CHAPTER 2

The Mystery of God in and through Hinduism

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INTRODUCTION

The church, the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ, is continuity in discontinuity. It is the continuation of the mission initiated by Jesus Christ, but a discontinuity in so far as this mission implies the fulfilment of every culture, as Jesus came to fulfill and not to destroy. The history of the Indian church, heir to a 'tradition that sought God with a relentless search', is a manifestation of the church's hot and cold relationship to the religious and cultural traditions of India. Whereas the earliest community, the St Thomas Christians, considered each religion salvific to the followers of the religion, the age of Inquisition would tolerate nothing of it.

Today Christians in India along with the rest of the Asian Christians are becoming increasingly aware of the Asian roots of Christianity. Though they are largely compromised to a Christianity that has come to Asia in its western form, there is increasing talk of the need to rediscover the Asianess of the gospel teachings and thought patterns.

PART 1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A context of pluralism

Traditional Asian thought, while sharing western abstract thinking, is very much context-dominated. The abstraction is not free from the context in which it is made, the reality of the experience. As the Japanese thinker Hajime Nakamura writes:

Europeans generally think of the abstract notion of an abstract noun as constructed solely by means of the universal meaning which is extracted from daily experience, so that they represent it in the singular form; on the contrary the Indians think of the abstract notion as what is included within experienced facts so fused with them that the essential principle is often represented in plural form.1

Traditional Indian openness to pluralism is ingrained in its very understanding of the Ultimate Mystery. In contrast to the Christian understanding of God as uniquely revealed to the biblical tradition and thus considered as an exclusive privilege to be this God's only people, the Indian seers present the Ultimate Reality as an inexhaustible ocean into which many rivers flow or as an immense mountain to which many roads lead. The rivers and roads are compared to different religions, none of which can claim the monopoly of the Reality. This is not a question of syncretism, or passive relativity, as it is generally understood. The focus is not on religions, as though they are all the same, but on the inexhaustibility of the Reality that no religion can exhaustively explain. Hence we have the acceptance of the pluralism of religions. As to themselves, the Hindus consider their religion as the Sanatan Dharma (eternal religion not traceable to any founder). They, thus, do not entertain syncretism. However, they were open to other religions and hence they welcomed them as they came to India either to propagate themselves, like Christianity, or to flee from persecution, like Zoroastrianism, or those who came as traders or conquerors like the followers of Islam.

Along with the understanding of the Mystery goes also the Asian epistemology that works not so much on the principle of contradiction as on the principle of relationship. Whereas the principle of contradiction advocates separation and isolation, the principle of relationship places one in the web of relationship with others as the mark of meaning. The principle of contradiction emphasizes that a thing has to be what it is. It cannot be at the same time A and non-A. The meaning of A is derived from the fact of its being in opposition to others. Hence there is room for uniqueness, in so far as what one is, the other is not. The Christian understanding of God and revelation is considered to be unique in so far as others do not have that revelation and that understanding of God. Christian identity is defined in terms of negation to others concerning what Christianity alone is. In contrast with this the Asian epistemology understands the meaning of a thing by relating it with others. Meaning is

The Mystery of God in Hinduism

The earliest Vedas present the Ultimate Mystery as one Power seen with different names and forms by humans (Ekam sat, vipra bahuda vadanti, Rig Veda 1.164.46). The whole universe is the manifestation of the same Power at the physical, psychological and spiritual level. However, the material phenomena began to be identified in isolation, concentrating on the qualitative aspects of matter and identified as the reality. This is due to ignorance (avidya). The basic Power is presented through the symbol of fire, which is physical in so far as it is the energy that works through the universe, and yet psychological, the fire of life, and it is the manifestation of the Supreme and thus spiritual as well.

This Supreme Spirit is Brahman, that which holds the universe together. Brahman manifests through the whole universe. It is that which grows, wells up, swells. It is the word uttered in the sacrifice, expressing the meaning of the sacrifice. The seers of the Upanishads, the last part of the Vedas, which are actually esoteric teachings on the Vedas, in their meditation saw how Brahman, the Power of the universe, was actually the Power within each person. Brahman is consciousness. Brahman is atman (the individual self). Eventually the whole universe is conceptualized as a person, Purusha, the Supreme Person who fills the whole creation.

