIII.62.

7. Cf. Mu. Up. II.2.2 et. seq.; Śvet. Up. III.12;
 Chh. Up. VIII.14.1; BG X.10-11.

8. Cf. Ka. Up. V.15; Mu. Up. II.2.9-10, etc.;
 Svet. Up. III.12; III.17, etc.; Chh. Up. III.12.8-9; III.13.7;
 III.17.7-8.

9. See Prov. 8:34-35(?); John 8:58, etc. Cf. BG IX.24;
 IX.26; IX.29 et seq.

Note: We might perhaps add that these do not represent merely doctrinal
 parallelisms (which we said earlier are inadequate) since both
 traditions put (or are apt to put) these references in the context
 of the Unknown, as in Tai. Up. II.9.1.???

Christians and hindus meet in the depths of death, in the ending of ourselves--including our long-held opinions of others--and in the acceptance of 'new life' which is always there at the heart of true religion. We--christian or hindu--can no longer consider ourselves as possessors of truth, but as beings possessed by a truth that is greater than we are and which cannot be known because knowing is possessive, is of the self which must end in order to accept the new life. The Christ who is already present in hinduism and whom christians can recognise and revere there, has not yet completed his mission here on earth, either in christianity or in hinduism.

45 →

because loving
Jesus and
loved by him

The christian temptation, however, has been the overzealous extrapolation. Already Peter thought to be allowed to control the relationship between John & Jesus and was rebuked for it ⁽¹⁾. Christians have tended to interpret Christ only in their own terms. Or rather, we should say, the christian context (judaism first, european religions afterward, recent for cosmologies following it and the myths of history culminating it) has been generally taken as the human texture, and ~~this being the cause~~ This explains christian exclusiveness whenever confronted with a fact outside their horizon. But christian reflection nowadays begins to be conscious of this mistake of the past.

The temptation of

→ 45

(needs connection)

① - cf.

Christ, the Meeting-place

italian (I much by)

Hinduism as a whole has no dogmas, no essential contents. Being only the concrete expression of the existential dharma, it can take as many forms as people and circumstances require, each form being relative to time and space. The bold christian claim is that, ~~the heaven of~~

~~christian faith is the true content,~~ the existential dharma of hinduism. The christian believes that God who has spoken ^{once for all} through the prophets and the rishis (sages), has sent/his living and personal word--one with him--to fulfill all justice, all dharms. —————→ 45

45 → In this sense christian dogma and ~~christian faith~~ both in the precise theological sense--meet the challenge of universality that the modern hindu mind finds absolutely necessary. The new claim of the hindu dharma is not strictly speaking a kind of syncretism--though it often takes this form--but it is the voice of catholicity, the very dynamism of the existential dharma, leading towards a sublimation of 'beliefs', tending to overcome all exclusivisms in particularity while maintaining the right of the individual to his particular practices. When the christian says that Christ is God, that Bliss is Heaven, that Perfection is Union with God, that Truth is the Logos, and so on, he does not want to put limitations on the former notions, but endeavours to fill them up with living contents, with a real meaning in order to prevent them from degenerating into mere ~~words, into~~ vague and abstract aspirations that each individual would afterward interpret in his own peculiar and restricted way. Likewise

in the historical unfolding of God's revelation there is a kind of pluralistic continuity held together by what they call Christ. Thus,

belongs to what they call the (christian) economy of salvation.

cf. Italian

the hindu may bow to the ultimacy of sacchidānanda brahman while in his need for the concrete acknowledge that Śiva (or Krishna or Kālī) is the be-all and end-all of the universe, his 'only way' to ultimacy, repository of that same truth, perfection and bliss, which are in fact inconceivable though he and the christian both speak of them in their longing. Both agree that universality, catholicity, openness and perfection do not mean vagueness, unbelief, purely abstract intention, nihilism and uprootedness from this earth and our human surroundings, so long as we still dwell here in this world. A christian dogma, ^{or} a hindu ^{tenet} belief is neither an idol nor a limitation nor a de-finition of faith, nor a place in which to get stuck before attaining the goal. These are just expressions, fit channels through which we may reach the Absolute; just the way--not the end--we have to run along in order to reach the fullness.

Italian

The catholic meaning of 'dogma' is not a 'truth' or a 'formula' that has to be believed in, but a means to bridle our intellect in order that our higher knowledge may reach, as far as it is possible here, the unfathomable inner nature of the supreme. This should not in any way be taken as a subjective interpretation of the christian truths or a relativisation of the dogmas in a modern ^{istic} sense. Dogmas are necessary so long as we are intelligent beings, but we should beware of the danger of 'dogmatolatry'.

