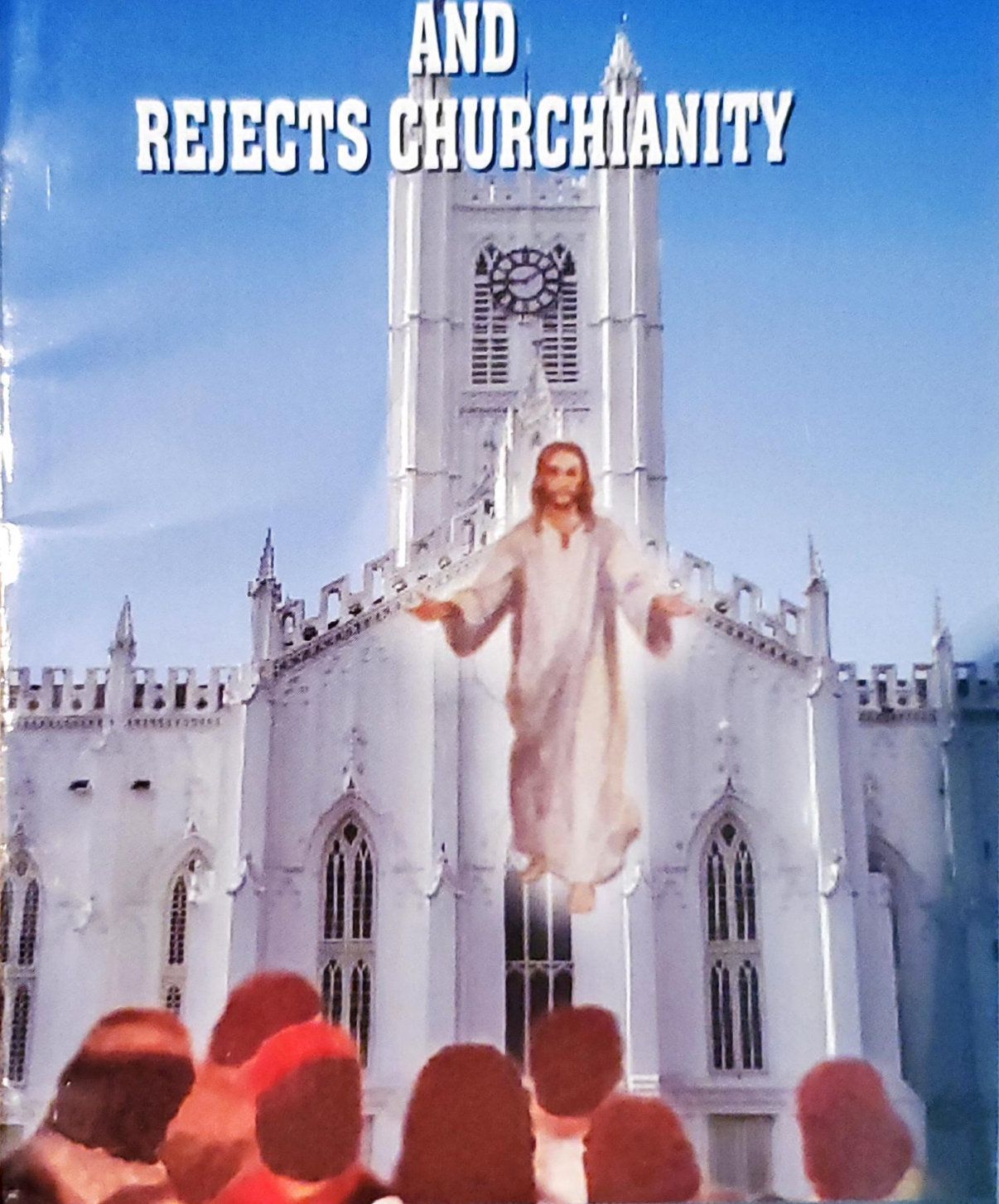


WHY A HINDU ACCEPTS CHRIST AND REJECTS CHURCHIANITY



SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

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FOREWARD*

Vedanta Keshori Swami Vivekananda entrusted the responsibility, of keeping the flags—sign of conquering the Occident—fluttering on a sublime height, to his dear brother disciple Swami Abhedananda, in far away America. During early twentieth century he returned to his motherland permanently and exerted himself to execute commandments ordained by Sri Ramakrishna. After Swamiji left earthly abode, duties regarding the West grew in magnitude and it was left to Swami Abhedananda to blow the trumpet call of the true principles of traditional religion and its eternal ideals—through America in particular and entire universe in general. The religious fanaticism of Christians of the West were shattered by his unique and courageous fight and the planned, selfish war of calumny against the Oriental people, were reduced to a major extent. To achieve this difficult aim, one of the noblest sons of Mother India, the

*This 'Foreward' is translated from Bengali by Prof. Samir Basu, keeping the quotations as they were.

disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and blessed son of Sri Sarada Devi—Goddess of learning incarnate—Swami Abhedananda used this weapon—the lecture included in the present treatise—from his armoury, in the ensuing spiritual warfare.

With his irrefutable logic, Swami Abhedananda explained rationally that religion practised by the church is totally different from the pious and kind lessons preached by Jesus. True principles of Christianity were not confined within the rigid barriers of Theology but it was a steady flow of human feelings and emotions—a religion without a cleric—a religion based on amalgamation of individual soul with the universal spirit. On the other hand, religion practised in the church is based on a particular book; the religion led by priests and limited within the confines of rituals and ceremonies. With clarion call he uttered,—“The creed of the church would have vanished from the world if swords were not drawn and innocent blood were not shed in the name of religion.” (C.W. 2, pp. 210).