The idea of the Cosmic Man (Puruṣa) begins in the renowned Purushaśūkha in the Rig Veda. The passage describes the Cosmic Man in whom the whole world is to be found. ‘This purusha is all that has been, and all that will be, the Lord of immortality’ (RV 10.90). The sacrifice of this Cosmic Purusha led to the creation of the world (RV 10.90).

Later, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad speaks of existence of the Atman in the form of the Purusha (1.4.1) and the Katha Upanishad presents Purusha as the summit of all creation (3.11). He is the Cosmic Lord in whom all become immortal (Svetasvatara Up. 3.7). He is the Lord of Lords, God of Gods, the Lord of the world, the adorable (Svet. 6.7).

The Bhagavad Gita presents the Cosmic Purusha as the origin of all, the guardian of the ever-lasting law (Samastat Dharma), the immortal person (BG 11.8–19). Hinduism stresses the underlying unity of all existence. Equally, there is the awareness of the presence of the divine power in all things, the multiplicity. They are only manifestations of the One Reality, the Formless One. They are the ‘names and forms’ of the One Reality, the One without a second. Brahman is the source and end of all existence. ‘That from which beings are born; that by which when born they live; that into which when dying they enter; that you shall desire to know. That is Brahman’ (Taittiriya Up. 3.1).

The formless (a-rūpa) Brahman can be recognized and worshipped in every kind of form (saraṇa rūpa). He is the un-name-able and the possessor of every name. There is nothing that cannot manifest God to the soul which is open to him in deep awareness of itself. Everything is a sign of God, his linga (sign). A jnāni realizes how any approach to God ends up in a sort of ‘ālasī’ in so far as humans know God only when they realize that they know nothing about God.

When you think I know well –  
Truly it is but little that you know...  
He who knows him not, knows him;  
He who understands him, has not understood...  
It is through an awakening that he is found...  
As when the lightning flashes... the eye blinks...

(Kena Up. 2.1–4; 4.4)

The knowledge of God implies that one gives up everything, including one’s self; otherwise one remains at the stage of talking about God, a theologian, a brahmavaadin. A knower of God is a contemplative, a seer, a brahmavaid. For such a person there is no more I and Thou, setting oneself apart from God or others. ‘For he who knows the supreme Brahman truly himself has become Brahman’ (Mundaka Up. 3.2.9).

This awareness comes to one only when one enters into the innermost being of oneself, the cave of one's heart, in contemplation.

In this city of Brahman (the heart of man)
There is an abode, within it a small lapis flower;
Inside, a little space;
What there is within,
It is that one must seek,
That one must desire to know.

(Chandogya Up. 8.1)

The identification of the Ultimate Reality (Brahman) and the individual self (atman) is brought out by the Upanishads through certain short formulas known as mahavakhyas (great utterances). The three most important mahavakyas are: 1. ayam atma Brahma (atman is Brahman) (Mandukya Up. 2); 2. aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman) (Bri. 1.4.10); and 3. Tat tvam asi (That thou art) (Chan. 6.8.6). Through these utterances the Upanishads summarize the experience of the identification of the individual self and the Brahman, the one without the second (a-dvaita). It can be experienced only by those who have reached the experience of that stage of existence.

The Upanishads describe the Absolute in three-fold images; that is, in terms of pure existence (sat) (Katha Up. 6.12), consciousness (cit) (Mandukya Up. 2.2.11) and bliss (ananda) (Taittiriya Up. 2.1). In the compound form it becomes Saccidananda. The awareness of God is to be had not by discussions but rather by plunging deeper and deeper within, as Abishiktananda would say, so that one is led to discover the mystery hidden in the depths of one's being, 'set in the cavern (of the heart), beyond the firmament, that splendour into which the saints pass' (Kaivalya Up. 1.3).

One comes to the true awareness by going beyond all that is known and all that is not known, beyond all becoming and non-becoming (Isa Up. 10.14), beyond all words, all thoughts, all distinctions, all qualifications (Mandukya Up. 7). Then one will have conquered fear, old age and death itself in order to become Atmavid, a knower of the Self (Chandogya Up. 7.3). Abishiktananda writes:

It would seem as if India, moved by the Spirit, invites the Christian to seek the mystery of God, Creator and Saviour, no longer outside or alongside himself, but in the profoundest depths of his own heart.

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1. Ibid., p. ii.  
2. Ibid., p. 10.

