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THE CHRIST WE ADORE

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THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

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INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
GOL PARK, CALCUTTA 29

PUBLISHED BY
SWAMI AKUNTHANANDA, SECRETARY
THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
GOL PARK, CALCUTTA 29

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First Published: 1955
Second Impression: 1960
Third Impression: 1965
Fourth Impression: 1969. 10,000 copies

RJS-105
414
COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL
~~47/1, First Floor, St. Marks Road,~~
~~Bangalore - 560 001.~~

PRINTED IN INDIA
BY P. C. RAY, SRI GOURANGA PRESS PRIVATE LTD.
5 CHINTAMANI DAS LANE, CALCUTTA 9

PREFACE

The Institute observes Christmas each year by arranging a special lecture for the discussion of the life and teachings of Jesus. In 1954, Swami Ranganathananda, Secretary of the Delhi branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, was invited to speak on the subject. The lecture he gave on this occasion was published in the *Bulletin* of the Institute for December 1955 and is now reproduced here.

The reader will be struck by the depth of knowledge shown by the author and his fine perception of the inner subtleties of the teaching of Jesus which touch the chord of universal Truth present in every heart. The universal message of Jesus—the ideas of the indwelling divinity, divine grace, universal ethics, and spiritual realization—finds clear exposition in these pages, and will be easily comprehended and readily appreciated by every seeker after Truth.

30 June 1960

PUBLISHER

PREFACE

TO THE THIRD IMPRESSION

The author of this book, Swami Ranganathananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is now Secretary of this Institute of Culture.

15 June 1965

PUBLISHER

PREFACE

TO THE FOURTH IMPRESSION

As the copies of the third impression have been sold out, a new impression of this popular booklet is being placed in the hands of the public.

Swami Ranganathananda has since ceased to be the Secretary of this Institute.

Christmas Eve 1969

PUBLISHER

THE CHRIST WE ADORE

WE, in India, have learnt through our religion to look upon great teachers with a heart open to the inspiration which they hold for all humanity. The approach of our people to the lives of all teachers has something refreshingly beautiful about it; it is hard for non-Hindus to understand how we, professing a different religion, can open our hearts, with equal fervour, to receive the inspiration of this great Son of Man, Jesus. India's approach to religion is experimental and not dogmatic. It is spirituality that India seeks in its religious quest and not a creed or a dogma. This is also the approach of Jesus Christ to religion, as we shall presently see. It is this approach that explains the spiritual hospitality of the Indian mind. This broad, all inclusive approach will be increasingly appreciated and accepted by the thinking people of the world in the coming years. *What is now the cherished possession of a national culture will eventually become an integral part of human culture and civiliza-*

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tion. Such a consummation will help to release the Christ-spirit from the shackles of a narrow sectarian creed in which it has been stifled for centuries. This will be the service that the spirit of India will render in this age to the religion of this great Master.

BIRTH AND BOYHOOD OF JESUS

We are familiar in our country with the idea that at the birth of divine personalities there is joyous co-operation of man and nature to welcome them; for it is an event heralding universal joy. In the words of one of our sacred books: 'The ancestors rejoice, the gods dance in joy, and this world gets a saviour'—*Modante pitaro, nṛtyanti devatāḥ, sanāthā ceyam bhūrbhavati* (*Nārada Bhakti-Sūtra*, V. 5).

Very similar is the account of the birth of Jesus Christ, as given in the various Gospels of the New Testament. Deeply touching is the description of the episode in Luke. The parents, Joseph and Mary, had come to Bethlehem in Judea from Nazareth in Galilee, to be taxed according to the newly promulgated Roman law. Mary was expecting her first child. The couple took shelter in an

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inn, where Mary gave birth to an infant who was destined to become a great spiritual teacher. For want of accommodation in the inn, the mother wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. At this time, a group of shepherds, keeping watch over their sheep near by, received, in the stillness of the night, in an extraordinary way, the intimation of the birth of this wonderful infant.

‘And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them ; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you ; ye shall find the babe wrapt in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’ (Luke, II. 9-12).

The shepherds were amazed. Hardly had they time to recover from this amazement, when they heard a multitude of angels signing, praising God: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men’ (*ibid.*, II. 14).

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The shepherds proceeded to Bethlehem in search of the babe as indicated, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger, and they offered him loving worship and homage.

Next, we get a glimpse, a tender and pleasing glimpse, of him as a boy of twelve. He was accompanying his parents to the holy temple in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. After the ceremonies, the parents started homeward ; they expected Jesus to be in the party, but after a day's journey when they found him missing, they searched for him here and there and, finally, retracing their steps, found him, after three days, in the courtyard of the holy temple discussing with the learned doctors points of law and faith. When his mother, piqued, told him how much she and his father had been worried over his disappearance, he gave a characteristic answer: 'How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' (*ibid.*, II. 49). His parents could not make anything of this enigmatic reply, but they were satisfied when they found him willing to return home with them.