On the other hand, he continued,—“Shall we wonder, then, if the humane, kind, gentle, peace-loving hearts of the Hindus, that are ever ready to send forth blessings, goodwill, benediction and a current of love toward humanity, nay, toward all living creatures, reject Churchianity?” (C.W. 2, p. 211). He added : “The church dogmas make the love of God for humanity limited by time, place and nationality. The love of God for humanity must not be limited by such narrow considerations. God loves all humanity; his love shines equally upon all living creatures like the light of the sun.” (C.W. 2, p. 214).

In course of his speech, Swami Abhedananda remarked : “The religion of Christ was a religion of love, renunciation and self-control; it was a religion of Godconsciousness. As these are the highest ideals among the Hindus, they accept Christ and His true religion in so far as it is one with their ideals.” (C.W. 2, p. 219).

In conclusion, Swami Abhedananda rightly remarked : “The Hindu is not satisfied merely to accept Christ in theory, but he

strives hard to live the life which Jesus lived, to lead a life of renunciation, of self-control and love to all." (C.W. 2, p. 219).

SWAMI PARAMATMANANDA

Ramakrishna Vedanta Math

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WHY A HINDU ACCEPTS CHRIST AND REJECTS CHURCHIANITY

A Hindu distinguishes the religion of churches from the religion of Jesus the Christ. Speaking from the Hindu standpoint the religion which the churches uphold and preach to-day, which has been built around the personality of Jesus the Christ, and which is popularly known as Christianity, should be called 'Churchianity', in contradistinction to that pure religion of the heart which was taught by Jesus the Christ and practised by his disciples. The religion of Christ or true Christianity had no dogma, no creed, no system, no theology. It was a religion of the heart, a religion without any ceremonial, without ritual, without priestcraft; it was not based upon any book, but upon the feelings of the heart,

upon direct communion of individual soul with the heavenly Father. On the contrary, the religion of the church is based upon a book, believes in dogmas, professes a creed, has an organized system for preaching it, is backed up by theologies, performs rituals, practises ceremonials, and obeys the commands of a host of priests.