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PART 2 THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Intellectual approaches to the Mystery

Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656)

In the following pages we shall present the description of the Mystery of God by some of the mystical theologians whose writings have inspired the emergence of an Indian Catholic Theology. We begin with a brief reference to Roberto de Nobili, the Italian Jesuit, who could rightly be described as the trail-blazer of an Indian theology.

De Nobili, the first one to take the road to the contemplative experience of the Mystery, reached South India in 1605. He realized the role of the Brahmins in making Christian inroads into Indian society. The Brahmins were prejudiced against Christianity as a religion of the low castes. Hence at a time when other religions were 'anathema' (condemned) in the Christian world view, de Nobili learned Hinduism in Sanskrit and attempted to meet the Hindu world in its own religious sources. 'He sought for a point of insertion of the Gospel message in the world of Hinduism by making the Gospel intelligible to the Indian mind,' comments Wilfred.

Through his efforts to present the Christian gospel in the language and thought patterns of the Brahmins, he evolved a Christian theological vocabulary and thus laid the foundation for today's inculturation. He was convinced that the life-style of a sannyasi was the best way to make Christianity acceptable to people of the upper castes and to implant the church into Indian soil. According to the Indian church-historian Joseph Thiedederath, he evolved a theological structure for communicating the Christian faith and coined a terminology for Christian theology in the Indian context.

De Nobili's attempts, however admirable they were, were embroiled in the inter-congregational rivalries spinning off accusations and counter-accusations, leading to the eventual banning of all experiments with local cultures by a papal bull in 1754. This explains the absence of any Catholic initiative to produce a local theology in any part of the colonial world.

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Christianity. The task of philosophy is to support, defend, clarify, expound and develop revelation and show how it is relevant for life. In the west Aristotelian philosophy served this purpose at the hand of Thomas Aquinas. However, that system is alien to the Indian mind and hence must be replaced by Vedanta, Upadhyaya argued, because the Hindu mind is synthetic and speculative, and not analytic and practical.\textsuperscript{10} Vedanta must be made to 'hew wood and draw water for the Catholic Church', he believed. In the process, as Lipner rightly points out, he is not developing an indigenized Catholic faith by implanting Christian concepts into Vedanta soil, but only replacing Thomism with Vedanta.\textsuperscript{11}

Making use of the Upanishadic understanding that described the Absolute in terms of the sat, cit and anmanda, Upadhyaya held that the essence of the divine being that was understood by neo-Thomistic reasoning could be expressed as sat, cit and anmanda of classical Vedanta.\textsuperscript{12} The Supreme Being, para-brahman, is essentially sat; that is, whose nature is to exist in and for itself. It is the first cause of all. It is self-sustaining. Thus, the para-brahman of the Vedanta and the God of the neo-Thomistic philosopher is one, infinite and eternal. It is also cit; that is, consciousness in the form of self-awareness, as self-productive. Hence, it alludes to the procession or generation of the Son from the Father. Thus, the Upanishads prefigure the Christian revelation.

Thus, according to Upadhyay, Vedanta provides to India the natural basis to receive the supernatural Christian truth, which is not to be identified with the European garb. The European garb of Christian truths makes it unintelligible to the Hindus. Hence, the Vedantic tradition would serve as the vehicle to present Christian truth, the truth regarding the Trinitarian nature of God, to India.

Upadhyay described Brahman, the Supreme Being, as pure Being, pure act and thus intrinsically self-contained and unrelated. Using the structure and terminology of Shankara, Upadhyay shows how Shankara can serve as the metaphysical foundation for a Christian understanding of the divine nature and its relation to the world.

God, in God's supernatural, intrinsic aspect, is separate from creation. Once we realize this distinction with all its implications, humans can live an appropriate natural existence with the liturgical practices and beliefs derived from Christian revelation. Shankara, according to Upadhyay, was granted some form of divine dispensation which enables Advaita and his commentary freedom from subtle errors.\textsuperscript{13} From the transcendent standpoint, the

\textsuperscript{7} J. J. Lipner, Bhaumakhandhab Upadhyay (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. xv.
\textsuperscript{10} Lipner, Bhaumakhandhab Upadhyay, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 188.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 191.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 168.
Supreme Being is nirguna (not impersonal, but attributeless), whereas from the perspective of creation, the Supreme Being is saguna, having attributes. Further, Upadhyay insists, Shankara has not held that Brahman is unknowable; rather he is knowable as bliss, intelligence and so on.\textsuperscript{14}