We get hardly any account of Jesus dur-

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ing his youth and early manhood. 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man', says the Gospel in a compressed narrative (*ibid.*, II. 52).

But we have enough indication to show that Jesus, very early in life, had become aware of the great purpose of his advent and set about it with a thoroughness that nothing could thwart. He must have also spent long hours in silence and loneliness in the nearby mountains and communed with himself. Later, when we meet him next, he is already a young man of about thirty. Moving from place to place, Jesus heard of another teacher who was creating a stir by his way of life and preaching. This was John the Baptist, who went about in the wilderness of Judea, and later in the Jordan area, proclaiming: 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew, III. 2).

SEMITIC RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The lives and works of John the Baptist and Jesus introduce us to a new chapter in Semitic religious history. There is something extraordinary, something refreshingly striking, in their contribution which has made

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religion in the West flow into a new channel of God's intimacy with man, with love as the bond between both. In the old Semitic tradition, this was not the central idea. The idea there was that God was far away; His distance from man was the measure of His majesty; man was called upon to conduct his life here below with faith and fear, and the fruit of such faith was to be reaped after death. Such a religion tends to be largely this-worldly, increasingly bound to time and the historical process. As a socio-political faith with a slight flavour of the other-worldly, it constantly tends to be bound in a rigid creed which leads to dogmatism, bigotry, and intolerance, on the one hand, and formalism and correct ritualistic behaviour, on the other.

The New Testament contains vivid descriptions of such a situation in the field of religion at the advent of John the Baptist and Jesus. Its pages reveal the birth-pangs of a new spiritual *Weltanschauung* at once universal and human, the recurring conflicts of this new ideology with the entrenched monotheistic exaggerations, the deep aspirations of the people for release from the rigidities of a

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lifeless tradition as represented by the priesthood, and the shining figures of John and Jesus proclaiming through life and teaching a compelling message of hope and assurance.

Man, as spiritual seeker, transcends the sphere of law and commandments of a religion. Whereas law and commandments relate him to parochial and temporal interests, spirituality relates him to the eternal and the infinite. Jesus came to offer this to man, to give the bread of life to the spiritually hungry. Insistence on correct ritualistic behaviour does not bring satisfaction to man at this stage. They are as stones to a hungry man, as the New Testament puts it. Jesus proclaimed a religion of wide and deep horizons ; he brought God near to man and bound both with the cord of love ; he eliminated fear as the medium of their relationship. With love implanted in his heart in place of fear, man emerged as the lover of his fellow-men ; he learnt to find fulfilment in a life of love for God and service to man, to God in man. This love for God, this intimate communion with Him, is the fulfilment of the righteous life ; it is the only means of satisfying the soul's spiritual hunger. This is the *essential*

of religion. It holds that man has a higher dimension which transcends his physical and social personality ; he is essentially spiritual ; in that inmost being of his lies his intimacy with and closeness to the divine, and his kinship to all creation. Religion is the realization of this spiritual fact and its expression in life and behaviour.

This is the approach of Jesus to religion. And this is the approach which India has learnt from the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the *Bhāgavata*, and other scriptures, and has made it part and parcel of our national awareness. These scriptures have taught us that religion is realization ; it is not creed or dogma or mere believing ; it is not merely the good life, the moral life, the righteous life, though all these are necessary for the flowering of religion in spiritual realization.

Thanks to the Upaniṣads, religion in India, unlike religion in Palestine, learnt to understand and appreciate this mood of spiritual earnestness, this passion for the spiritual as distinct from the merely socio-religious and moral, and to welcome it. This is the meaning of our national idea that Śruti is more binding than Smṛti, that life according to the

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Smṛti is only a prelude to life according to the Śruti.

JESUS CAME TO FULFIL, NOT TO DESTROY

For the first time, a glimpse of this great idea came to the Semitic world through John and Jesus ; it was not that this idea was entirely absent from the older tradition ; a few gifted individuals had borne witness to it. But theirs were forlorn voices incapable of making any impression on the tradition. This was the case even with John the Baptist, who was compelled to refer to himself as 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. But with Jesus the idea became a force, which inevitably came into conflict with the traditional religion. In the New Testament, we can see these two currents flowing side by side. The conflict was all a one-way affair ; it was the old in conflict with the new, and not the new in conflict with the old. A spiritual message is large enough to accommodate all forms of faith. Its approach is synthetic and inclusive. Love and grace do not negate law and commandment, but fulfil them. Jesus himself never desired to exclude the old

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religion. He claimed to have come to fulfil and not to destroy. In this broad and generous spirit, which is the mark of a deeply spiritual religion, we find him endeavouring to effect a synthesis of the old and the new.

The New Testament gives us glimpses of this attempt at synthesis between the message of Moses and the message of Jesus. 'For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' (John, I. 17).

