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A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

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# Interpreting Christ to India Today: The Calcutta School

JOSEPH MATTAM, S. J.

The attitude of the Catholic Church to other religions has seen many changes during the past few decades and it has been briefly expressed by the All India Seminar of the Church in India, in one of its Resolutions: 'The age of polemics is past; today we cultivate courtesy, kindness and confidence because of what God has given us and our neighbour in Christ'.<sup>1</sup> This positive attitude was made possible thanks to the pioneering efforts of men like Brahmabandhav Upadhyay from the beginning of this century. Only in the context of the general East-West encounter and in the light of the attitude of the universal Church to other religions in the 19th and early 20th centuries can the attitude of the Catholic Church in India be understood. The basic attitude was what Dr Cuttat calls a *Wertblindheit*, a blindness to the values of religions and cultures other than one's own.<sup>2</sup> It resulted in an attitude of exclusivism, based on an exaggerated appreciation of one's own religion and culture and the ignorance of those of others. Missionaries in general followed a theology which due to a very narrow and exclusive interpretation of the axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, believed that the eternal salvation of 'infidels', to use the terminology of that time, depended almost absolutely on conversion to Christianity and baptism. In the beginning of the century Pope Benedict XV wrote that the aim of missionary activity was to 'bring light to those dwelling in the shadow of death and to open the way to heaven to those hurrying to destruction'.<sup>3</sup> Given the conviction that the followers of non-Christian religions were 'hurrying to destruction' it is quite understandable that missionaries did not attempt to study the spiritual teachings of the people to whom they had to preach the Word of God, but rather tried to refute them and destroy them. Besides, there was a deplorable confusion between culture and religion, or more precisely, between western culture and Christianity. Christianity had become so identified with its expression in the west that another expression could not be conceived of.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Church In India Today*, All India Seminar, Bangalore, 1969, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> For the ideas in this paragraph, cf. J.A. Cuttat: *Expérience Chrétienne et Spiritualité Orientale*, Desclée, Paris, 1967, p. 65f. cf. also my unpublished thesis, *Catholic Approaches to Hinduism: a study of the works of the European Orientalists P. Johanns, O. Lacombe, J. A. Cuttat, J. Monchanin, and R. C. Zaehner*. Rome, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> *Maximum Illud, Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 11 (1919), p. 446.

<sup>4</sup> We are not in anyway minimizing the good done by the missionaries, for whatever may have been their shortcomings, they succeeded in preaching

It is in a period of such indifference and even hostility that Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, William Wallace, Johanns and others, the 'Calcutta school', ushered in a rather new attitude to Hinduism, for they considered it not merely as something to be tolerated but as containing positive values for Christ and His Church.<sup>5</sup> Their attitude to Hinduism has been recognised and given official approval and encouragement in the II Vatican Council<sup>6</sup> and the Church in India Seminar, referred to earlier.

### BRAHMABANDHAV UPADHYAY

Bhavani Charan Banerji, later to be known as Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, was born in 1861 of a Brahmin family in Bengal.<sup>7</sup> He has been described as 'the greatest Indian that ever found his way to Christ'<sup>8</sup> and it is said that probably all the modern attempts at adapting Christianity to Hindu thought and needs are to a great extent inspired and encouraged by his example.<sup>9</sup> He was a disciple of Keshab Chandra Sen and a friend of Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore with whom he founded Shantiniketan.

From Keshab Chandra Sen and Kali Charan Banerji, Upadhyay's uncle, he came to know Christ as the great *guru* and in 1891 he was baptised by a Church of England clergyman and in the same year became a Roman Catholic. Ever since his conversion, he writes, 'my mind has been occupied with the one sole thought of winning over India to the Holy Catholic Church'.<sup>10</sup> In the early years after

the Message of Christ in many parts of India and their handing on of Christ's teaching has not been fruitless.

<sup>5</sup> What is intended by *Calcutta School* is that the persons included in this section worked primarily in Bengal and there is a similarity in their thought so that it can roughly be called a 'school'. Chief exponents of this school are William Wallace (1863-1922), Brahmabandhav (1861-1907), Georges Dandoy (1832-1962), P. Johanns (1882-1955), J. Bayart (1905-), R. Antoine, P. Fallon and De Smet. The 'fulfilment theory' of missionary activity was perhaps begun in India by William Wallace [cf. *From Evangelical to Catholic by way of the East*, Calcutta, 1923; typescript copy of *Introduction to the Hindu Clairvoyance*, Vidya Jyoti Lib. Delhi; J. Bayart: 'In Memoriam. Georges Dandoy, s. j.', in *Clergy Monthly Supplement*, 6 (1962), pp. 104-115.] We shall however limit ourselves to Upadhyay, Johanns and De Smet.

<sup>6</sup> cf. e.g. the *Decree on the Missions*.

<sup>7</sup> cf. B. Animananda: *Swami Upadhyay Brahmabandhav*, a Sketch in two parts, Calcutta, 1908 (designated *Life*); *The Blade*, Calcutta, 1949. A more complete bibliography of the works of Brahmabandhav and works on him can be had in, 'The Sanskrit Hymns of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay' by G. Gispert-Sauch, *Religion and Society*, XIX (1972) 4, pp. 60-79. The major publications of Brahmabandhav are *Sophia* and *The Twentieth Century* in English and *Sandhya*, *Svaraj* and *Karali* in Bengali.