Commenting on creation and the principle of \textit{Maya}, in the Advaita understanding, Upadhyay writes:

Shankara teaches that the individual soul is different from the highest Self (Para Arman) as well as non-different from it. If \textit{abhedā} means ‘absolute identity’ as M. Thibaud supposes, then the individual soul can never be said to be distinct from the Supreme Being in the face of their declared non-difference.\textsuperscript{17}

According to Upadhyay, Shankara means that the individual soul is a reflection (\textit{adhyātma}) of Brahman and thus creation is a sort of communication by the Supreme Being, participating in his being. This communication and this participating is a mysterious activity. It is similar to the sun’s reflection in different water-bodies, which have a type of dependence on the sun, without affecting it in any way. This communication is called \textit{Maya}. \textit{Maya} affects the communicated things, but not Brahman. Thus, the individual soul is different from Brahman as its reflection, as a result of the mysterious communication of Brahman. It is not-different from Brahman in as much as Brahman is the substratum of the individual soul. \textit{Maya}, thus, is not illusion, but the principle of creation. It is neither real nor unreal.

\textit{Maya} can be an occasion for sin, in so far as it can lead to distortion of nature and reality, bestowing on the world a reality that it does not deserve.\textsuperscript{16} Further, \textit{Maya} expresses the Christian understanding of creation in the following aspects: (a) that God does not necessarily create; (b) that created things come into existence from prior non-existence; and (c) that the infinite perfections are contained in the finite in a pre-eminent way.

\textbf{Christ through Vedanta}

The legacy, bequeathed by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, of developing an Indian theology through the mould of Advaita died out with his death in 1907 (aged 46), due to the high-handedness of the then papal delegate. Interest among the later generation begins with three Jesuit scholars, G. Dandoy, J. Bayart and P. Johanns. They were encouraged by Upadhyay’s disciple, Animananda, to interpret Christianity, especially the understanding of Jesus Christ, through the philosophical tradition of India.

The main argument of the trio is that the Indian philosophical tradition is the natural base for Christianity in India. The Vedantic tradition is the preparation that finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Johanns argues contentiously that there is nothing that St Thomas writes that is not somehow anticipated in Advaita.\textsuperscript{17} The Vedantic systems, thus, pave the way for a true Christian theology.

\textbf{Mystical approaches to the Mystery}

Thus far we have concentrated on the intellectual methodology of the Indian tradition, represented by Advaita. We turn now to the insight that a genuine encounter of Christianity with the soul of India can take place only through India’s mystical tradition.

\textit{Abbbé Jules Monchanin (1835–1937): the land of the Trinity}

Abbé Monchanin, belonging to a French religious missionary congregation, reached India in 1939, with the mandate, as he acknowledged, given to him by his theologian friend, Henri de Lubac, “to rethink everything in the light of theology and to rethink theology through mysticism.”\textsuperscript{18} This inspired Monchanin to launch a sanyastic-monastic movement in India in 1950, founding, with another French missionary, Dom Henri Le Saux, the renowned Saccidananda Ashram on the banks of the holy river Kavery.

Although, following Upadhyay, he named the ashram as Saccidananda, the name for Trinity, he was careful not to identify the Advaita notion of the Absolute with the Christian understanding of the Trinity. In a lecture in 1956 he states:

Christian mysticism is Trinitarian or it is nothing. Hindu thought, so deeply focused on the Oneness of the One, on the \textit{kēvalitī}, in his \textit{kēvalātva}, cannot be sublimated into Trinitarian thought without a crucifying dark night of the soul. It has to undergo a noetic metamorphosis, a passion of the spirit.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet, he believed that at the depth of the mystical experience the two could meet and he worked for the reconciliation of the two traditions.

His contemplative theology and his life focused on the Trinity. He writes: “It is because of the mystery of the Trinity – Alpha and Omega – that I am a Christian.”\textsuperscript{20} The Saccidananda Ashram was the expression of Monchanin’s relentless search for the Absolute. He believed that

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.  \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.  \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 370.