To the rich man who wanted to know the way to inherit eternal life, Jesus gave the advice to fulfil the commandments before proceeding higher in the spiritual quest. It was in this sphere of the higher spiritual life that Jesus had something new to give. It was not merely new, it was also startling to the people who heard him. 'They were astonished at his doctrine', records the New Testament in several places.

BAPTISM OF JESUS

The appearance of John the Baptist on the horizon was the first surprise to the people. John was an ascetic and lived a celibate life. Asceticism and celibacy were foreign to the

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Semitic tradition. John burst upon the people's attention with the startling proclamation, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. The people were familiar with the notion of a kingdom of heaven. So there was nothing startling in that ; it was a far-away thing in time and space, and they could afford to wait till death and take things leisurely till then. But John proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was *at hand* ; not far away, but *here, now*. To a people suffering from Roman oppression, this was a happy announcement ; and they naturally interpreted it in political terms. He asked the people to prepare themselves to enter into it by inner purification through sincere repentance ; and he instituted a symbolic purification through baptism in the Jordan river.

Hundreds of people flocked to John to be baptized ; a few among them who were wicked at heart, he sent away hurling after them words of rebuke and threat. He exhorted the baptized to practise charity, justice, mercy, and honesty. The crowds took John to be the promised Messiah ; but he divined their thoughts and proclaimed in clear language: 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repent-

ance ; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire' (Matthew, III. 11).

Presently Jesus, who was still an unknown figure, went to him to be baptized by him. John eyed Jesus for a minute and then remonstrated, saying that he was not fit to baptize him, but that he had need to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus replied: 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness' (*ibid.*, III. 15). John baptized him, and, coming out of the water, Jesus had his first recorded spiritual experience ; and a voice from heaven proclaimed: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (*ibid.*, III. 17).

Jesus now began his mission. John was arrested and beheaded shortly after for the fault of being far ahead of his time. Immediately after baptism, Jesus retired to the silence of the mountains near by and passed through a tense inner struggle and, coming out victorious over the 'temptation', moved to the coast of the lake of Galilee to enter into the period of his public ministry.

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HIS SPIRITUAL MISSION

The first act of this ministry was the gathering of his disciples ; there is something very fascinating in this process, in the call he sends forth and the response he receives ; its simplicity and directness is charming. Finding Peter and his brother Andrew, both fishermen, casting their nets into the sea, Jesus went up to them and summoned: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him' (*ibid.*, IV. 19-20). Two other fishermen, James and John, he similarly gathered, and later Matthew, the customs clerk, and the rest of the twelve.

This is something we understand well in India: the tremendous magnetism of a spiritual teacher who finds and gathers round him those who are to be his spiritual intimates and the bearers of his message, the pure ones who have the capacity to share his inmost thoughts and relieve his loneliness. Buddha, after his illumination, went to Vārāṇasī to gather his five disciples. We are reminded, in this connection, of the words which Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) spoke at the close of the period of his *sādhana*, describing

the longing of his heart for his disciples: 'A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companion, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning, the devotees began to arrive' (Swami Nikhilananda, *Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India*, p. 38).

Jesus now began to move about with his disciples preaching the kingdom of heaven in the synagogues, and performing various miracles of healing. But the congregations of the synagogues could not understand or appreciate him. They were certainly looking for the advent of a heavenly kingdom ; but it was one largely political in complexion, tribal in scope, and intended to free the Jews from the hated Romans. One who claimed to be the promised Messiah had to fulfil this national demand. Jesus did claim to be the Messiah in direct and indirect references, but made only vague mystical references to the kingdom. He merely incurred the displeasure of the orthodox. But the masses followed him, fascinated by his personality and the miracles he wrought. Although he delivered his message in the famous 'Sermon

on the Mount' to his disciples alone, it has provided spiritual nourishment to vast masses of mankind these nineteen hundred years.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The 'Sermon on the Mount' expounds moral and spiritual ideas which are universal ; they do not breathe the air of Jewish exclusiveness. They are the G.C.M. of the inner life of spirit, and will not sound strange to any spiritual seeker nourished on the ideas of the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. But it sounded strange to the ears of those who listened. There was newness in them, and there was a ring of authority in their utterance. It was not an authority deriving from any sacerdotal office ; it took its force from inner realization. The New Testament has put it pithily: 'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' (Matthew, VII. 28-29).

The Sermon was a tremendous departure from the accepted ideas of the time ; it was a mighty attempt to release the life of the spirit from the shackles of tribal morality and

dogmatic religion. Old familiar words were used, but they were given new meanings ; old moral codes were invoked, but they received an inward content and direction ; old familiar hopes were mentioned, only to be filled with new spiritual meanings. And all these innovations had been prefaced with a 'but *I* say unto you', conveying a sense of authority. It was no wonder that the people were astonished at his doctrine.