The popular history of Churchianity begins from 325 years after Christ, the 20th year of the reign of Constantine the Great, when the famous Council was convened at the City of Nicea. Those who have read the life of this august Roman Emperor will remember how remarkable was the character of this so-called pious supporter of the church dogmas. He put to death his own son and his wife Fausta on groundless suspicion, cut off his brother-in-law Licinius and the unoffending son of Licinius and massacred everyone of his rivals.

Nevertheless the Greek church has canonized him, and adores the memory of St. Constantine.

It was Constantine the Great who issued a decree in 321 A.D., for the general observance of Sunday, instead of the Jewish Sabbath. He hated the Jews and everything connected with the Jews and said : "This day shall be regarded as a special occasion of prayer, because it is the Sun's day, the day of our Lord". Since that time, the church has accepted that decree, ignoring the fact that this was the day for worship of the sun among the pagans.

It was Constantine the Great who decided what should be the creed of the church and commanded the assembled bishops to receive the decrees of the Council of Nicea as the dictates of the Holy Spirit. Since that time the church has given authenticity to that creed, which is repeated almost every Sunday in all

the orthodox churches in Christendom.

The horrifying accounts of fraud, political wire-pulling, theological jugglery, ecclesiastical scandal-mongery, passions breaking forth into curses and anathemas, bloody massacres and inhuman assassinations in the ecumenical councils, show that these were the principal instruments in the building up of the creed of Churchianity. Readers of ecclesiastical history will remember that in one of the disputes following the great Council of Nicea, maidens were insulted and scourged, the holy temple was profaned, books were thrown into flames, and the church and baptistry were burned and monks were trodden under foot. Such were the deeds of the pious bishops and founders of Churchianity.

In the Council of Ephesus, which was held in 431 A.D., monks and bishops screamed : "Whoso speaks of two natures is a Nestorius, and let him be cut

asunder." A bishop was kicked to death by another bishop in course of their arguments, and 137 corpses were left in a church to attest the convincing reasons by which the most ruffianly side proved its orthodoxy.

Such were the assemblies of saints who formed the pillars of the structure of Churchianity. We can easily imagine the nature of the guiding spirit of those councils which established the creed of the church. From the beginning of the history of churches, down to the present day, freedom of thought and freedom of speech, which are the most essential characteristics of true religion, have been suppressed; and fanaticism, bigotry, curses, anathema, religious persecution, tortures of inquisition and diabolical crimes have been committed in the name of religion. Hatred, cruelty and fighting have reigned in the place of love, mercy, kindness, peace and good-will. The creed

of the church would have vanished from the world if swords were not drawn and innocent blood were not shed in the name of religion. The deeds of Churchianity are written indelibly upon the pages of the religious history of the world. Shall we wonder, then, if the humane, kind, gentle, peace-loving hearts of the Hindus, that are ever ready to send forth blessings, goodwill, benediction and a current of love toward humanity, nay, toward all living creatures, reject Churchianity? Shall we wonder that the Hindus, who recognize Divinity in the souls of all, should refuse to accept a system which was founded upon the barren soil of dogmas, fertilized with the vital forces squeezed out of the hearts of innocent humanity, and nourished by the blood of martyrs?

By a strange irony of fate, the Hindu sees to-day that the followers of Churchianity, ignoring its past history,

have come over to India to tell the so-called 'heathen' how Churchianity has civilized the world, how it has brought peace on earth, and how it has saved the souls of sinners. But a Hindu is a lover of Truth and Freedom. Freedom of thought and freedom of speech are his guiding stars. From ancient times, search after Truth and unswerving love for Truth have forced the minds of the Hindus to make rational investigation into matters that have been presented to them. It is very difficult to persuade a Hindu to blindly believe in anything. Before he accepts a dogma as truth he must trace its source and weigh all the arguments, pro and con, and then compare it with the highest ideals that are known in his own country. Stimulated by this natural tendency and by his love of truth, when a Hindu studies the facts upon which Churchianity is founded, he first reads the Bible as critically as possible, applies

logic and reason at every step, and then he looks into all the available writings of those Western scholars and critics who have made impartial examination of the Christian scriptures from the standpoint of historical researches.