What christianity seeks in hinduism, the right it claims over hinduism, is not therefore a kind of juridical ownership. Christ does not belong to christianity, he only

express

belongs to God. It is christianity and hinduism that belong to ~~Christ~~, though in two different ways.

and unfold their
belief in the
Theandric
mystery,

The encounter of Melchisedech with Abraham, and later the revelation of Peter at Joppa and the many experiences of Paul, are some of the authoritative instances of this christian attitude and position, besides, of course, the living example of Christ and his explicit teachings.

Let us explain again the christian position, this time accepting the main tenet of the ^{relative equalities} ~~equality~~ of all religions. The hindu seems to say: because we are all the same, we remain separate; because in the final analysis we are one, let us simply coexist and not strive for a deeper unity. We are already the same ocean, our only difference being that you are one stream and we another; because unity is there, let us not pay attention to our present dualism, since it is only apparent.

The christian would like to answer: because we are all the same ultimately, and the differences between our religions ^{may} belong only to the realm of māyā, let us see beyond the separation that exists between us as human beings--this separation, though of such great historical thickness, is not necessary. Let us embrace one another and not keep aloof any longer, let us discover--uncover--our deep unity, realise and make manifest the depth of that identity you are convinced of and that we yearn for.

The encounter of the two great streams may produce some passing waves or some sudden whirlpools, but the enrichment and growth will be mutual. Christianity claims to be catholic. But logically it is not complete (i.e. 'catholic')

christianity until that unity has been realised. The confusion lies in mistaking religious unity--for which we plead--for the unity of religions. We are not self-sufficient monads, but fragments of the same, unique religious faith. Christianity does not want assimilation, dominion, does not want to destroy; it only shares with hinduism the fundamental urge towards unity. *→ italian (2)*

I would dare to say more: this thirst for unity, this prayer for oneness is so fundamental in christianity that it conditions everything else. Obviously unity which is not based on truth is not unity at all; a oneness which is not the real one--will^{ed} by God, the christian would say--is not oneness at all. This amounts to saying that no human compromise is a way towards union, that this union is not the result of sifting down together and framing a liberal religious constitution, but of praying and struggling together to discover the Will of God, to realise this unity. This means also that though christians may be convinced of the contents of their faith, they do not know what the further developments in their Church may be, they do not have access to the plans of divine providence, they should in truth and honesty not cling to a fixed scheme or to a frozen faith. New dogmas, renewed formulation of old ones, real evolution and progress are constant features of christianity. Nobody knows how christianity will look should the present christian waters and those of other religions merge into a bigger river where the peoples of the future will quench their thirst for truth, for goodness, for salvation.

There is little sense in discussing, in this context, what christianity considers definitive and what changeable. There is and there will be a continuity but it is not for the theologian to pontificate; it is not even for the pontiff to silence the prophet, to rule the future. Follow me, Christ said to the first head of his Church, and do not bother about John. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!

Finally, we will add a word about Christ himself for the hindu, since at first sight it really looks ridiculous if not preposterous from a hindu point of view, to say that the encounter takes place in Christ. We are not making any kind of apologetic or trying to dispel the many misconceptions about Christ, perhaps given to hindus by christians themselves. These are very important points but beyond the scope of this study. Our only objective is to clarify the issue as it stands.

Hinduism and christianity will agree to some extent that both meet in God and that God is working inside both religions as it were. The christian claim is that God and Christ have a unique relation, that they are indivisible and inseparable, though without mixture or confusion, and that where God is at work in this world, it is always in and through Christ that he acts. Hindus would not find much difficulty in accepting this aspect of God, and would perhaps call it Īśvara (Lord). The statement we made about Christ as the place of encounter makes sense at least for the christian and can be made understandable--if not acceptable--

to the hindu too, ^{making} ~~whereas~~ a parallel statement about Śiva or Krishna or Kālī, ~~would not make sense for the christian until and unless he found Christ (already) in that symbol.~~

The ^{major} obstacle appears when christianity further identifies, with the necessary qualifications, Christ with Jesus the Son of Mary. ^{It is precisely} ~~To accept~~ this identity ^{that characterizes} ~~requires a full~~ christian belief. The hindu can only respect, without sharing in, this ^{'Theohistomological'} ~~historical~~ aspect of christianity.

The Christian Encounter

We are led to a point which seems to render impossible the mutual--^{even} ~~at least~~ the 'formal' mutual--agreement that we have been aiming for. If Christ is the point of contact but only christians can fully accept his necessary identity with Jesus, we cannot hope for a very fruitful dialogue.