There is a continuity from John to Jesus. John preached baptism unto repentance with a view to preparing man for the kingdom of heaven ; and Jesus took up this idea, in spite of its background of Jewish dogma, for, as he expressed it, he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law and the prophets. Repentance is based on the Jewish dogma of original sin ; but whatever be the dogma behind it, it has its significance for spiritual life, in so far as it initiates the inner cleansing process ; it leads to humility and receptivity of heart. As a moral act, it steels the mind against further evil doings. Without this resolve, no spiritual life is possible. But repentance is not everything ; there are further steps to be taken before we can achieve the kingdom of heaven

which, though near at hand, is yet far. It was these further steps that Jesus elucidated in his impressive Sermon.

Jesus opened the Sermon with a reference to repentance and its fruit: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven' (*ibid.*, V. 3).

But he struck a new note thereafter ; that not only the kingdom of heaven is at hand, but that it is *within* us—not outside ; and that we can realize it. This was a revolutionary conception that spiritual realization was to be had there and then, in this very life, not after death. And so he added: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God' (*ibid.*, V. 8).

Thus purity of heart is the one condition for spiritual realization. It follows that everything else—acts of piety, morality, and social service—is but the means to attain this purity. This was entirely new language for his listeners—that we can realize God, become intimate with Him, and be blessed in this very life. *And here we have his unique message, the message of a spiritual religion of inward realization.* We are reminded of the ringing proclamation of the Upaniṣads:

‘*Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyah*’—The Self, O dear, must be realized (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II. 4.5); ‘*Tam akraṭuḥ paśyati vīta-śoko dhātu-prasādāt mahimānam ātmanah*’—He who is humble and pure realizes the glory of the Ātman, and becomes free from grief (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II. 20).

The farthest that Judaism had gone till then was to make man hear the voice of God ; the idea of *seeing* God was thus an innovation which, with all its corollaries, was the main point of departure from the prevailing tribal god and faith. These corollaries are set forth in the succeeding passages dealing with the inwardness of morals, rituals, and pietistic acts, indicating the clear departure from the old, in the emphatic words in refrain: ‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time. . . . But I say unto you.’ The moral and ethical demands of a spiritual religion are far more exacting than those of a socio-political faith ; hence he said: ‘That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew, V. 20).

The departure became complete when he

exhorted his listeners to strive for perfection: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (*ibid.*, V. 48).

This exhortation sounds strangely Vedāntic in significance. He then wound up the Sermon with a ringing statement on the need for the practice of the teaching, and not merely the hearing of it or believing in its truth, and illustrated the nature of wisdom and folly:

'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell: and great was the fall of it' (*ibid.*, VII. 24-27).

How akin this sounds to the exhortation of an earlier teacher, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in our own country: 'Those devotees who practise, in a

converging life endeavour, this teaching of mine which fulfils all righteousness and leads to immortality, endowed with faith and a godward passion, are extremely dear to me' (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, XII. 20).

Here is a refreshing statement of the scope and goal of religion. The emphasis is on *sādhana*, the *practise* of religion, with a view to attaining *anubhava*, realization. 'Religion is realization ; it is being and becoming', in the words of Swami Vivekananda ; it is character. It is not a cosy belief, but an adventure, something that sets the soul on fire, the carrying, as Jesus would say, of one's cross by oneself and not by proxy. It reminds us of Buddha's last words addressed to his dear disciple, Ānanda: 'Be a lamp unto yourself, O Ānanda ; depend not on any external refuge ; work out your emancipation with diligence.'

Perfection is a complete transformation of character through the realization of the kingdom of heaven which is within. *It is the fruit of lived religion*. This conception frees religion from all elements that are magical and misty, materialistic and primitive. The strength that comes to a life through the

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realization of the ever-present Ātman within is something palpable. It is the rock-bottom of experience, which ensures steadiness of wisdom and character ; it is the *sthitaprajña*, the life of steady wisdom, of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

THE HEALING TOUCH OF JESUS

With the 'Sermon on the Mount' closes, once for all, the chapter of obscurity in the life of Jesus. Multitudes thronged round him, many of them victims of serious bodily and mental ailments, some of whom were endowed with deep faith in his spiritual power. They sought his blessing which was given, and they were cured. Some he touched ; some just touched the hem of his garment ; and some he just blessed saying, 'Be thou whole'. In all cases the effect was immediate. Jesus had the power within him, and he had compassion in his heart. But he did not like to exhibit this power or make it known wide. Accordingly, he exhorted the cured not to make a fuss about it. He asked them to mollify orthodoxy by making customary gifts to the synagogue in thankfulness for the healing. He gave the credit

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for all healing to the faith in the heart of the healed: 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.'

From now on, the events in his life move ever faster; and the shadow of tragedy, arising from the conflict with established religious authority, becomes darker and darker, until it reaches its final act in the crucifixion. But within this brief period of about two and a half years, we are introduced to events and episodes and personalities which have the touch of the immortal about them. They form the bright and cheerful scenes of an otherwise gloomy drama. We find Jesus moving from place to place, a picture of alertness and vigour, compassion and humanity, humour and laughter. We watch him in his dealings with the rich and the poor, the good and the sinful, the lowly and the lost; we are amazed at the poise, self-assurance, and versatility which he manifests in these varying situations.