\textsuperscript{17} Wilfred, \textit{Beyond Settled Foundations}, p. 40.  \textsuperscript{18} Teusdale, \textit{Toward a Christian Vedanta}, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 31.  \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Christianity could strike roots in India only if it met the innermost soul of India in the mystery of interiority, mysticism and contemplation.

The object of the contemplation where both Christianity and Hinduism can meet is the mystery of God as Trinity. He proceeds from the events of the incarnation, death and resurrection, and concentrates on the Triune God, the fulfillment of the Hindu experience of God as Saccidananda. Christian faith, on the other hand, must rethink the understanding of person and creation in line with the Hindu experience of Saccidananda. Trinity, as opposed to the individualism suggested by person, is a being for the other. A sannyasi should transcend concepts and concentrate on God the Father as Sat, on the Son as Cit and on the Holy Spirit as Ananda. Such a vision leads him to qualify India as 'the Land of the Trinity'.

Abhishiktananda (1910–73): meeting the Mystery at the cave of the heart

Dom Henri Le Saux, a French Benedictine, came to India in 1948, led by the desire to integrate the Indian contemplative tradition into the Christian monastic ideal as a meeting point of Christianity and the eastern religions. For this he joined hands with Abbé Monchanin in founding the Saccidananda Ashram and adopted the much-researched name Abhishiktananda (joy in the anointed one; that is, Jesus Christ). He was of the view that the western intellectual formulations of Christianity could not adequately express the spiritual reality of the Christian faith; for this we have to turn to the Upanishads which offer experience based on the spirituality of wholeness.

Abhishiktananda, convinced as he was that for a meaningful dialogue with India the church has to enter into its mystical traditions, develops his theology based on this mystical dimension. He became the first Catholic priest to sit at the feet of Hindu Gurus when he made himself a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Gnanananda, who introduced him to the Hindu contemplative tradition. At their feet he learned what it means to enter into the cave of one's heart.

He holds that the great primitive Upanishads, like the Chandogya and the Brihadaranyaka, are incomparable witnesses to the awakening of the soul to the Mystery of being and of the self, and these earliest formulations of that experience have never been surpassed. Hence, he starts from the

Upanishadic relationship of the Arman and Brahman, which for him ensures a solid foundation for the Christian encounter with traditional Indian thought. The Christian turns to Vedanta, according to Abhishiktananda, as an encounter between the Word of God communicated by means of speech and thought on the one hand, and on the other, as an inner experience springing from those levels of the Spirit that transcend words and concepts. Hence it is only in the highest experience of the Spirit that the Christian can come to terms with and crown the Vedantic experience. While in the Bible God's inaccessibility is symbolized by turning to heaven (Our Father who art in Heaven, Matt. 6:9, RSV), the Indian tradition expresses the same by emphasizing the need to enter ever deeper within (Kaivalya Up. 1.3).

According to Abhishiktananda, the Johannine prologue, through its identifications and its deeper penetration into the Mystery of God, recalls the Upanishadic experience. Abhishiktananda shows how John, as in the case of the Upanishads, starting from God and proceeding to the lowest level of the creature, discovers the presence of the Mystery of God in each stage.

John, using the Greek concept of the Logos, the principle of order and continuity, presents the Word as God. Further, Logos-God-Life-Light is identified with the man born on earth. This way, all that was said in the Upanishads is in reality said of Christ. Hence, in John we have not only the Upanishadic method, but also the fundamental themes contained therein.

The 'I am' statements in John remind us of the Upanishadic maha-vakyas (great sayings) such as 'I am Brahman'. Jesus simply identifies 'I' with being. Here we are not using the Bible to understand the Indian scriptures, but our knowledge of the Indian texts enables us to interpret the Bible. We come across the reciprocity and communion of love which is the very foundation of the unity and non-duality of being. Based on Matthew 11:25, 'No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him', Abhishiktananda believes that the knowledge in which the Father begets the Son and in which the Son receives existence from the Father is the 'revelation' of God within himself which the Son came to make known to the world, inviting whoever 'receives' this revelation to share in his own divine sonship (John 1:12–18). As the Father and Son are one, so the Son and his own are one. Ultimately, in him, they are one with God. Similarly, the Father has given the Father's glory to the Son.
from the beginning (John 1:1) and it is given to them as well. Just as there is only one glory, there is only one life; the life that was in the bosom of the Father from the beginning (John 1:14). Through other concepts like joy (John 17:13), name (17:26) and love (John 17:23), Abhishiktananda concludes that just as in the inner silence the sages of India hear the primordial OM, the murmur of Sat-cid-ananda, so in the depths of the silence of the Spirit, springing up from the Word, the Christian hears deep within his or her own soul the echo of the same Sat-cid-ananda.27