I know many Hindus who read Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* before they opened a page of the Bible. A Hindu knows that there has been a great dispute in the present century among Western scholars regarding the historical personality of Jesus of Nazareth, as it is described in the Synoptic Gospels. Therefore he doubts the historical side of the personality of Jesus of the Gospels. He also knows that the researches of the higher critics of the Bible have shown that the descriptions of the canonical Gospels regarding the events connected with the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, do not harmonize with the facts of history which can be gathered from other sources.

A missionary preaches in India that the New Testament is the revealed scripture, or word of God. The educated Hindus, however, know that Jesus did not leave any writings of his own, nor did any of his direct disciples write any of the Gospels which were accepted by the church as the infallible and revealed word of God. They are also familiar with the fact that there are absolutely no contemporary records or accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus, either in the Bible itself or outside of it; and that the earliest of the writings, in the order of their composition, were the genuine epistles of Paul. Out of the fourteen epistles attributed to Paul, four only are held to be authentic; they are these, Epistle to the Romans, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Galatians.

Again, Paul never saw Jesus the Christ except once in a vision, and only once

did he quote the language of Jesus—a single phrase in connection with a reference to the commemoration of the last supper: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” It is admitted by many of the orthodox ministers of churches that Paul introduced many of the doctrines and dogmas which were afterwards accepted by Churchianity. It is a well-known fact that Paul did not preach the religion of Christ; if he did, he could not have boasted that he withstood Peter at Antioch to his very face. To the followers of Churchianity who preach to the Hindus that the New Testament is the revealed word of God, the Hindu asks: “If God intended to reveal His word, why did he inspire so many different men to write the history of one transaction, and why is it that almost all of these writings, except four, were afterwards rejected by human beings as fraudulent and incorrect?”

We do not hear about the four canonical Gospels until the time of Irenius, Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, who lived in 178-200 A.D. He was the real founder of the Church Canon. It was Irenius who first mentioned four Gospels. His arguments for accepting four Gospels were very remarkable, though not convincing. He says : "It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than four. For, since there are four quarters of the earth, four elements, four seasons and four cardinal winds, the church ought to have four pillars; for this reason there should be four Gospels." How clever was the argument of this noted bishop!

Moreover, there are so many inconsistencies, discrepancies and errors in the Gospels, that no critical student among the Hindus could say that they are the infallible and revealed word of God. As the church upholds this theory,

and preaches the infallibility of this book, the Hindus reject it as a dogma of the church.

When the Hindus read the Apostles' Creed or the 'Twelve Articles of Faith' which were maintained and amplified in the Nicene creed, which formed the main body of the Reformation Theology, and which eventually developed into the Thirty-nine Articles of the Episcopal creed, they find there a set of dogmas which are neither supported by science nor by philosophy, nor do they appeal to reason. They must be accepted whether they appeal to reason or not. But a Hindu's mind is not ready to accept any of these articles of faith as true unless it is based upon sound reasoning and supported by science or philosophy. A Hindu says that while God has given us reason, understanding and intellect, and freedom to use them, we should be acting against His wish if we accepted anything

blindly upon the authority of anybody's statement. We must question, we must test every claim in the crucible of logic upon the fire of right reasoning. Therefore, a Hindu says, before we accept any of the articles of faith, we must examine them.

The first article of the creed is a great stumbling-block to a Hindu, because it is backed by the story of creation. The Genesis account of creation of the world in six days out of nothing by an extra-cosmic being seems absurd and childish to a Hindu, because he has been brought up with a belief in the doctrine of evolution; that the world is the result of a gradual evolution. The Hindu mind cannot believe that this world was created 6,000 years ago, and that this earth came into existence before the sun was created. The Hindu says that the writer of such a story, whether he be divine or human, should have offered a more reasonable

explanation, that he cannot believe in a creation out of nothing. In the voluminous writings of the Hindu sages and philosophers, ancient and modern, you will search in vain for any theory of creation out of nothing or creation by any extra-cosmic being. As Churchianity believes in such a creation, and preaches it, the Hindu rejects it as an absurd dogma.