At this juncture we would like to propose an important consideration which may help to overcome the impasse. If we had made it before, it would have been too easily misunderstood by both sides. We are referring to the Spirit of God as the place where encounter, if at all, takes place. It is only in the Holy Spirit that prayers meet, intentions coalesce and persons enter into communion.

We needed first to clear up the problem of the confession of Christ as universal saviour, because it is so indispensable to the christian. Also, without having previously mentioned the concrete, theandric Christ, talk of the Spirit would have amounted to saying that we all agree in a kind of

The parallelism is not complete as the cultural and religious frameworks are also different. Elsewhere I have applied the mathematical concept of homeomorphism to 'Comparative Religion'.

style

51

Let us clarify immediately that we are not dealing here with a mere semantic quibble. It is not question whether this spirit is God's or Christ's, ~~or just a spiritual force~~ It is question to agree on the nature of this spirit.

or Spirit's.

fundamental

The christian contribution seems here rather strong vis-à-vis hinduism, although not too original in confrontation with african religions for instance. The christian understanding of the Spirit as Christ's spirit implies, paradoxically enough, the materiality and temporality of such a spirit: its personhood we might add. This spirit is not an idea, a principle or an ideal. It is a person, a material and temporal point of reference, an incarnated spirit.

→ 51

vague and amorphous acquiescence to a certain spirit of truthfulness and sanctity--more likely than not. This is by no means false, but a general commitment to truth and sincerity, necessary as it is for every real encounter in any realm, is not sufficient to constitute the ground for a truly religious, and not merely ethical, understanding. Now we can say that if Christ in Jesus as the summit of God's self-disclosure at the end of times, seems too specifically christian a view to be accepted by a hindu, then the Spirit of God--which christians will consider the Holy Spirit, Spirit of Christ, and which the hindu will interpret as any of the divine manifestations through which God in his immanence discloses or rather clothes himself--this Spirit of God provides the real ground for an authentic religious communication and dialogue at a deep level.

Whoever really prays does it in the Spirit, and ultimately it is the Spirit which prays. If Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God is a specifically christian figure, the presence and reality of the Spirit is an ^{and important} element common/to both hinduism and christianity. Only because the Spirit dwells in our hearts and in the world could the Logos become flesh and establish his dwelling among us. In other words, we meet in the Spirit, the Spirit of God which for the christian is the Spirit of Christ. —————> 5/11

We must not linger any longer on this subject lest we be obliged to make a complete study of its implications and consequences. We wish, rather, to add a few reflections of a pastoral character.

The Christian encounter, as we have said, is not essentially a doctrinal dialogue or the mutual comprehension of two cultures. It is an historical encounter of religions in the concrete meeting of ~~Men~~ in society. This encounter can really take place because it is an encounter in ^{That Presence} (Christ) who is already present in the hearts of those who in good faith belong to one or the other of the two religions.

Mutual understanding is absolutely necessary: it is an ineluctable condition. But knowledge alone is not enough. It not only lacks the warmth necessary for a fully human encounter, but it tends to stir up almost antagonistic consequences. In fact, human knowledge is always an ego-centric movement. The 'thing' known (doctrine, person) comes to me. I am at home, I am the host: I receive, welcome and assimilate the 'things' that I know--I possess, I enrich myself.

Only mutual love overcomes that egocentric position of knowledge. When I love, I go out, I give up, I am the guest, I am no more at home, I am received and possessed. Pure intellectual knowledge hurts (offends) whatever is not assimilated, whatever is left behind. I may reach some synthesis in an intellectual victory over my opponent, but I bring only the spoils of the confrontation back to my system. Śāṅkara, let us say, is overcome or 'understood', but the Śāṅkarites remain outside, unconvinced. This love requires from both sides, ~~but especially the christian,~~ an asceticism, a mystical life, a detachment from all categories and formulae, from prejudices and critical judgements alike. This should not be taken as a denial of orthodoxy but as its

integration into 'orthopraxis' (right action).

The authentic christian encounter with other religions requires a very special asceticism: we must strip ourselves of all externals, of garb and superficial form, and remain alone with Christ, with the naked Christ, dead and alive on the Cross, dead and alive in the christians who dare come to such an encounter with their brothers. This special kind of asceticism entails real mysticism, an immediate contact with Christ which carries the christian beyond--not against--formulae and explanations. Only then is it possible to discover Christ where he is, for the moment, veiled; only then is it possible to help unveil or reveal the mystery hidden for aeons in God. Few indeed, unless they are given the means, are capable of such a stripping, are able to remain with the naked Christ living within them, to perform this existential imitation of the incarnation of Christ. —→ 53,1

do you want to
emphasize the
rarity of the mystical
attitude so much?
See p. 38 *

The consequences of all this reach far, and augur the ultimate failure of the mere comparative study of religions. The study has to be done, but it also must be transcended. The meeting of spiritualities can only take place in the Spirit. The aim of encounter is not to give rise to a new 'system', but to give birth to a new spirit, ancient and ageless as it is. Spiritualities are not there to be 'studied' (they are not properly 'objects' of study) but to be lived, authentically experienced.