<sup>8</sup> Animananda, *The Blade*, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Vāth Alfons, s. j.: *Im Kampf mit der Zauberwelt des Hinduismus*, Fred. Dümmlers Verlag, Berlin and Bonn, 1928, p. 231.

<sup>10</sup> *The Tablet*, London, 3 Jan. 1903, p. 7.

his conversion he was opposed to Hinduism; but gradually he realised that the *Vedānta*, which he used to consider as pantheism<sup>11</sup> was to become a vehicle of Christian theology. He was convinced that the theism of the *vedānta* was eminently adapted to explain the mysteries of the Catholic Faith to the Hindu.

For the sake of clarity we shall first of all point out some of the basic principles and convictions underlying Brahmabandhav's approach to an Indian-Christian theology and then proceed to show some examples of his theology itself.

*We are Hindu-Catholics*: The Swami held that just as Christianity is different from Europeanism and European thought, so Hindu thought is different from Hindu religion<sup>12</sup>. Hinduism has two branches: *Samāj Dharma* and *Sādhan Dharma*. *Sādhan Dharma* is of the individual and its object is *sādan* and *mukti* (salvation) and has no relation to society; whereas *Sāmāj Dharma* is social customs and a way of life. He held that since in Hinduism there are many different sects holding different 'faiths', so a Christian by faith and commitment can also be a Hindu in customs and social belongingness. Hence he called himself a Hindu-Catholic. 'By birth we are Hindu and we shall remain Hindu till death. But as *dvija* (twice born), by virtue of our sacramental re-birth we are Catholic . . . We are *Hindu-Catholic*'.<sup>13</sup> The conviction that he was a Hindu-Catholic became stronger as years went by and to all appearances he lived like a Hindu and even underwent the *prayaschitta* ceremony prescribed by Hinduism for Hindus returning from abroad. He considered this a social penance which society imposed on its members and did not involve the question of religious faith.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, he allowed Sarasvati worship to his Hindu pupils at the Sarasvat Ayatam; for Sarasvati, according to him, was a symbol of learning-art and not a symbol of God.<sup>15</sup> His insistence on remaining a Brahmin till death,<sup>16</sup> however, did not diminish nor weaken his attachment to Christ and to his Church. It is true that he did not always like to be called or known as a Christian, for he held that among Hindus one does not speak of one's religious faith but only of his caste, and secondly because the word 'Christian' had come to mean those who eat meat, wear trousers and had become thoroughly westernised.<sup>17</sup> In spite of all this, Animananda and his Hindu friends assure us that he remained a Catholic to his death, though he was cremated according to the Hindu rites<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> cf. *The Sophia*, Jan. 1895, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Animananda, *Life*, II, p. 33; see also 30f.

<sup>13</sup> *Sophia*, July, 1898, pp. 101-102.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Animananda, *Life*, II, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> cf. *The Twentieth Century*, Aug. 1907; *Life*, II, p. 41 f.

<sup>16</sup> cf. *Life*, I, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> cf. *The Blade*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> cf. *Life*, II, p. 51f, for the impressions of his friends. We might also add that Brahmabandhav upheld the caste system and defended the nobility and grandeur of Hindu culture and Hindu thought. He says: '... nowhere has

*Vedānta and Christianity:* A second conviction that underlies the thought and action of Upadhyay is that the *Vedānta* must do the same service in India as Greek philosophy did in Europe. The Catholic Church is universal, that is, not confined to any race or country: she is cosmopolitan and is meant for all mankind. Preserving her doctrines in their entirety she adapts herself to changing environments of time and space.<sup>19</sup> He attacked the westernisation of Christianity in India and held that the 'foreign clothes of Catholic faith'<sup>20</sup> have prevented the Hindus from perceiving her universal character. He argued that the 'Scholastic garb'<sup>21</sup> of the Christian doctrine was ill-suited to an intellectual Hindu and hence the Catholic belief must be expressed in and through the *vedānta* philosophy. It must be noted that following the scholastic theology of his time, he held that Hinduism was a purely natural religion, whereas Christianity was supernatural and in that sense was the perfecter and fulfiller of Hinduism. If the 'religion of nature and reason' is destroyed, he argued, the supernatural religion would be without a foundation. Hence he insisted that the missionary should 'instead of vilifying Hinduism' find out truths from it by study and research.<sup>22</sup>

*Monasticism and Conversion of India:* A third conviction is that if India had to be converted it had to be through monasticism. He himself became a *sannyāsi* and donned the saffron garb. He wanted to establish an Indian style *āshram* in Jabalpur but that plan did not materialise because of the opposition of the Church authorities.<sup>23</sup> Yet he held on to the belief that India needed itinerant missionaries who would be thoroughly Hindu in their mode of living; they should wear the yellow *sannyāsi* garb and remain strict vegetarians, and they should be well versed in Sanskrit.