One who has never experienced the non-duality of being cannot understand the Mystery of God manifested in Jesus Christ. As long as we look upon God or Jesus Christ as another, we cannot grasp what God is or what we are. For Abhishiktananda 'the Ultimate Mystery lies at the very heart of non-duality. The Spirit of unity alone silently teaches that essential reciprocal Gaze of Love in the depths of Being of which all earthly "otherness" is simply a sign.28

The Christian knows how God is in all things; and in order to meet God one has to plunge deep within oneself and within all things in pursuit of his final secret. But in this search the soul finds that every atom of it is ablaze with the glory of God and the 'I' and the 'Thou' disappears like a person shipwrecked in a high sea, tossed from wave to wave that sweeps him away. Abhishiktananda adds, 'soon there will no longer be any I to be conscious of any experience whatever, still less to be aware that all possible experiences are now finished.'29 Just as it is only at the very heart of Being that the loneliness of the Monad can transcend, so also it is only in the heart of God that the antimony of created existence can and must be resolved. 'In the end', he points out, 'it is in the mystery of the essential koinonia of the divine Being that man can rediscover himself as simultaneously one with God and yet present to him.'30 The Christian knows in truth that in the Mystery of God, at the very heart of Being, the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father, alike in the non-duality (apotheosis) of nature and in the threefold communion (koinonia) of Persons. The Vedanta experience of Self leads to the Trinitarian experience of Saccidananda. However, the Christian experience of Saccidananda transcends that of Hinduism. Whereas in Hindu understanding everything stops with Being, the indivisible and attributeless Brahman (Mundaka Up. 2.2.11), the Christian passes on to the communion in love, within the indivisibility of unity of being. However, it is a mystery of faith.31

Abhishiktananda rightly holds that though there are several texts in the Hindu scriptures articulating the Vedantic experience, it is in the lives of saints like Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Gnanananda that we encounter it concretely.32 The whole Indian spirituality is shaped on the basis of sages' intuition of the Self within, the call of which can be heard only from within. It is the realization that who one is does not depend on the changing external circumstances of bodily and mental existence, but is at the kernel of one's consciousness and cannot be identified with any external circumstance.

Christianity, with its experience of the Spirit, can accept what is essential in the Advaitic experience and penetrate to its very heart. In the process it may find itself anew 'precisely in those ultimate depths of the Spirit to which advaita recalls it', Abhishiktananda insists.33 He goes on to say that, whether we like it or not, we are faced with the fact of India's religion and spiritual experience and we are challenged to define our faith and present it in the presence of this experience. It is in this spirit that Abhishiktananda and others have attempted to define the Christian experience of the Mystery from the Indian perspective.

Likewise, he points out, Christianity has a universal definitive service of manifesting God's love made present in Jesus Christ.34 To do this it will have to integrate whatever is true and good, wherever it is found, to itself. If Christianity is incapable of assimilating the spiritual traditions of India, it will cease to be an agent of universal service, in so far as the truth of the Vedanta in itself is unassailable.

As Gispen-Sauch shows, one of Abhishiktananda's concerns is to go beyond (or below) the namamrtha (world of multiplicity) to Reality itself.35 In the spirit of the Upanishadic tradition, he had a distrust of all mental forms, which he considered as belonging to the realm of maya, entering the realm of the Real. Towards the end of his life he acknowledges the relative value of the realm of vyavaharika (world of senses), which loses its significance when the Absolute Truth (paramartha) dawns in the heart of the world of multiplicity and history. The vyavaharika is left behind when the paramartha dawns, as one leaves behind the boat that one has used to cross the river.