The second article of the creed is based upon a belief in Jesus the Christ as the only begotten Son of God. This article offers nothing new to the Hindu mind except in its exclusiveness. The doctrine of Incarnation of God or Logos (the Word), is an Indo-Aryan theory, and the Hindus believe that there have been and will yet be many such incarnations. The theory of Logos, or Word, or Son of God, travelled from India to Greece, and found expression in the writings of the early Greek philosophers, Heraclitus, Plato,

Neo-platonists, in the writings of Philo and his follower—the writer of the fourth Gospel—until it was accepted by the church as its fundamental doctrine.

Although many of the Hindus believe in the doctrine of incarnation of God in a human form, still they strongly object to the dogmatic method by which the churches preach it among the heathens. Their first objection is that if God could incarnate in one place for a certain purpose, why should He not incarnate whenever and wherever such an incarnation was needed? The church dogmas make the love of God for humanity limited by time, place and nationality. The love of God for humanity must be unlimited by such narrow considerations. God loves all humanity; His love shines equally upon all living creatures like the light of the sun. The Hindu conception of the incarnation of God is beautifully expressed in the

Bhagavad Gītā. In that Krishna says :
“Wherever irreligion prevails and true religion declines, I manifest myself in a human form to establish righteousness and to destroy evil.”

Among the incarnations of God recognized by the Hindus are Krishna, Buddha, Rama, etc. When a Hindu reads the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ, as given in the Synoptic Gospels, and compares them with the life and teachings of Krishna and Buddha, he is amazed to find the singular coincidences in every minute detail, from the immaculate conception and the rising of the star, to the resurrection and ascension to heaven. Krishna lived about 1400 years B.C., and Buddha was born in 547 B. C. Many eminent European scholars of the nineteenth century who have impartially studied Oriental religions have shown by their able articles and non-partisan criticism that the Synoptic Gospels, being

the productions of a later date, might well have drawn many of their important truths from the accounts of the lives and teachings of Krishna and Buddha in India. When the Christian missionaries first came to India, they were so astonished to find these singular coincidences in the lives and teachings of Krishna, Buddha and Christ that they satisfied their questioning minds by assuming, as Sir William Jones said: "That the devil foreseeing the advent of Christ, originated a system of religion in advance of His, and just like it." The readers of the history of symbolism know that the cross as a religious symbol had existed in India ages before Christ was born, and many centuries before it was accepted by the Christian church and monopolized by it as its own property. The Hindu mind does not believe in any monopoly in religion, therefore it rejects the claims of Churchianity.

Churchianity depicts in a dramatic way the temptation and fall of Adam from Paradise, seeking in this 'fall' to find the origin of evil and to explain the way that sin came into the world. But this account finds no acceptance from the Hindu. He looks upon it as the mythology of a primitive people, the explanation of undeveloped minds, who believes that one man who lived about 4,000 years before Christ was the parent of the whole human race, and that because he sinned, all his descendants are born sinners. The Hindus know, and have known for countless ages, that such an account of creation is irrational and unscientific. Modern researches have proved the correctness of their views, for evidences of a vast nation with highly developed civilization, existing seven or eight thousand years before Christ, have recently been discovered at Nippur. How, then, is it possible for a Hindu to accept

such a theory of the origin of sin? Millions of people lived and died before Adam was 'created.' How could his conduct affect them? The Hindu believes that all men are children of God, and that they inherit divinity as a birthright.