*The Theology of Upadhyay:* Now we shall consider briefly some of his theological contributions.<sup>24</sup> He was strongly influenced by the Aristotelian-Thomistic system and tried to express his faith in Christ using the *vedānta* philosophy. The *Parabrahman* is eternal; no one else is eternal. He is the only one who exists by himself, he is the absolute Being—*niralamba*; he is the rootless principle of the Tree of Being; he exists by necessity. He is *sat* (positive being), *chit* (intelligence) and *ānandam* (bliss). Vedantic conception of God, he says,

that true light shone forth so brilliantly as it has shone forth in India. Nowhere has human philosophy soared so high except perhaps in ancient Greece', *Sophia*, Jan. 1895, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> cf. *Sophia*, Aug. 1898, p. 122f; *Blade*, 73-75.

<sup>20</sup> *Sophia*, Aug. 1898, p. 123.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> cf. *Sophia*, Jan. 1895, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> cf. *Blade*, 81f. Mgr. Zaleski, the apostolic Delegate, definitely forbade such an undertaking. cf. *Sophia*, Oct. 1894, pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that as he was busy with many things, and as politics took up a great deal of his time and energy, he has not written very much in the field of theology.

is accepted by Catholic faith, for it affirms that he is eternal, one, purely positive, intelligent and supremely happy.<sup>25</sup> He holds that the *nirguna* Brahman is not unknowable, for there must be some relation bearing upon the divine essence to make it intelligible. 'Jesus Christ has declared that God is *self*-related by means of *internal* distinctions that do not cast even a shadow of division upon the unity of his substance . . . God knows His own Self begotten in Thought and is known in return by that Begotten Self . . . It is this correspondence of knowing and being known, of cognition and recognition which generates the relative distinction of subject and subject in the Absolute'.<sup>26</sup> Upadhyay has expressed this concept of God with internal relation, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, in a Sanskrit hymn. It is a Christian meditation on the mystery of the blessed Trinity which does not have a parallel doctrine in Hinduism, yet Upadhyay expressed it in such a way that an educated Hindu does not find this totally extraneous to his religious tradition. 'With all its newness the seed is received in a land that can give it a new body of expression. The terms that convey the Christian faith grow from the religious tradition of Hinduism and keep their full religious resonances and power of allusion to anyone educated in Hindu thought pattern. We believe that here is found the most successful example of a true adaptation or incarnation of the faith in India'.<sup>27</sup> Upadhyay not merely borrows words from Hindu philosophical tradition, but he chooses words which have rich mythical and historical associations, like *Govindā*, (*su*)-*mukundā*, *bhava-vṛikṣa*, *buddha*, *carama pada*, and *trisāṅga* etc. As we cannot enter into a detailed analysis of this hymn here, we refer the reader to the study of Fr Gispert referred to above.

<sup>25</sup> *Sophia*, Jan. 1898, 11f.

<sup>26</sup> *The Twentieth Century*, 1901, p. 5. Cited by Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Bangalore, 1969, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Gispert-Sauch, *art. cit.*, p. 74. Brahmabandhav's own translation can be had in Baago, *op. cit.*, p. 40. We give here a translation made by Fr Gispert-Sauch:

I adore Thee, O Saccidānanda Highest goal,  
 Scorned by the wordly,  
 Yearned for by the saintly !  
 Thou art the Supreme, the Eternal, the One beyond all,  
 Fullness undivided, Distant yet Near,  
 Holy in thy treble bond, All-Conscious yet unbound, the Mystery !  
 Father, Unborn Source of life, Supreme Lord,  
 Unsown Seed of the tree of existence,  
 Maker of all, wise creator,  
 our Shepherd !  
 Word eternal, yet unheard,  
 Begotten, yet Person unexcelled,  
 Image of the Father, subsisting Thought  
 our good Saviour !  
 Proceeding from the union of Sat and Cit,  
 gracious Spirit, pure Ananda,  
 Sanctifier, Inspirer, revealing the Word,  
 our Life-Giver!' (*art. cit.*, pp. 75-76.)

Brahmabandhav's theology of the Incarnate Logos calls for our attentive study. Though in the early years after his conversion he was opposed to Krishna, in later years he came to venerate Krishna as a divine *avatār*, by which he meant a unique manifestation of divine power and wisdom, and he insisted on the historical character of Krishna.<sup>28</sup> But he strongly opposed the translation of the word Incarnation by *avatār* for he held that *avatār* is in the natural order and it is not a real incarnation which is an incomprehensible mystery and is wholly a matter of faith. He explains the mystery of the Incarnation using the *Vedānta* theory of five sheaths (*koṣa*) composing human nature.<sup>29</sup>

These five sheaths are presided over by a personality (*aham-pratyayi*) which knows itself. This self-knowing individual (*jīvacaitanya*) is but a reflected spark of the Supreme Reason (*kutasthachaitanya*), who abides in every man as the prime source of life and light. The time-incarnate Divinity is also composed of five sheaths; but it is presided over by the Person of the Logos himself and not by any created personality (*aham*). . . In the God-man the five sheaths are acted upon direct by the Logos-God and not through the medium of any individuality. The Incarnation was thus accomplished by uniting humanity with Divinity in the Person of the Logos.<sup>30</sup>

He makes a good observation here. Just as the first man, *adipuruṣa*, was produced by divine *samkalpa* (will), the body of the Lord who is the *adipuruṣa* of the second creation was formed by the power of God and not by the usual process of procreation.