What about the Christian faith — does it not belong to the vyavaharika? For Abhishiktananda, though much of the Christian faith was part of the vyavaharika, the deepest Mystery of Jesus who said, I AM, the pure being

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27 Ibid., p. 96. 28 Ibid., p. 102. 29 Ibid., p. 104. 30 Ibid., p. 104. 31 Ibid., p. 108.
32 Ibid., p. 47. 33 Ibid., p. 48.
of non-duality, is interiorized and is seen as one with the Godhead. He writes in his diary on 28 May 1972, about a year before his death:

Saying mystery can only emerge from the cave, from the depth of consciousness. ‘Christianity believes that salvation comes from outside, through thoughts, rites, “sacrements.” The level of namamrupa. But actually, in truth, Christianity is first of all Upanishad, correlation, not direct teaching. Direct teaching only gives namamrupas. Correlation causes the spark of experience to flash, that alone gives fulfillment . . . The pure act of love or service, that is what awakens one to oneself. That is what awakens one to God, not to the God of namamrupa but to God in himself! It is on this inner experience that all real religion should be based, not on ideas that come and are passed on to us from outside. 46

What is happening in Jesus the Incarnate One is his awakening to the Father’s intimate presence in him. This Jesus Christ is the Saipranishita in whose awakening the awakening of all are included. Just a few months before his death he writes: ‘There is in truth only one act by which Jesus—every human being—goes to the Father (to use biblical terminology): it is the act of awakening’ [italics added]. As soon as you awake, on account of the essential connectedness of all human beings, you awake with, on behalf of all. 47 The Paschal Mystery is an impressive symbol of the awakening of Human Being to himself or herself.

In short, Abhishiktananda’s understanding of the Ultimate Mystery evolves out of his grasp of the Upanishadic traditions as well as his Christian Faith.

A new vision of reality: Bede Griffiths (1906–93)

Bede Griffiths, a British Benedictine with an Anglican background, who came to India in 1955, carried forward the tradition Abbé Monchanin and Abhishiktananda left behind. As can be gleaned from his autobiography, from childhood he was blessed with a mystical sense and a spirit of contemplation that generated in him a regard for cosmic revelation. 48 His exposure to Hindu and Buddhist mysticism convinced him of the need to develop a valid and creative synthesis of the inner encounter of Christianity and Hinduism, relating the Oriental tradition to Christianity. 49

He was influenced also by modern science, especially Fr. Jof Capra, David Bohm, Ilya Prigogine and others. He was attracted by the scientists’ advocating a cosmic whole, as the vedic revelation sees it. 50

Hence he asserts:

The one divine Mystery is beyond word and thought, reveals itself in different ways in each religious tradition. Each religion manifests the one Reality, the one Truth, under different symbols, a symbol being defined as “a sign in which the reality is really present. In this sense it is true to say that Jesus Christ is a symbol of God.” 44

Beyond the physical world of differences there is a deeper dimension, the world of the transcendent. Bede Griffiths writes:

This we find, in the great revelations. There what is revealed is not merely the physical or the psychological or psychic world but rather there takes place an intuitive insight into the ultimate, the transcendent. All the great revelations are, as it were messages from that transcendent world . . . transcendental reality. 44

This revelation he describes in terms of the myths understood as the mystical. All religions have their origin in some sort of mystical experience. 49 This experience as such is incommunicable, though the religions do communicate it through myths and symbols. Hence he describes myth as “the symbolic expression of the One Reality experienced as a living unity in an undivided consciousness.” 44 In fact, even the biblical books, according to him, gain their meaning from the mythical elements they contain. 49 It is the myth that relates the events contained in the Christian Bible to the eternal drama of human salvation.

In the Christian tradition this One Reality is known as the Father, the Source of the Godhead. The Father signifies the Absolute from which every thing originates. Griffiths writes:

The understanding is that from this ground, from this source, there springs a Word, a wisdom, an image of the Godhead, and that is this cosmic Person, who reveals the Father, the Source. In that cosmic Person, in the Word or Son, all the archetypes of all created beings are contained. The archetype of every being in the universe is contained eternally in the Word, in the Godhead. 46

His Word, his image, the Cosmic Person, Jesus Christ reveals the Father, the source. In the Son all created universe is contained as the archetype, unfolded.


50 Bede Griffiths, Return to the Centre (Springfield: Templegate, 1982), p. 79.

44 Bede Griffiths, A New Vision of Reality, p. 169.
The Mystery of God in and through Hinduism

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What I have attempted in this chapter is the presentation of one stream of reflection on the Ultimate Mystery, which, while it is the most prevalent, is not the only one. The Indian church is surging ahead in its theological reflection. Not denying the acuteness of the dehumanizing poverty in which millions live, one could still say that the major issue the church in India faces is how to cope with the vibrant religions with their ancient wisdom expressed in the lived spirituality of the Indian masses. The originality of Indian Catholic theology is to be found above all in the writings and lived spirituality in response to this religiosity of India. Though most Indian theologians have something to say about the Ultimate Mystery, most of the time what they say is from the perspective of understanding Jesus Christ as the only medium of salvation and articulating the mission of the church emanating from that understanding.