The meeting of religions should be a religious act, an act of incarnation and redemption, an encounter in naked Faith, in pure Hope, in (^{authentic} supernatural) Love--and not a conflict

The Hindu encounter does not require a mirror purity and not-attachment (asakti). We must purify ourselves of all pride to have understood the Mystery and realized Truth. We have to accept our karman as our siddhi, our limitations as ^{well as} ~~our~~ gifts. We need to ^{swim} ~~enter~~ into the stream of history without learning to fly in the air (akāśa) of timelessness. We need incarnation as much as transcendence and take our īśa-dēvatā, our ~~conception of the divine~~ ~~symbol~~ configuration of the divine as a total symbol and more than a mere sign.

of formulae, in the expectation of 'winning them over' (---to what?).

In naked Faith! I believe, credo! But faith is not a matter of reifying the living expressions of a mystical or 'supernatural' act, into a belief in some crystallised and disconnected formulations. The act of faith is a gift of God, through which I participate in the divine knowledge that God has of himself, and in himself of everything else; it is a simple, vital act which need only the minimum of intellectual explicitness. "I believe, Lord": this act alone is a saving one. I believe--in the only thing which requires this higher and supreme act--in the unthinkable Absolute, in God, I grasp it vaguely and with unclear vision ~~at first~~, yet I am fully convinced and somehow taste him already: God, as my faith explains it, who is Trinity--Father, Logos and Holy Spirit. And faith in turn allows me to enter into the ineffable heart of divinity, there to discover, to understand that this Father is omnipotent, creator... and that the Logos ^{is} ~~became~~ Man, and that the Spirit is the living breath of his ^{People} ~~Church~~... But all these 'articles' of faith are only expressions, manifestations, explicit examples of the mystical act of faith, which has no fixed points, no adequate intellectual expression, and can only be imperfectly translated into human words. [All of this] might be summed up in the hindu devotee's spoken and lived attitude: "Not I, not I but thou, thou, O Lord..." ~~And since Christ inspires him and is behind him, the christian encounters his hindu brother.~~ It is in this faith ~~that~~ ^{and} ~~encounters~~ ^{encounters} a

the mystery,
the void, ---

or
[This act of faith]
?

In pure Hope, in the ~~supernatural~~ consciousness of being already possessed by God, of being possessed so as to be ~~annihilated~~ (in) his fullness one day, in the pure expectation of the manifestation and glory of God: in this, the christian is almost one with his hindu brothers. How can either exclude anyone who is already pervaded by the same hope of liberation and union?

authentic
In supernatural Love the encounter is not only implicit but also explicit. The christian and the hindu not only share the same hope, not only embrace others in faith, but each actually meets Christ or his chosen ideal (Ishtadeva) and communicates with him in the person of his brothers, the men of this earth, without distinction of race, creed or condition. If he really loves them, he discovers the Christ, the Ishtadeva, already in them. It is Christ himself (Christ the Unknown) who has awakened that love and neither the christian nor the hindu will be able to explain how he came to be inflamed by it. Love unifies, makes one.

The christian encounter is really much more than the meeting of two friends; it is a communion in being, in the one Being which is much more intimate to both than they are to themselves. It is communion not only in Christ but also of Christ. Nothing of condescension, no paternalism or superiority is to be found in the supernatural love of a truly christian encounter. Neither teaching nor learning matters much at all in the unity of love. He who has the higher temperature, the richer knowledge of a certain area

of spirituality will spontaneously disperse what he has, share it with the other, his neighbour.

Only when a man is completely empty of himself, is in a state of kenosis, of renunciation and annihilation, will Christ fulfill his incarnation in him. Only kenosis allows incarnation, and incarnation is the only way to redemption....

Now, ^{notice that} we have not said that this faith, hope and love is not found 'outside Israel'. The christian event transcends by far the boundaries of christianity.

An Epilogue as Preface

"In the evening you shall be proved in love" wrote Juan de la Cruz. Almost a quarter of a century has elapsed since this book was conceived, so I may be allowed to speak of the evening of this essay and perhaps confess the lack of love that a mature reader may detect. I think that it is and always was there, but perhaps not transparent enough: a love not only for Christ and Ísvara, but also for hinduism and christianity and contemporary Man in his quest for harmony and meaningfulness in the whirlpool of our present world. The theses of this book should be understood over against a bhakti background and not ~~interpreted as a jñānic commentary~~ exclusively. As for the karmic effect that this book has scattered, the fact of its survival after so many years and its appearance in so many languages speaks for itself.