Brahmabandhav's hymn to the Logos is also full of Hindu imagery and mythology:

<sup>28</sup> cf. *Life*, II, pp. 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> cf. *The Twentieth Century*, 1901; *Life*, I, p. 54f. cf. *The Taittirīya Up.* 2 and 3 where this theory is proposed. The term *koṣa* is not used in that Upanishad, but in *Mundaka*. *Taittirīya* uses the terms *ātman* and *puruṣa*. The five sheaths are physical (*annamaya*) vital (*prāṇamaya*), mental (*manomaya*), intellectual (*vijñānamaya*) and spiritual (*anandamaya*). The last *koṣa* could either be taken as the ultimate reality in man, the final *ātman*, or merely as one of the *koṣas*. Upadhyay follows the latter interpretation. cf. G. Gispert-Sauch, *Course on the Indian Religious texts*, Kurseong, 1968-69, p. 14. Fr. R. Antoine, s.j. interprets the same *Taittirīya Up.* in a different manner. 'We first see the little babe drinking his mother's milk: that is the *annarasamaya ātman*, the bodily self of Jesus. Then he appears to us as a boy or a man living among other men: that is the *prāṇamaya ātman*, the psychic self of Jesus. Further we know him as a person who rejoices and grieves: that is the *manomaya ātman*, the psychological self of Jesus. Deeper still we listen to his doctrine and admire his wisdom: that is the *vijñānamaya ātman*, the spiritual self of Jesus. Finally, at the very centre of his being, the light of faith reveals to us the *ānandamaya ātman*, the divine and blissful Person' (from a cyclostyled course on *Introduction to the Upanishads*, pp. 50-56).

<sup>30</sup> *The Twentieth Century*, 1901, p. 6f. Cited by Baago, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

The transcendent Image of Brahman blossomed and mirrored in the full to overflowing (*upachita*), eternal knowledge (*chirachit*):

Victory be to God, the God-man (*Nara-Hari*)

Child of the golden Virgin, director of the universe, absolute, yet charming with relations:

Victory. . .

Ornament of the assembly of the learned, destroyer of fear, chastiser of the spirit of wickedness:

Victory. . .

Dispeller of spiritual and physical infirmities, ministering unto others, one whose actions and doings are sanctifying:

Victory. . .

One who has offered up his agony, whose life is sacrifice, destroyer of the poison of sin,

Victory. . .

Tender, beloved charmer of the heart, soothing pigment of eyes, crusher of fierce death:

Victory. . .<sup>31</sup>.

Christ is the image of the Brahman, hence he is of the same sphere as of Brahman, yet he is the *Nara-Hari* (*Hari* taken as a synonym for God); he is infinite, director of the universe, yet born of the Virgin; he is the *Nirguna* (infinite in being) and *Saguna* (with relations). His work, unlike that of Krishna, is self-gift, reminding one of the Śaivite story of Śiva drinking poison to save the world. Upadhyay keeps the two natures of the God-man and insists on the unity of the Person.

Upadhyay has also tried to re-interpret some vedic hymns. Let us take the hymn 'KA' of Rigveda. 'Hiranyagarbha was begotten before all; the begotten became the sole Lord of all creatures; he holds heaven and earth. . .'<sup>32</sup> Following the commentary 'Rijvartha', Upadhyay holds that 'Hiranyagarbha is, then, begotten of wisdom'. In this 'first begotten of wisdom' and in his being sacrificed by the gods and *Rishis* (*Rigveda* 10.90) by which all creation comes into being, Upadhyay sees 'a very sublime conception of the one Supreme Being, the idea of Divine generation somewhat resembling the Christian doctrine of Divine Sonship and an account of the sacrifice of the first-begotten of God the virtue of which supreme act is far-reaching'.<sup>33</sup>

We have presented here some of the basic principles in the thought of Upadhyay; we have also studied some examples of his theological thinking. As to his distinction between *Samāj Dharma* and *Sādhan Dharma*, we may say that today it does not have much relevance; for Christianity tries to assume the whole of Hinduism and Hindu culture;

<sup>31</sup> *The Twentieth Century*, 1901, p. 6f; cited by Baago, *op. cit.*, p. 43. *Life*, II, p. 21 f.

<sup>32</sup> *Rigveda*, 10.120. *Sophia*, Feb. 1896, p. 2f.

<sup>33</sup> *Sophia*, Feb. 1896, p. 4. Before we end this section we may refer the reader to the attempts made by Brahmabandhav to re-interpret the *maya* concept in the light of Thomistic *creatio-passiva*: *Sophia*, Feb. and March, 1899; Baago-*op. cit.*, 146f.



yet this distinction may still have value for certain caste Hindus.<sup>34</sup> His interpretation of the Trinity as *Saccidānanda*, his consideration of Jesus as *Saguṇa* and *Nirguṇa*, the presentation of Christ using the five *koṣa* theory still have value for us. In conclusion we may say that the great enterprise undertaken by Upadhyay has yet to be completed. He opened a way to present Christ to India: all its potentialities have still to be tried. His call, however, is not altogether left unheeded, as we shall see presently.

#### FATHER PIERRE JOHANNĀS, S.J. (1882-1955)

Whatever may have been his immediate success it is clear that Brahmabandhav's writings did inspire a group of young missionaries of Calcutta to view their missionary activities from a new perspective. It was thanks to his inspiration and that of William Wallace that an enterprising Review, *The Light of the East* was started in Calcutta in 1922 by Frs. G. Dandoy and P. Johannās in collaboration with Animananda, a disciple of Upadhyay.