MARY AND MARTHA

The touching episode of Mary and Martha of Bethany has entered into world literature.

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The two sisters were deeply devoted to Jesus. The death of their brother Lazarus made them grief-stricken. They heard that Jesus was in the neighbourhood. Martha went out to call Jesus. She expressed her faith in his divinity, and then rushed home to call her sister, Mary, saying, 'The Master is come and called for thee' (John, XI. 28).

Both then rushed out to welcome the Master. Mary fell at his feet weeping ; Jesus was moved: 'When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled. . . . Jesus wept' (*ibid.*, XI. 33, 35).

He then went up to the grave of Lazarus and, after deeply communing with God for a moment, commanded Lazarus to come forth. And forthwith he rose alive.

In another touching scene, we find the same Mary doing a loving service to Jesus at Bethany, just before his last supper.

She brought an alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it on the head of Jesus, as he sat at his meal. When a disciple protested at the waste and said that it could

better have been utilized to help the poor, Jesus made the significant and ominous remark: 'Why trouble ye the woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her' (Matthew, XXVI. 10-13).

There was also a third occasion when the two sisters met Jesus ; it is a story full of mystical import. They received Jesus into their house. Mary was sitting at his feet and hearing his inspiring words ; whereas Martha was busy in the kitchen. She complained to Jesus about her sister Mary: 'Lord dost thou not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful ; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her' (Luke, X. 40-42).

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DIVINE LIFE DEMANDS TOTAL RENUNCIATION

During his wanderings in Judea, Jesus was approached by a certain man who knelt before him and, addressing him 'Good Master', asked him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus reprimanded him for calling him good, saying that none except God deserved the epithet, and asked him to keep the ten moral commandments. The man replied that these he had been keeping from his youth ; he would like to know what else he should do.

'Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

'And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions' (Mark, X. 21-22).

Seeing him thus go away, Jesus made the famous remark that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

This episode illustrates the distance that

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separates mere social ethics from divine life, and proclaims total renunciation as the watchword of the latter. The young man of the story went away grieving ; but the story itself has inspired many a young man and woman of later generations to fulfil to the letter the demands of Jesus and scale the heights of holiness and blessedness.

THE COMPASSIONATE JESUS

The compassion of a divine incarnation and his power to redeem shine remarkably through two anecdotes, which also reveal the way purity views sin.

A Pharisee, Simon by name, invited Jesus for a meal one day ; Jesus accepted and sat down to eat. A woman in the city, who was a sinner, hearing that Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee, brought an alabaster box of ointment and washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair kissed them and anointed them with the ointment.

Seeing this the Pharisee was angry that Jesus should have allowed a sinner to do all this. Jesus, addressing Simon, said: 'There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the

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other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace' (Luke, VII. 41-50).

Jesus was teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. The scribes and Pharisees brought

before Jesus a woman taken in adultery and, announcing that, according to Mosaic law, she had to be stoned, asked him for his opinion, just to entangle him unawares. The Gospels give a fine picture of Jesus stooping down and writing on the ground with his finger, as if he did not hear them. But when they pestered him, he lifted up his head and, turning to them, declared: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more' (John, VIII. 7-11).

The power behind the words 'Thy sins are forgiven' is the power of God working through an incarnation only; it is beyond the reach even of saints. This divine power

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working through Jesus is specially revealed in his famous declaration: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew, XI. 28-30).

We are reminded of an identical promise given by an earlier incarnation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa: 'Renounce all your duties and take refuge in me alone ; I shall redeem you from all sins ; grieve not' (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, XVIII. 66).

JESUS' TEACHINGS

Trials and tribulations began to confront Jesus. Various attempts were made by the priests to entangle him in some remark of treason or blasphemy. But his intelligence and ready wit baffled their attempts. A group of priests brought a Roman coin and asked him whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not ; on his asking whose image and superscription the coin bore, the priests answered that it was of Caesar. Then he answered, to the amazement of the clever priests: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the

things which are Caesar's ; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew, XXII. 21).

Then a lawyer came forward to entangle him with a clever question, as to what constituted the great commandment in the law ; *and the world got in the answer of Jesus a compressed statement of spirituality and social ethics.*

'Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (*ibid.*, XXII. 37-40).

This great enunciation gave rise to a very practical question: Who is my neighbour? In answering it, through the famous parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus contrasted the universality of the spirit and temper of spiritual ethics with the narrow and parochial temper of creedal and sectarian morals.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves ; they stripped him of his raiment, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. A

priest and a Levite chanced to pass that way ; seeing the helpless man, they, instead of going to his help, went away by the opposite side of the road.

‘But a certain Samaritan,’ Jesus continued, ‘as he journeyed, came where he was ; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him ; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again. I will repay thee’ (Luke, X. 33-35).