They say that sin means selfishness and trace its cause, not to any mythological devil, nor to a supernatural power of evil, but to man's ignorance of his divine nature, and of the fact that God dwells in every individual soul. As long as we do not know our true nature, we identify ourselves with the limitations of mind and body and become selfish; but the moment we can realize that God dwells in us and come to understand our true nature, we become unselfish and free from all sins. The fire of true knowledge of the divine nature burns all sins into ashes and makes the soul realize that it is free. Such being the conception of sin among the Hindus, they do not care for

any special scheme for the salvation of souls. They do not believe in the hellfire doctrine, nor in any hell as a place for eternal punishment, therefore they do not need any help of a mediator. Those who believe in eternal punishment may feel the need of a Saviour from it. When Dr. John Henry Barrows, the well-known missionary, went to India, he addressed an intelligent audience in one of the large cities and preached that doctrine. After the lecture one of the audience got up and said; "Sir, we thought you had come from an enlightened country to enlighten us; we did not know until now that your enlightenment is no better than what we call superstition." After Dr. Barrows had returned to America, he said that there were thousands of Brahmins who were waiting to be baptized and requested his audience to send more missionaries, and to give more money for that purpose. One well-known speaker hearing this,

said : "My friends, why do you not send a fire-engine instead; it would be so much cheaper?"

The church dogma teaches the doctrine of vicarious atonement; it horrifies the tender feelings and loving nature of the Hindus; they do not interpret this act as an act of mercy or of love on the part of the heavenly Father, but they say it was an act of cruelty and injustice on His part to allow such a sacrifice of His innocent child.

The next dogma of Churchianity is the resurrection of the body. Most of the churches believe that Jesus the Christ was the "first fruit of the dead," the only one that ever arose after death. The Hindus do not believe in physical resurrection, for the same reasons that the scientists and best thinkers of the West do not accept this dogma. The Hindu belief is that the soul is immortal and indestructible; and by death they mean

only a change of body. The whole of Hindu philosophy and religion is based upon the doctrine of the immortality of the soul; but many of the missionaries affirm that the Hindus do not believe in immortality. On the contrary this doctrine is so well-known and so largely accepted by the Hindus that it is unnecessary for anyone to go to India and try to prove it by the traditional resurrection of a single person. The Hindus have better arguments than that. They say that there are two things necessary for the proof of immortality, the pre-existence of the soul, and its existence after death. If anything is created, or if anything has a beginning, it must have an end; this is the law of nature. If the souls of men were created by God out of nothing, they cannot be immortal, they must die. It is illogical to assert that the soul which was created should exist forever. If you wish to preserve immortality, first prove the pre-

existence of the soul. The churches do not believe in the pre-existence of the soul, but preach its everlasting life after death, which the Hindus say is absurd on the face of it, and on the contrary to all we know of nature's laws. In the writings of the Hindus you will find that the soul of man is described as free from birth and death. In the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gitā*, occurs that beautiful passage made so familiar in America by Emerson : "If the slayer thinks that he has slain, or if the slain thinks that he is slain, they know not well that the soul can neither slay nor be slain." As Churchianity preaches that the soul of man had a beginning, but will have no end, the Hindus cannot accept it.

The next dogma of the church is the doctrine of predestination and grace, which makes God partial and unjust; while Hindu believe in the **more rational**

and scientific doctrine of the reincarnation of souls. This theory explains most satisfactorily the problems of life and death, without imputing partiality and injustice to God.

Churchianity teaches that God punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous; while the philosophy of the Hindus teaches the law of *karma*, that is, the law of cause and effect, and says that God neither punishes nor rewards, but that we punish and reward ourselves by our deeds. Punishment and reward are the reactions of our own actions. Another reason why Hindus cannot accept Churchianity is that its highest ideal is going to heaven and enjoying the pleasures of life through eternity. The highest ideal of religion, according to the Hindus, however, is not enjoying the eternal pleasures, but the attainment of Godconsciousness and freedom in this life from the bondages of ignorance and

selfishness. Salvation must begin here; we must be perfect here, and the hereafter will take care of itself.