The general policy of *The Light of the East* reveals to us to a certain extent the attitude of Johannās. We read in the first editorial: 'What we . . . wish . . . to do is . . . to help India . . . to know and understand Jesus . . . We have no intention to put out the existing lights. Rather we shall try to show that the best thought of the east is a bud that fully expanded blossoms into Christian thought'.<sup>35</sup> India was not to be led to something foreign to her heart but she had to be assisted to 'become fully herself by pointing out to her her true ideals, showing her the way to realize them'.<sup>36</sup> Father Johannās became an Indian at heart and delved deep into the metaphysics and religious tradition of India: Even though a great scholar, he remained a missionary and wished to speak to Hindus from within their own culture and religion. His knowledge of Hinduism was recognized even by Hindu scholars. The late professor of Sanskrit at the University of Calcutta, Shri Harichandra Bhattacharya, after a careful study of the articles of Johannās in the *LE* says, ' . . . to those . . . who have not read the *Vedānta Sāstra* in Sanskrit, these articles will prove of the utmost usefulness . . . These scholars truly deserve congratulations from us'.<sup>37</sup>

We shall first of all enunciate the principles underlying the works of Johannās. Profound study of the history of the Church and of the riches of Hinduism led him to the conviction that following the example of the early Fathers of the Church and St Thomas Aquinas,

<sup>34</sup> cf. P. Turmes, s. j. : 'Samāj Dharm and Sādhan Dharm', in *Clergy Monthly Supplement*, 6 (1963) pp. 330-334; De Smet, s. j. 'Comments on Samāj-dharma and Sādhanā-dharma', *ibid.*, pp. 335-337.

<sup>35</sup> *The Light of the East* (Henceforth, *LE*), I (1922) 1, pp. 1-2. Father P. Johannās was born in Luxemburg in 1882. He came to India in 1921. Besides teaching philosophy at St Xavier's Calcutta, he worked with Father Dandoy on the *LE* where he developed his major work: *To Christ through the Vedānta*. He had to return to Belgium owing to ill-health in 1939 and died there in 1955.

<sup>36</sup> *LE*, IV (1925), 1, pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> *LE*, II (1923) 2, p. 6.

we can and must construct a philosophical system 'akin to Thomism' with the various positive doctrines contained in the different *Vedānta* systems. For the *Vedānta* are perhaps 'the best among the natural religions and . . . the best foundation for the supernatural structure of Christianity'.<sup>38</sup> For Hindu philosophy is more 'religious' than the Greek philosophy used by the early Fathers. The history of India's quest for God through the centuries witnesses to her rich and valuable intuitions on God and his workings in the life of men.

This Hinduism, however, will find its real fulfilment, the answer to its aspirations in Christ and in Christianity. The Indian heart, Johanns writes, is after Christ. India wants a human God, but its own systems are unable to give it such a God, who is man. The great delight India takes in Krishna who is so much like an Indian boy and is at the same time the Lord shows that what India yearns for is a God as human as possible and a man as divine as possible.<sup>39</sup> Only in Christ is this desire fully realised.

Another of Johanns' convictions is that 'There is no important philosophical doctrine of saint Thomas which is not found in one or the other of the *Vedānta* systems'.<sup>40</sup> If the various positive truths of the different systems are brought into harmony we would obtain a well unified theistic system 'akin to Thomism'. The *vedānta* philosophers move in the same direction as Catholic philosophy, but as they have not yet met, they have not reached their goal. The synthesis of the various truths can be achieved with the help of the notion of *creatio-ex-nihilo*, as we shall see presently.

The actual working out of these principles cannot be entered into in detail, for Johanns achieved a masterly synthesis between Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhava, Vallabha, Chaitanya and Jīva Goswami. Unlike Brahmabandhav who almost exclusively depended on Śaṅkara<sup>41</sup>, Johanns took seriously all the Acharyas, though Śaṅkara was his own favourite author. We shall briefly show how Johanns takes the idea of God and the world in Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja and integrates their ideas into a perfectly theistic philosophy.

According to Śaṅkara God<sup>42</sup> is Being, that is, being in absolute concentration and intensity and at the same time concentration of awareness.<sup>43</sup> As the identity of Being and Awareness God is the absolute form of Awareness which is its own substrate. As the plenitude of Being and Awareness, he is self-sufficient and because of the

<sup>38</sup> *LE*, V (1927), 6, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> cf. *LE*, VIII (1930), 9, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *LE*, I (1922) 1, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> At least once Brahmabandhav proposes a synthesis of the ideas of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Mādhava: cf. *Sophia*, Feb. and March, 1899, Baago, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>42</sup> Johanns normally uses the term 'God' for the Absolute of Śaṅkara who makes a distinction between God and Brahman. cf. *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya*, 2. 1. 14; cf. M. Dhavamony, 'Śaṅkara's idea of creation', in *Studia Missionalia*, XVIII (1969), pp. 41-59, esp. 55.