After narrating this, Jesus asked his questioner as to who really behaved as neighbour to the one that fell among the thieves. ‘And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise’ (*ibid.*, X. 37).

In between the harassments of the priests, Jesus did a lot of teaching: first to the simple masses and then to his close disciples. To the former he spoke in parables, making thereby difficult subjects easy to comprehend.

Each one of these parables, like the parable of the good Samaritan, elucidates one or other aspect of his central theme, the life of godliness. Some of them, like the parable of the Ten Virgins, are full of mystical significance. He spoke to the disciples about the service of man, the poor, the sick, the homeless, the naked, and the forlorn, in the spirit of the worship of God.

‘Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’ (Matthew, XXV. 40).

He charged the disciples to go forth and preach his gospel among the people, and he prescribed a way of life and behaviour for the preachers, which breathes the spirit of renunciation, dependence on God, non-possession, peacefulness, and humility, echoing the exhortation of Buddha to his disciples. It is a tragedy of history that subsequent Christian preachers, unlike the Buddhists, have largely strayed from the strait and narrow path shown by their great Master.

To his chosen disciples, Jesus gave his spiritual teachings directly and without the aid of parables. He revealed to them, a few

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days before his death, his true personality as the Christ, the anointed One, and charged them not to tell it to anyone else till the day of resurrection: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . . . Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works' (John, XIV. 6-10).

He asked all those who would choose to follow him to be prepared to deny themselves and take up their crosses; it was not a cosy and comfortable religion that he offered but a heroic path of adventure, a life of total renunciation in the love of God: 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profitted, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matthew, XVI. 25-26).

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THE BETRAYAL AND THE TRIAL

The preachings, movements, and miracles of Jesus had stirred up by now a good deal of hostility from the priests, who now began to take steps to apprehend him and bring him before the law. They picked up stray bits of remarks made by Jesus and built up a case for blasphemy against the faith. The tragedy deepened with the last supper in the company of all his disciples, when Jesus made the ominous remark that one of his disciples would betray him and hinted at Judas. When Peter protested against it, he made the still more ominous remark that even Peter would deny him thrice before the next morning. Feeling the end near, and with a heavy heart, Jesus moved to Gethsemane and sat down to pray, asking Peter and two of his other disciples to watch and pray in the meantime. But Peter fell asleep, and Jesus, annoyed, rebuked him: 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (*ibid.*, XXVI. 40-41).

This happened three times ; but the third time he allowed them to sleep and, after

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prayer, waited for the betrayal by Judas, who had been bribed by the priests to do so with thirty pieces of silver. Judas came up soon after with the priests and soldiers, and betrayed Jesus to them through a kiss of the Master's hand for identification, and the soldiers took Jesus into custody. Peter, in defence, cut off the ear of a soldier with his sword. Jesus reproved him saying: 'Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword' (*ibid.*, XXVI. 52).

Henceforth, it was mounting pathos to the end. Jesus was taken to the high priest, Caiaphas; all the disciples deserted him. Peter, however, attended the trial from a distance, and during the trial he denied thrice, before passers-by who asked, that he had anything to do with Jesus. The operations of an inexorable fate left Peter sad and weeping. The priests decided, though without much evidence, that Jesus was guilty, and they hauled him up before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate asked Jesus whether he took himself to be the king of the Jews. Jesus remained silent, which amazed Pilate. Pilate found

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Jesus was not guilty, but the priests demanded his crucifixion amid tumultuous scenes. Pilate, finding no other way, yielded to their demand and, washing his hands with some water symbolically, said that he was innocent of the blood of Jesus, whom he referred to as a just man. The people assembled there cried out that they were willing to take his blood on themselves and on their descendants. What a tragic statement, and what tragic consequences have followed therefrom ever since!

THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE RESURRECTION

The doleful procession, with Jesus adorned with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns and carrying his heavy cross, proceeded to Golgotha. He was attended by soldiers who jeeringly hailed him king of the Jews and spat upon and smote him; then they removed the scarlet robe and put his own raiment upon him and nailed him on the cross on the mount of Calvary between two thieves similarly crucified. They placed over his head a taunting signboard: This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

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After hours of intense agony, Jesus cried with a loud voice: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew, XXVII. 46), and then in an appealing voice: 'Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do' (Luke, XXIII. 34).

It was a Friday. The mother of Jesus was a witness of this pathetic scene from a distance ; with her was her sister and Mary Magdalene and John. Before he finally expired, Jesus pointed to his mother and asked John to treat her as his own mother, and asked her to treat him as her own son. After this expression of tenderness, Jesus bent his head and expired, after nine hours of intense torture.