The injunction not to put new wine into old skins is more than a simple request for prudence. It means--at least for me--that life in all its constant novelty cannot be squeezed into an old framework, that change cannot be measured by an obsolete guage. It also means that content and form constitute a single thing so that any content which could not create, as it were, its own form would appear as a kind of existential lie, just as any form which expresses a content other than its own becomes mere hypocrisy.

Nonetheless, if people feel the need for a new wine (a better one), that is, if life is change and movement, there will be some tension and polarity between content and container, symbol and symbolized, nāma-rūpa and avyakṛta. A living content, despite its dependence on the form, will eventually have to break this very form. Likewise, though united with a particular content, a form which is to remain alive, will sooner or later betray its own content. Yet what appears to be a vicious circle is in fact a vital circle.

When an author finally succeeds in expounding his insights, he is tempted to abandon them afterward. He forgets that they can be kept alive and vital only through a continuing relationship of life and of love with author and reader. The spoken word can be proffered again and again, verbal discourse can be reiterated, but otherwise it sinks into a barren oblivion. A book, on the other hand, is in a different position. Since, though bearing a living word, it crystallizes the word in writing. Hence a book possesses a peculiar type of resistance as well as a stimulating flexibility.

The written form itself is an expression of the mode of being of living discourse. The written form of the word should thus belong to its very morphé. Unfortunately, however, many modern cultures have almost forgotten the special sensitivity of the calligraphic arts which ties the content of a thought to the visible aspect of its written expression. The

particular form as well as the general style in which the thought is clad, belong to the symbol and to the reality symbolized. With the use of the printing press, however, the whole thing is almost lost. As it is now, when the modern author abandons his manuscript--or typescript-- to hands of the publisher, his estrangement from the work is almost complete. It has been said--and significantly, not only said, but written--that "the letter killeth." What kills, actually, is not the writing but literal understanding, the literal interpretation of the words themselves. If, then, we want to overcome all verbal estrangement and stagnation, we need a writing which can be continually rewritten, that is to say, a thought which can undergo constant revision, and ideas which are not established once and for all. The spirit only gives life when it "consumes" the letter, like the biblical Seer who swallows the book. Hermeneutics without sacred communion does not lead to understanding. Have we not been witnesses all too often to the suffocation of the spirit when it is mortified; or to the limitation of an ideal when it is formulated in logical terms; or to the degeneration of a prophet when his vision is transferred to the written page, or his call for reform is translated into organizations (however necessary such things may be at the time)? Are not books just another form of institution? But is it possible to do without them?

When, a quarter century ago, I began to write the ideas expressed in this book, I had already lived them

in various ways, which is gratifying to remember, but which I do not think necessary to describe now. But ^{when} ~~since~~ I began to formulate these intuitions--was almost compelled to do so--my experiences had to be poured into "old skins," simply because there was nothing else available, either for me, or for the public which I addressed. No wonder they burst the old skins and spilled the new wine everywhere. After awhile, there appeared a german edition of the book, an italian one as part of a larger work, then a spanish edition, and the french one, others partially translated into hindi, polish, etc. For each of the full-length versions I did some mending of the skins, hoping that the stitches would hold. I had thought this would be the end of it, but apparently it was not So here I am doing more patching. In fact, after re-reading the new italian translation by my good friend Caterina Conio, who has had access to the 'vine^eyard', I have made further modifications, though of a secondary nature. I offer here a revised version, not a new edition. It may, as a testimony from the past, perhaps help us to better face the future.

Since writing this book, I have been engaged in obtaining new 'must' and in procuring 'new skins', but the human vine^eyard and the earthen containers remain more or less the same. The process may have been modified and the results may be more accurate, more suited to our times, but all the same, the grape is ripened by the sun.

In this epilogue which serves as a prologue to the new italian version, I cannot provide new skins into which the reader could eventually pour wine. The new skins are being made at the same rate as the must is fermenting into a new wine. This venture to discover or perhaps even create new forms of human consciousness--and corresponding new forms of religiousness--requires an intense collaboration. The continuing demand for this book shows that many of us are already committed to the enterprise.

The only thing that I can do here is to point out some features pertaining to the container and the content. With regard to the skins, I would like to take into consideration the origin of the leather and the method of curing. The former refers to my original audience, and the latter to the model of intelligibility which is emerging today in relation to this type of problem. As far as content goes, I would like to consider two bouquets of this new vintage: that is, the significance of catholicity and the significance of identity.