<sup>43</sup> cf. Johanns, *A Synopsis to Christ through the Vedānta*, Part I, Calcutta, 1930, p. 1f.

awareness of the infinite self-sufficiency he is absolute Bliss. For Śaṅkara God is identically *sac-cid-ānanda*, that is, Being absolutely pure, intelligence unmixed, self-sufficiency absolutely complete; in other words, existence-knowledge-bliss. God is absolutely self-subsistent and independent, simple and immutable, hence he cannot undergo changes; no real *pariṇāma* (real evolution) of Brahman is possible; there is the possibility of a *vivarta*, the illusion of an evolution.<sup>44</sup> Since God has neither completely nor incompletely passed into the world and since a real world would destroy the self-subsistence and independence of God, Śaṅkara refused to accept the reality of the world. For God, we must remember, is the material and efficient cause of the world. From such an elevated notion of the Absolute there follows a second conclusion: namely, the knowledge of God that we derive from the world is false for it reveals a *Saguṇa* God, God with attributes, related and dependent. The world is a veil that hides and deforms the independent and absolute self-sufficient *Nirguṇa*, indeterminate Brahman.

According to Rāmānuja, Reality is one, for God is the one ultimate substance qualified by animate and inanimate beings.<sup>45</sup> God is an infinite substance possessing an infinity of qualities and is the ultimate foundation of everything. The world of multiplicity is the different, real but non-essential transformations of the primal cause, but these are only modes, qualities of the One Reality. 'The absolute is one unchanging substrate of many different qualities, an *Advaitam*, but modified, *visistām*'.<sup>46</sup>

Johanns has thus discovered a foundation for a truly theistic philosophy in the *Vedānta*. Śaṅkara describes God as he is in Himself and as the foundation of all possibility<sup>47</sup>; Rāmānuja on the other hand gives a God who is related to the world. Śaṅkara asserts that the world is related to God as an unreality though it behaves as if real; but God is not related to the world. Now, the theory of *creatio-ex-nihilo* holds that the world by itself, independently of God is only 'privation', absence of being and nothingness. But God being goodness itself and goodness being self-communicative what God freely communicates is reality and not an illusion. The creativity of God presupposes creatability as its necessary term. Hence 'if God creates, His creation must be received in that privation'.<sup>48</sup> Since the world that arises by creation must be by and for God (for total privation or

<sup>44</sup> According to prof. Hacker [see, 'Vivarta' in *Akademie der Wissenschaften und Literatur*, 5 (1953), 197 f]. Śaṅkara did not fully accept the *vivartavāda*. It was elaborated by his followers. cf. M. Dhavamony, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> cf. *Śrī Bhāṣya*, II, I, 15.

<sup>46</sup> *LE*, II (1923), 1, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> cf. *LE*, V (1927) 4, p. 5. cf. *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya*, 1, 2, 22: 'The imperishable is the unevolved as form of germinal virtuality of names and forms'.

<sup>48</sup> *LE*, V (1927) 5, p. 6. The word 'privation' occurs frequently in the writings of Johanns. By it he does not mean the absence of something that is due, but the idea of mere non-existence, total nothingness. cf. A. D. Sertilanges, *S. Thomas d'Aquin*, Tome, I, Paris, 1922, p. 293.

passive possibility is nothing in itself nor for itself) it is something in itself as received into privation and essentially finite and distinct from God who is essentially infinite<sup>49</sup>. Thus *creatio-ex-nihilo* brings harmony and consistency to the apparently opposed theories of the *Vedānta*. For it affirms the independence of God from creation and the essential dependence of creation on God who is the whole of Reality. We might also mention that Johanns studied at great length the whole of the *bhakti* literature and has shown its bearing on an Indian Christology.

We have merely hinted at the main principles at work in the writings of Johanns and have called attention to the way he tries to build a complete system of philosophy based on the pattern of Thomism but with the materials of the *Vedānta*. He does not mean to destroy the *Vedānta*, but to make it complete and allow it to follow its own natural growth. Such a vedantic-thomism, he claims, would be intelligible to the educated Hindus. We must remark that he does not build up a Christology *ex professo*, though Christ is the centre of his whole thought and theology, and it is to Him that the whole *Vedānta* points: 'To Christ through the *Vedānta*'.

By way of an evaluation we must say that Johanns has not received the attention he deserves neither in his life time nor posthumously, probably because he wrote most of his articles in a small magazine with a limited circulation and also perhaps because of his 'unscientific procedure': he knew Śaṅkara's thought so well that he could expound it without explicit reference to the sources, but that does not help a critical study of Johanns's work. Another reason may well be that 'Indian Catholics as a whole remained impervious to any serious study of Hindu thought and *The Light of the East* had to cease publication for lack of support'.<sup>50</sup>

The work of Johanns is so far the only systematic and serious attempt to study the whole of the *Vedānta* in the light of Thomist philosophy and theology, and in that sense it is a pioneer work.<sup>51</sup> He has shown at least one serious way to a Christian interpretation of the *vedānta*, and thus a way of presenting Christ to the Hindu in a language he can understand. The primary value of his writings is for the missionary himself, especially to guide him in his approach to the spiritual minded.<sup>52</sup> Even though Johanns follows the Thomist system, he does not mean to advocate Thomism for all. He himself saw that his work was only a modest beginning calling on many generous collaborators to finish the work.<sup>53</sup> Father Johanns has also rendered us a great service by declaring 'a merciless war' on our ignorance of Hinduism. As a missionary method however this is of very limited

<sup>49</sup> *LE*, XIII (1935), 10, p. 116.