A characteristic that the Indian mystical tradition has brought out is that theology is not solely a science of God as an abstraction, but it is for and in relation to humans. Humans constitute as much importance as God in theology. Humans exist in the world and thus there can be no theology divorced from the world. The world is the arena in which humans struggle to grapple with the problems which derive their meaning in relation to God. The search for God takes place in the context of lived reality. This makes the Indian search not just a conceptual clarification but an encounter with the Ultimate Reality in the context of atman-abhaktar (self-realization).

Even in the midst of globalization, frequently we lack the readiness to accept others and respect the space of others. The Indian approach to the Ultimate Mystery can serve as a corrective to this tendency to exclusivism. Equally, it is a corrective to another spin-off from market-oriented globalization: a trade mentality with respect to others and to the world—how to make the best of them for one’s own advantage. The Indian approach insists on a sort of detachment (nishkamakarma) in the pursuit of interests, keeping the Ultimate Reality in focus, in the midst of the relative reality (maya) of the world of senses (namarupa). The Indian approach reminds us of the need to concentrate on the experience of the

epistemology\textsuperscript{30} paving the way for a new world order through religions renewing themselves in relation to one another.

\textsuperscript{30} Tsusale, Toward a Christian Vocation, p. 41.

As the Word/Son is the source of all forms in creation, so the Spirit is the source of all energy. "It is the uncreated energy," Griffiths says, "which flows forth eternally from the Godhead and which then brings into being the energies of matter and of nature."\textsuperscript{47} Thus, the universe is an overflow of the energy of the spirit, the energy of love. In other words, the Spirit is the love-energy of God. God calls into being the whole creation to manifest God's self, to manifest God's love and to bring forth that love in the creation. The Spirit flows out in this love to effect the creation and the Word organizes all those energies of matter and creation gradually bringing it back to its source in the cosmic Person, Purusha. The Spirit is active throughout history, and at work in all religions. As part of this cosmic process at times certain centres, like Israel, are formed, in and through which the cosmic process of redemption is consummated. Through Israel, the organizing power of the universe, the archetypal man, Jesus, manifests to overcome the power of sin and death. Through his resurrection the redemptive power of the Spirit is poured out to the world. The Spirit's coming on the church is part of that outpouring, though the Spirit is everywhere and not limited to the church.

The church is the centre for the regeneration of humankind, the Spirit rebuilding humans into the likeness of Christ and unifying all in the love of the Father from which everything comes. So the universe and humanity return to the divine unity and each element and each person discovers its original archetype. So he writes: "In love the whole universe is pouring out and that love is drawing it all back to itself."\textsuperscript{48} All are reintegrated into the one. All are held together in Christ, the supreme Person, and all become persons in the Person. However, it is not a matter of dissolving into the One. As Hinduism says, rather it is a reintegraion into the One in total unity. It is an eternal and infinite reality, and all of us, even now, are interwoven and interpenetrating in that one reality. Yet, Bede Griffiths reminds us:

The Absolute itself is beyond all human comprehension and we use words, images and concepts taken from everyday finite experience in order to direct our mind, our will and our heart towards the Infinite and to allow that Infinite to enter into our lives and transform them.\textsuperscript{49}

Bede Griffith's contemplative theology springs from his spirituality, mystical experience and reading and reflection on the sacred texts of eastern religions and the Bible. Thus, it can be qualified as 'theological

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 270. \textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 273. \textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 275.
Ultimate Mystery, which is all-pervading and thus invites us not only to be tolerant but respectful of others. Here religions will have to underlay doctrinal expressions but must concentrate rather on the Mystery itself, which unites all. The Mystery is greater than the representation of it. This implies an inward orientation, the gift of interiority with which India was blessed, leading to the state when 'God may be everything to everyone' (1 Cor. 15:28), the state of convergence of existence in its crystal purity and limitless plenitude in the experience of the Ultimate Mystery, the pure non-duality.

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