Let me explain these four points briefly. The first two are "formal," that is, they refer to structure; and the second two are "material," that is, they refer to content:

The first (a) is sociological, since it concerns the cultural ambience of the persons for whom I wrote, and even partially concerns my own situation.

The second (b) is epistemological and concerns the theory which underlies understanding.

The third (c) is theological, and treats the problem of the universality of a religion.

The fourth (d) is philosophical, and is the problem of one's own identity.

(a) Although I wanted to help both christians and hindus to a better and deeper mutual comprehension, I allowed myself to speak mostly to christians and in the christian language. I was in fact anxious to show christians that the ideas in this book do not dilute the christian message or evade the "folly of the cross" or avoid the christian "scandal." To speculate on the latter as an excuse to condemn others or to stick stubbornly to one's own ideas, is not quite christian scandal, but--to remain in the pauline context--is prudence of the flesh. On the contrary, I maintained that to pretend to an exhaustive knowledge of the mystery of Christ, is to empty the cross of its power. I still held that the "old skins" should be taken from the christian heritage, so as to enable christians themselves to keep their own identity without any alienation, and to open up to the understanding and insights of others without misunderstanding, not to speak of . insulting them with an intolerable attitude of superiority. In a word, I tried to show that there is a way to accept totally the message of Christ without edulcorating it and to remain at the same time open to others, ready to accept them without patronizing or co-opting them.

I wanted above all to say that the truth that we can honestly defend as universally valid, the truth that makes us really free, is an existential truth, not a mere doctrine. Thus I also maintained that the true significance of orthodoxy does not consist in a degenerate interpretation, a 'right doxa', understood as doctrine, but in an 'authentic glory' and in a 'considered opinion', in a word, in something closer to an orthopraxis than to correct doctrinal affirmations, however true these may be in their own domain.

Such a christian perspective, nevertheless, has sometimes given--especially to hindus--the impression that I was being "too christian" and so ultimately unfair, although sympathetic, to hinduism; that I had still not overcome the innate sense of christian superiority, and that if there were "dangerous" christians today, they would not be the missionaries of the old school, but the more subtle ones like myself who would dry up the ^{living} sap of the hindu dharma.

Now, it is not sufficient to assert that such was not my intention, since that would only confirm the suspicion that an attitude of superiority was so rooted in christian thought that it could not be eliminated even from an approach as open and sympathetic as mine. I do not deny that my opinions have evolved and my convictions deepened since then, but I have to stress that from the beginning, I have insisted on saying that the relationship between the two religious traditions, christian and hindu,

is not one of assimilation, or of antagonism, or of substitution (the latter under the misnomer of 'conversion'), but one of mutual fecundation. What I confess here, however, is the use of a language that has often been ambivalent, sometimes even cryptic, as for example in the preface to the first edition where I wrote that "the 'Book' on Christ already exists" without making it clear that in speaking of hinduism I did not intend to refer to the Bible, but mainly to the Śruti, the hindu Revelation.

Now, after this sincere confession, I can add that in practically all my writings, except perhaps in my scientific papers, I have made ample use of a linguistic polyvalence. Reality in fact has many layers, and consequently comes to expression with various levels of meaning. Words, when they are not merely algebraic signs, have a constitutive polyvalence which depends not only on various possible contexts but also on the very nature of the reality they express.

My "wineskins" were certainly made of christian material. Should I now write another book for hindus? Have I trusted them too much or relied on their tolerance to the extent that I have neglected to present the hindu side adequately? Certainly it is not possible now to transform this book into something which it is not, and this for two reasons: in the first place, I am engaged in precisely this task elsewhere and, in the second place, I think that today's application of hinduism consists not

so much in defending its own orthodoxy as in confronting the present kalpa without worsening human karma. I would say that the question of the existence of other beliefs has never been an ultimate problem for hinduism.

(b) The process used to tan the hides for the wineskins was also a fundamentally western method. The principle of non-contradiction has served as 'tannic acid' and my intention has been to show that if Christ were not the monopoly of christians, nothing would be lost of his reality, his vitality and truth. The kingdom of God does not come when and where we look for it; in fact, as the latin Vulgate says, "non venit regnum Dei cum observatione" or, the kingdom is not visibly noticeable, nor is Christ himself always recognizable. The problem of identification by differentiation, as I have elaborated elsewhere, is typical of occidental christianity. For hinduism, on the other hand, the problem hardly arises. Hindus may indeed be 'anonymous christians', provided one also admits that christians are 'anonymous hindus' (though this expression makes little sense in a tradition which takes polynomy for granted, ever since the famous rgvedic saying "One is he whom the sages call by many names"). It is no great wonder, then, if in discussing a specifically western christian problem, I have used western christian categories. Reducing the epistemological problem to its bare essentials, I have tried to show in this book that though a christian believes that "Jesus is the Christ," if it is more than an abstract affirmation, and ^{if it} expresses

faith, then this sentence is not identical to "the Christ is Jesus." Similarly, I have maintained that the assertion "Christ is the Lord" cannot simply be reversed. It is not necessary, in fact, that the Lord be named Christ or acknowledged by this title, for the saving name of Christ is a super-name, above every name.