<sup>50</sup> Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram*, London, 1966, p. 61.

<sup>51</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61; 169.

<sup>52</sup> cf. J. Bayart, 'The Religious Thought of India' in *India Missionary Bulletin*, 2 (1954), 1, p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> cf. Johanns, 'Théologie Catholique et Sagesse des Indes', in *Doctor Communis*, II (1951), p. 179.

value. For even though what Johanns says is true, namely Christ is the fulfilment of all, a Hindu who is proud of his religion will scarcely be inclined to listen to him.<sup>54</sup> 'Will the Hindus', he asks, 'then examine the claim we make to possess in its highest fulfilment the realisation of their ideal?'<sup>55</sup> There is a further question as to whether we can ever meet the Hindu *beginning* with a doctrinal confrontation. Doctrinal confrontation there has to be, but it cannot be at the start. Brahmabandhav's and Johanns' consideration of Hinduism as merely a 'natural' religion is no more acceptable, but when they wrote, they followed the theology of their times and they may not be judged from today's standards. Looking at Johanns' work in its context, we cannot but admire and appreciate this great pioneer who deserves our esteem and gratitude.

#### FATHER RICHARD DE SMET, S.J. (1916-)

In this third section, we shall no more than mention an attempt made by Fr de Smet to propose an Indian Christology.<sup>56</sup> He observes that though we have many Indian names for God and Christ we do not have an Indian expression of the Christological dogma. His attempt to offer one is merely 'an exploratory attempt'.

*Jesus is God:* Christ is *Brahmātman*, that is, 'one without a second' whose name is equivalently Brahman or *Ātman*. The word Brahman means that he is the Absolute, self-subsistent existence; and *Ātman* means that he is the innermost Cause of all beings and the supreme Spirit whose knowledge consists in perfect self-consciousness and omniscience. The inner life of this being consists in perfect fruition, bliss, *ānanda*.<sup>57</sup> Neither of these terms signifies personality, but only designates God as God-head which Christ shares with his Father and the Spirit.

*He is God the son, the Second Person of the Trinity:* By 'person' de Smet understands a distinct and complete intellectual subsistent.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> cf. Dr D. S. Sarma, *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, Benares, 1944, p. 304: 'India's need is not . . . any fresh imported religion as Christian missionaries want to make us believe. On the contrary, the rest of the world is in need of India's Vedānta for making its religion more liberal and broadminded'.

<sup>55</sup> *LE*, VIII (1930), 10, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> 'Materials for an Indian Christology', in *Religion and Society*, 12 (1965), 4, pp. 7-13. Here we merely summarise this article. De Smet is a Belgian and a member of the Calcutta province of the Jesuits; he teaches in Poona, at De Nobili College.

<sup>57</sup> De Smet understands by *Ātman* the inner principle which though immanent in selves is yet distinct from them and transcends them. *Ātman* is akin to Plato's *ousia* for it has the ontological independence and immanence and is causal.

<sup>58</sup> As *distinct* it differs from universal notions which are shared by many; as *integral* it is distinguished from groups of being whose external relation does not constitute them as a being, and from internal parts like the soul which though subsistent does not constitute a being. As *subsistent* 'it exists in its

In Christology, we have to show that the Word is identically God, pure Act of Being which is subsistent Intelligence, Love and Power. His divine transcendence forbids that he merges with a finite nature, yet it is possible for him to assume a nature and be united to it in a personal union, preserving the distinction of the two natures.

In Indian thought there are four words which might signify what is meant by person: *ātman*, *jana*, *vyakti* and *puruṣa*. *Vyakti* denotes individuals within a class (*jāti*) or a special manifestation or impersonation, hence would have a modalist connotation. Whereas *puruṣa*, though of uncertain etymology, is better, for it is used to designate persons (man or God) or a conscious entity as opposed to *Prakṛiti* or even the supreme Being. Hence this seems to translate better the word person. The terms *saguṇa-nirguṇa* brahman used commonly for personal-impersonal is misleading, for the *saguṇa* is in fact not applicable to the Christian notion of God, for that would mean that he is internally complex, consisting of a substance (*dravya*) endowed with accidents (*gunas*) which make him a limited individual. Though the divine being is devoid of any complexity, He is by pure identity of substance, Being, Truth, Beauty, Intelligence, Love Bliss and Power. The term *nirguṇa* Brahman, then, designates God and each of the three persons better.<sup>59</sup>

*Christ's Human Nature is real, Complete and Distinct from his Divine Nature:* Nature or substance is the basic endowment with which a being is born and makes it distinct from beings of other species. In a finite being its nature is distinct from its act of being (*esse*), but in God because of what He is, namely, the Pure Actuality of Being (*esse purum*) there is no distinction in him of essence and existence. A human nature which is a mere possibility apart from its act of being, is made real by a corresponding act of being which it 'receives' and limits it to its own configuration. But if human nature is actuated by a divine act of being, it will not be able to limit the transcendental act of being, but can only share in the divine personality. Hence there will not be a human person since it exists not by its own act of being but by the divine act. The words *svarūpa* and *svabhāva* can designate what we mean by nature. *Daiva* or *Brahmanya* and *manuṣya* added to these would give us: *brahmanya svarūpa* and *manuṣya svarūpa* or *svabhāva*. Christ is therefore one *brahmanya puruṣa* or *jana* (Divine person) in his two *svarūpas*: his *nisarga svatantra brahmanya svabhāva* (his original independent divine nature) and his *samyukta paratantra manuṣya svabhāva* (coinjoined human nature).<sup>60</sup>

own right and in virtue of its own "act of being" unlike accidents which exist in and in virtue of their substance'. *Intellectual* implies the intellectual appetites or free will and the capacity to enter into a relation of intellectual knowledge and love with other beings.

<sup>59</sup> cf. Dr Paul Hacker of Münster, a great Sanskritist and a scholar of Hinduism while accepting the use of *nirguṇa* for 'God, prefers *ātman* for person, basing himself on the use made of it in *nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika* and *Mīmāṃsā* cf. *Religion and Society*, XII (1965), 4, pp. 13-15.

<sup>60</sup> Hacker holds that though both *svarūpa* and *svabhāva* are right, the latter is preferable. *op. cit.*, p. 14.

*His two Natures are United Through Hypostatic Union:* Since the God-Man is a single being, the unity of his two natures cannot be one of a mere external unity, nor an internal unity of composition making a *tertium quid*.<sup>61</sup> Christianity calls the union of the two natures in Christ a hypostatic union, union by virtue of the personal supposit (*hypostasis*) or Person who takes into Himself a human nature. The human nature is directly united to the divine subsistent person who actuates it—the novelty being in the human nature, hence the divine nature remains unaffected by the human, and distinct from it. Now, since *Ātman* is an inner principle which transcends what it actuates, we can say that the second Person of the Trinity is the *Ātman* of the *manuṣya svarūpa* and his *brahmanya svarūpa* is the *pratisthā* (foundation) of his Personality.<sup>62</sup> Śaṅkara's idea that all which are not the perfect being (*a-sat*) have no existence of their own, is applicable to the human nature of Christ, for it is totally dependent on the Act of existence of the Word, so that it exists by the Pure Act of Being and not by its act of being, though his nature is complete and distinct. In such a conception, the *Paramātman* remains unaffected by the *upādhi*, human nature. Their union is not a *samyoga* but a personal *tādātmya*, a hypostatic union. *Tādātmya* is not pure identity of reciprocal relation but it is the unreciprocal relation between an effect and a cause.<sup>63</sup> The power of the *ātman* extends to the *upādhi*, and it partakes of all those attributes of the *ātman* which can be shared by a finite nature. So Christ's human nature is holy, divinised, but it is not the Godhead.

The *Purusa* and the *brahmanya svabhāva* are in no way changed by the incarnation. Incarnation may be called a *vivarta*, an effectuation through which the novelty is on the side of the effect and does not affect the cause. However Christ's human nature is not an illusion (*māyā*); however, it would be *avidya* or *mithya jñāna* to think that Christ's human nature is the divine nature, or a part of it or that the union is *sāyujya* (conjunction) or *samānarūpata* (mutual conformation). *Sāmatā* (sharing of a single *ātman*) implying personal *tādātmya* is a better word than *vivarta*. The relation of the hypostatic union is real on the side of the human nature, but only logical, though real, on the side of the Incarnate Word. This however is an *anirvacanīya*, a mystery.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Nor can it be an essential unity by which accidents are bound to their substance, for the divine nature can have no accident; nor the substantial unity of matter and form for the matter limits the form, but here it is impossible for the matter to limit the divine act; nor is it an ontological unity by which a finite act of being is united with the essence it actuates.

<sup>62</sup> cf. *Gāṭī*, xiv. 27 *Brahmano hi pratisthā'ham* (I-personal Krishna) am the abode of Brahman), reversing however the *puruṣa-pratisthā* relationship signified there between the Person (*aḥam*) and the Godhead (*Brahman*).

<sup>63</sup> Reciprocal relation would be: the writer of this paper is myself : I am the writer of this paper. Unreciprocal, e.g. Brahman is the *Ātman* of the world, but the world is not the *ātman* of Brahman. cf. *Vedānta Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2, 1, 9.

<sup>64</sup> As is obvious De Smet is a Thomist and has merely translated the Thomistic doctrine on Christ into Sanskrit words. One may ask whether we

In conclusion we must say that as to explicit Christology nothing much has been done except in some classrooms. In general the Calcutta school tries to present Christ in Christianity, or rather Christianity to India in a way the Hindus can understand the teachings of Christ. Johanns alone has tried to make a sort of systematic vedantic-thomistic philosophy synthesising Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja and others. The task of the theologian of today, however, is not to present to the Hindu any existing Christian theology in vedantic garb. He would rather have to meditate upon and assimilate the Hindu scriptures and perceive their relevance for the Christian message, which has taken deep root in him and try to give expression to his Christ-experience in this newly acquired background. He must be steeped in the history of the Church, the development of her dogmas, the history of her spirituality and traditions. Only by assimilating them can he transcend them. Then as the II Vatican Council says in its *Decree on the Missionary activity of the Church*, no. 22:

Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illumined by the light of the gospel, and then taken into Catholic unity . . . the individual young Churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion.

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have to keep the person-nature categories while trying to build an Indian Christology, or whether we could find a different category. However, we cannot enter into this vast problem here.