The tragedy was complete. Forsaken by the world, for whose redemption he had come, Jesus ended his earthly career when he was hardly thirty-three. But his spirit triumphed in the resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea, a silent but influential devotee, took his body for burial with the permission of the Roman governor. He laid the body in a new tomb and, placing a heavy stone over it, departed. The two Marys, however, remained near the sepulchre. After three

days, on Monday, they had a shaking spiritual experience; and they learnt about the resurrection of Jesus through the angels. They rushed to convey the news to the disciples at Galilee in fear and joy. On the way, the radiant form of Jesus appeared before them, and they fell at his feet and worshipped him. Directed by him, they informed the disciples of the glad tidings, and Jesus appeared to all of them on a hill in Galilee, blessed them, spoke to them, commanding them to teach the gospel to all the world and, before disappearing, assured them that he would be with them always unto the end of the world.

In this moving story of the resurrection, there is one touching episode relating to one of the disciples, Thomas, who was absent at that time. When they related the vision to him, he refused to believe them until he had a direct experience. Exactly eight days after, Jesus again revealed himself to all of them, including Thomas, and invoked his peace on them. Calling to Thomas, Jesus asked him to feel his wounds with his fingers, which he did in amazement and sorrow and joy. Jesus admonished him to believe and not be faithless,

and added a significant remark: 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed' (John, XX. 29).

As a sequel to the above episode, the expression 'doubting Thomas' passed into the world's vocabulary of banter.

It is interesting for us to recall the tradition that our country first heard the message of Jesus from this direct disciple of his, and a group of Christians of our Kerala State trace their spiritual descent from him.

These are, then, some of the salient features of the life and teachings of this arresting personality, whom the Hindus spontaneously recognize as a divine incarnation. As we have seen, his life is full of sweetness and tenderness, tragedy and pathos ; it is spiritually inspiring. To us in India, however, the end is just a tragedy, bereft of any special spiritual beauty. It is the life that is, in our view, spiritually beautiful and elevating. The deaths of our own spiritual heroes, Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, were near tragic ; but we did not build our religion on them. India treats the manner of their deaths most casually, while she seeks

to build her religion on their lives and teachings.

It is no wonder that ordinary people do not understand the depths of a divine incarnation's personality; they can at best appreciate his miracles, while missing his character. Too much insistence on these miracles converts religion into a sort of magic, and degrades the content of the life-giving message to cheapness. All great teachers, including Jesus, therefore, discountenanced them. The difficulty of recognizing an incarnation has been well expressed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*; only a few can understand him; the rest will deride him or just ignore him: *Avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣīm tanumāśritam; param bhāvamajānanto mama bhūtamahēṣvaram*—'Fools deride me when invested with a human body, not being able to grasp my transcendent nature as the supreme Lord of all beings' (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, IX. 11).

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus is the measure of the intolerance and folly of the contemporary society. There is pathos in the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto

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thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Matthew, XXIII. 37).

Persecution is the outcome of intolerance, which is a social malady arising out of the limitations of its *Weltanschauung*. India was, and is, fortunately free from this malady, thanks to its generous spiritual outlook which finds beautiful elucidation in several of our sacred books: 'Knowers of Truth declare that it is the same non-dual Reality that is spoken of as Brahman (Absolute) by the philosophers, as Ātman (Self) by the mystics, and as Īśvara (God) by the devotees'—*Vadanti tat tattva-vidah tattvaṁ yat jñānam advayam; Brahmeti Paramātmetye Bhagavān iti śabdyate* (*Bhāgavata*, I. 2.11).

THE NEW MOVEMENT

To teach the world faster than it can learn is to court disaster, as Bertrand Russell has put it. The teachings of Jesus relating to the kingdom of God and the resurrection were just incomprehensible to most of his hearers. There is the typical instance of the Pharisees demanding Jesus to state when the kingdom

of God should come. Jesus answered: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke, XVII. 20-21). This statement that the kingdom of God is within us can hardly be squared with the dogma of the innate vileness of human nature. How beautifully have the Upaniṣads expressed the above sentiment of Jesus:

*Na sandrṣe tiṣṭhati rūpamasya,
na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam ;
Hṛdā manīṣā manasābhiklipto
ya etadviduramṛtāste bhavanti—*

The form of the Self is not an object
of vision ;
No one can behold Him with the
fleshy eye ;
One can know Him when, by constant
meditation

And free from doubt,
He is revealed by the heart.
Those who know thus become immortal.

(Kāṭha Upaniṣad, VI. 9)

The crucifixion was a tragedy of the first magnitude ; but a greater tragedy was

the way it was handled. Woven into the prevailing dogmas, it slowly became central to the new movement. The man of joy, which Jesus undoubtedly was in real life, became transformed into the man of sorrows, in dogma. We may find a forbidding austerity in John the Baptist ; but the Son of Man, as he himself has said, came eating and drinking, trailing clouds of humour and laughter. By transforming him into a man of sorrow, dogma has helped to turn his religion into grim and cheerless aspects, with serious consequences for the emotional life of its followers. Only a few great saints have been able to penetrate through this spiritual heaviness. 'A sad nun is a bad nun', wrote St. Theresa ; and she exclaimed: 'O Lord, save us from sullen saints!'