Of course the christian has to affirm that "Jesus is the Christ" and that "Christ is the Lord." Jesus, who is the Christ of the christians, is more than a Jesus of Nazareth, unresurrected. A christian could maintain, moreover, that the affirmations "Jesus is not the Christ" and "Christ is not the Lord" go against his faith and are incompatible with it. The christian, however, cannot say that "Christ is only Jesus," because in fact, the risen Jesus is more than the Jesus of Nazareth, which is only a personal identification. Neither can he say "the Lord is only Christ," precisely because his knowledge of the Lord is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, there are not many Christs, nor are there many Lords. On the contrary,^{and} this is the central argument of this book: "the Lord is" even though his name may not sound like "Christ" or any of its now familiar translations. The present work deals with precisely this delicate transplant, but to go further here would be to enter directly into the subject itself.

As I have tried to explain on other occasions, every believer sees his own tradition from the inside, so that for him, it becomes symbol of all that is true. Hence,

if he finds that there is some truth 'outside' he is led to affirm that he can also participate in that 'external' truth, whether by incorporating it more or less directly into his own religiosity, or by recognizing that such truth is already present in his own religion in another guise.

Now entering into the heart of the problematic of our book, a predominantly analytic mind may have some difficulty in accepting assertions such as "he too, is a christian" or "I too am a hindu," because he gives these words a restrictive and exclusive meaning ("whatever a christian may be, he is not a hindu"). Hence, when I maintain that Christ is real and effective, though hidden and unknown, in hinduism, I violate the 'sacred' western canons used to identify Christ, since Christ is seen only in terms of differentiated identification, instead of in terms of an identifying identity.

This is also, of course, a semantic problem. And here I must confess that I have not always made the necessary clarifications and distinctions. When I say "christianity" or "hinduism," I mean:

- 1) the social and historical expression of these religions: that is, I refer to christianity as a particular church affiliation; or I think of a particular hindu sect as a particular sampradaya or way of religious life;
- 2) the core of our devotion to a particular religion: the sacramental or sacred structure, which abides through cultural and temporal fluctuations;

3) the transcendent divine reality (whatever name we may want to give it, and whatever degree of reality we may be disposed to grant it), of which all the rest is but the expression, the manifestation, symbol or creation.

Now in comparing christianity and hinduism, as in our case, we should carefully specify which of the three levels or aspects we are dealing with. To be sure, the three are intertwined, so that a believer accepts the lower simply because he believes it gives concrete expression to the higher; but when crossing the boundaries of a religious tradition we cannot ignore such distinctions. A non-hindu, for example, who sees the caste system and the non-killing of cows simply as sociological or dietary problems misses the point, as does a non-christian who sees in the Eucharist just a meager meal. Obviously, we cannot confront Canon Law with the Upanishads, or the present-day caste system with the Sermon on the Mount, or the Crusades with advaita . . .

(c) The third point, regarding the nature of the vinyard itself, concerns the theological problem of understanding catholicity. Synthesizing and simplifying a little, we could say that the concept of catholicity has fluctuated with the political and historical conditions of the times. It is not surprising then, that during the colonial and imperial period of the christian west, the geographical expansion of the 'christian' nations was accompanied by the concept of catholicity as a geographical universality. The catholic religion was in fact considered

to be a universal religion and thus had the right--even the duty--to spread throughout the entire world. Still, it is not necessary to recall the greek origins of the word in order to understand that this geographic, extensive and almost quantitative meaning was and is not its only meaning. 'Catholic' in fact, also and perhaps mainly means "perfect," complete, i.e. a way of life, a religion, a revelation which has in itself all that is necessary to lead Man to his goal, by yielding the fulfillment of the human being, by caring for every aspect of human existence, and thus providing a way which will enable Man to become what he is meant to be. Secundum totum, as St. Augustine literally translated it. 'Catholic' is thus the opposite of 'sectarian', of the 'partial aspects' of religion. Here the quality of catholicism is stressed, and for that reason, its oneness, uniqueness. But a thing is unique precisely because it is in-comparable. If it were comparable, it would cease to be unique; it would be more or less similar to another, not unique.