Although the Hindus do not agree to accept the doctrines and dogmas of Churchianity, still they do not hesitate to believe in Jesus the Christ as the Son of God, as an incarnation of Divinity in a human form on earth. The Hindu conception of the incarnation of God is much more rational and deeper in meaning than that of the Christians. Those who have read the *Bhagavad Gitā* will understand what the Hindus mean by the incarnation of Divinity on earth. Whether Jesus the Christ had a historical personality or not, is not discussed by the Hindus. They understand by the word Christ that supreme state of Godconsciousness where all duality vanishes, where all idea of separateness ceases forever, and where the tremendous onrush of the divine essence of the

universal Spirit, breaking down all the barriers and limitations of our human consciousness, causes us to realize our eternal oneness with the heavenly Father on the spiritual plane. Whoever reaches that state becomes a Christ, whether he be Krishna, or Buddha, or Jesus of Nazareth. The particular name makes no difference to a Hindu. They are all great, all divine, all incarnations of God on earth. Show me one who has reached that state, and I will worship him as a living divinity on earth. The Christian may think that Jesus was the greatest of all incarnations; the Buddhist may think that Buddha was the greatest of all and a follower of Krishna or Rama may say the same thing regarding his Master, but when we examine the lives of these divine men we find that each of them was as great as the other. One may have manifested one phase of divinity; another may have presented another phase. When

Jesus of Nazareth lived the life of renunciation and preached the ideal of spiritual oneness as the highest goal of all religions, he showed that he understood that state of Christhood; but ordinary people, forgetting the great mission of Jesus the Christ, fight for his historical personality. The masses quarrel and fight regarding the superiority of this or that incarnation, and the followers of each try to convert the others, but the wise man pities them all and tries to help them out of superstition, bigotry, race prejudice, fanaticism and religious persecution. The religion of Christ was a religion of love, renunciation and self-control; it was a religion of Godconsciousness. As these are the highest ideals among the Hindus, they accept Christ and His true religion in so far as it is one with their ideals; but when they see that Churchianity does not preach renunciation, and that its

advocates do not practise love for all, nor show self-control, when they see that Christian governments encourage vice by opium trade, liquor trade, and introduce intoxicating things among innocent and temperate people for the sake of gain, they reject a religion which allows such things. They believe in Jesus the Christ as the Son of God, and know that he did not teach such things.

The duty of true religion is to broaden the human mind, to open the spiritual eyes, to lead humanity to the realization of oneness with the supreme Father in Heaven, and to repress all quarrels over dogmas and creeds. As long as we are not spiritual, we fight and quarrel, but when we realize that God dwells within us, that we are all children of God, irrespective of nationality, creed or denomination, when we rise above all dogmas, above beliefs, theories, and sectarianism, then, and then alone, are

we the true followers of the Christ. Then, and then alone, are we able to say with Jesus, "I and my Father are one" The Hindus leave aside the disputed personality but they accept the Christ-principle that dwells in each individual soul and believe that each soul is a latent Christ. They believe that the voice of God tells this truth within each soul, but we do not listen to it, through our ignorance and selfishness. Krishna says: "Giving up all the formalities of religion, come unto Me, take refuge in Me, I shall make thee free from sins, sorrows and sufferings".

Jesus says, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest". Let us listen to that voice, for it is one and the same, and let us follow it; let us realize the spirit of true Christianity which was exhibited in the life of Jesus of Nazareth; let us live as he lived, and be living Christs on earth. The

Hindu is not satisfied merely to accept Christ in theory, but he strives hard to live the life which Jesus lived, to lead a life of renunciation, of self-control and of love to all. Thus he seeks to fulfil the mandates of that eternal Religion which was taught by Christ-Krishna, Christ-Buddha, and Christ-Jesus.

Churchianity teaches that God punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous ; while the philosophy of the Hindus teaches the law of Karma, that is, the law of cause and effect, and says that God neither punishes nor rewards, but that we punish and reward ourselves by our deeds. Punishment and reward are the reactions of our own actions. Another reason why Hindus cannot accept Churchianity is that its highest ideal is going to heaven and enjoying the pleasures of life through eternity. The highest ideal of religion, according to the Hindus, however, is not enjoying the eternal pleasures, but the attainment of Godconsciousness and freedom in this life from the bondages of ignorance and selfishness. Salvation must begin here; we must be perfect here, and the hereafter will take care of itself.



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