The dogma of one man's sin affecting all humanity gave rise to its logical corollary of the dogma of one man's blood washing away the sins of all ; such an approach led inevitably to a chain reaction of such tragedies involving the lives of Stephen and Joseph, Peter and Paul, immediately after, and of countless other good and noble and innocent souls thereafter. The theory that the blood of

the martyr is the seed of the Church developed out of this dogma; and, in place of calm reason and generous love, frenzy, fanaticism, intolerance, and bigotry gripped the propagation of the life-giving message of Jesus down the centuries, destroying as many lives as it undoubtedly helped to build, with groups interchanging places as persecutor and victim.

It is interesting to speculate how the message would have spread, like a little leaven leavening the whole bread, from one good soul to another in comparative peace and goodwill, if the divine life and sublime teachings of Jesus had found the central place, instead of the popular and striking dogmas of 'the scapegoat' and 'the atonement', physical resurrection and the second advent, earthly kingdom, and the imminence of the Day of Judgement. These dogmas were purely tribal in their scope, including the prevalent concept of the monotheistic god. They were the nurseries of contemporary Jewish patriotism and national cohesion, sectarian intolerance and political frenzy.

This fettering, in cast-iron dogmas, of the universal message of Jesus—the ideas of the indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal

ethics, and spiritual realization—caused the distortion of its universality through bigotry and intolerance, and the dilution of its peace and love content with hatred, violence, and war.

Judaism represents an impressive human movement of ethical fervour and faith in the divine ; but its scope was severely limited to the Jewish community which, in response to the challenge of a hostile world, had tightened its moods and ways, life and laws. The radiant faith in a living God and the laws and commandments, which nursed that faith in the hearts of its people, made it the only steady spiritual island in the sea of the moral and religious confusions of the Roman world. As such, it had justification for its faith in its world mission ; it was also fitted to be the nursery of the new message of John and Jesus, which had brought with it the vision, the energy, and the character to translate that faith into reality. The only impression that the Gospels warrant us to carry is that Jesus meant his movement to be at first a deepening and, eventually, a broadening of his people's heritage. He took in much before he gave out in ample measure ; he came to fulfil

and not to destroy 'the law and the prophets'. Here was an attempt at a lofty spiritual synthesis by an equally lofty spiritual character. But history records the tragedy of its failure ; the word 'fulfil' was slowly interpreted, not in its spiritual sense as meant by Jesus, but in its prevailing socio-political significance ; and this not merely by the Jews, but also by the new movement, which led to the dissatisfaction of Jews against the movement with its tragic consequences, on the one hand, and the strait-jacketing of the soaring spirit of the new movement itself in the 'letter' of the dogmas of the old faith, on the other.

The new movement thus began as an uneasy combination of the universal and the tribal, the spiritual and the dogmatic, the peaceful and the passionate. The latter elements in their original context, which was consciously parochial and limited, were constructive and creative ; but in their new context of the universal, they became largely negative and destructive. The former elements, however, became the source of the high spiritual, mystical, and humanitarian temper of the new movement. The history of Chris-

tianity, in its twin records of persecution, violence, and war, on the one side, and lofty mysticism, moral passion, and humanitarianism on the other, bears the impress of this inner division, which also explains its recurrent conflicts with science. A successful synthesis needs the guidance of an adequate *Weltanschauung*, which was not available at the time. *The successful synthesis of thought elements, each one of which is vital and powerful, flowing as they do from human experience at various levels—the ethical passion of Judaism, the mystical and humanitarian fervour of Christianity, and the rational temper of science—calls for the guidance of a philosophy or world-view such as that of the Vedānta, which is not afraid of any aspect of experience, but seeks truth in all of them with zestful detachment and devotion.*

It is against this background that we view with hope the future of Indian Christianity. Under the guidance of the philosophy of Vedānta, the Christian message in India can achieve that synthesis by which it will flow as an entirely constructive force with its universal elements functioning free in the spirit of the universal, and its dogmatic

elements digested and retained to accord with the spirit of the universal and human.

Our people have the genius, inherent and active, to appreciate a truly spiritual message ; our minds are hospitable to spiritual ideas, however new or startling they may be. *The message of Jesus and his life divine have found their lodgement in the Indian soul, through the irresistible appeal of their beauty and charm.* It is our earnest hope that the Christian message passing through Indian experience will bear in its look a new charm and force of tolerance and gentleness, peace and fellowship, capturing thus the Master's spirit *in full*.

The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of spiritual redemption. That gospel has a meaning only when we feel the bondage of worldliness irksome and heavy, and seek for freedom in the freedom of God. There is the assurance given by the Master that we shall then get what we seek. To ask and seek and knock is our share, and to give and reveal and open is the Lord's. That is the mood and attitude in which we adore Christ. That is the Hindu way of acceptance and assimilation.

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