My teologumeno, then, was that the catholicity of christianity does not need to be interpreted in geographical terms. In point of fact, ^{the}/modern emphasis on local churches, the mystical comprehension of the sacramental nucleus of christianity, and religious pluralism (which now appears to be an obvious necessity), make accepting this meaning almost a matter of course. In one sense, there is no catholic religion; but in another sense, every personal religiosity is catholic.

I would submit an analogous proposition regarding hinduism. The hindu concept of universal dharma is not a geographical idea. The historians of religion find it difficult at times to understand the existential character of hinduism which, though it may not be strictly ethnic or historical, is tied to the populace of India. Traditional hinduism does not proselytize because dharma (religion) comes with the free gift of existence. It is meaningless to want to change a person totally, into something he is not.

I am well aware that this point needs much more elaboration, but I am also convinced that what I say does not in the least dilute the christian exigency, nor does it weaken the hindu point of view. Today, encounters among religions can no longer follow in the wake of political events. The day of christian and hindu empires is over; consequently, it is only fair that the last remainder of christian 'imperialism' recede completely in order to allow emulation, complementarity and mutual fecundation among religious traditions.

(d) The new must that I have tried to ferment in this book, perhaps without sufficient clarification, may be a new consciousness of the unity of Man, not only in the spheres of biology, history or politics, but also fundamentally on the religious plane. As long as the peoples of the world are not considered to be on the same existential level with respect to religion, there can be no firm base for human dignity. There is something terrifyingly consistent in asking whether the religious

outcast (infidel, slave, black, mlecchā, kafir, goy, etc.) has a human soul. I am not saying that there should be a single religion, nor that all religions are equal, nor do I defend the theory that all races of humankind are equal. Some are doubtless stronger, richer, more beautiful according to a certain standard, and others are better according to another. I believe, nonetheless, that the equality of every human being qua human being cannot be logically upheld if we are not ready to accept the equality of all races with respect to the radical value of "human-ness." Similarly, religions can differ among themselves, but if they are concerned with the dignity and destiny of Man, if they are different expressions of a constitutive human dimension, they are equal insofar as they are expressions of that same fundamental human religiousness.

A christian, religiously speaking, is not "better off" than a non-christian. On the other hand, we should not throw everyone indiscriminately into the same bag. And if for a christian, Christ is the ultimate and irreducible symbol, and if he really believes in the dignity of Man, then he must share 'his' Christ with others.

Here it would seem, however, that one must renounce Christ in order to remain completely faithful to him, as some christian mystics suggest, or ultimately sacrifice God, as the example of the trinitarian 'economy' implies (God the Father sacrificing his Son). But then where does identity lie? Only in differentiation? What makes one reality equal to another, and what differentiates it? Only the external parameters of space and time? Have we not perhaps converted the variety of the world

into dialectical differences and then wondered why we cannot find any dialectically convincing answer? [solutions]

Or, to turn to our problem, where does the identity of Christ lie? If he is present now, what, it is often asked, is the 'use' of christian missions?

It is not the task of this prologue to give answers, but only to pose problems in the light of the present work. My first reaction to the specific problem of the missions, is to call to mind the Gospels on one hand, and the Bhagavad Gītā on the other, in order to learn the meaning of spontaneity, of detachment from all consequences, and of acting out of love. To seek to justify christian missions by counting the souls saved would today be not only untheological, but unethical as well. In the second place, the christian mission--if we still want to use this language--is not finished, nor is that of hinduism. Human solidarity must impel people to share experiences, material and spiritual goods, and this mutual interpenetration may guide us toward building a true family of Man. Whoever has something to share, is blessed in the sharing. The christian identity cannot however, be defined in terms of 'specialization' and 'monopoly'.

In the course of this prologue, I have subjected my book to an almost ruthless critical attack. Let me say in/defense, ^{its however,} that I have remained true to the title. I speak neither of an unknown principle of hinduism which may be alive in every human being, nor of an unknown

dimension of the divine in christianity, but of that unknown reality which christians call Christ, discovered in the heart of hinduism, not as a stranger to it, but as its very principle of life, as the light which illumines every Man who comes into the world.

Now it is not for me to spell out the many assumptions which undergird the main thesis of this book. Perhaps its beauty lies in the fact that it was written straight through and without much self-reflective introspection. It advocates growth in both traditions, it favors an ongoing and genuine conversion. It encourages mutual love and openness as the condition for that mutual fecundation which many of us hope may be one of the brightest prospects in this time of ferment.

Santa Barbara, California

6th August, 1976

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord