

# Bonhoeffer, Radhakrishnan and Modern Secularism

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The concept of man according to Bonhoeffer is different from that of Radhakrishnan, yet there are points of similarity regarding the freedom of man, man as a spiritual being, man's relation to God and his fellow human beings, the significance of incarnation (incarnation and humiliation for Bonhoeffer and *avatāra* for Radhakrishnan), man's struggle between the two spheres (infinite and finite for Radhakrishnan, and ultimate and penultimate for Bonhoeffer), and both are concerned about the whole man instead of concentrating either on the inner life or the outer life of man alone. From these considerations Bonhoeffer arrives at the necessity of 'Religionless Christianity' as the world has 'come of age' and man has 'come of age'. In contrast to this, Radhakrishnan advocates a universal religion or syncretism or eclecticism. These things point out that both are dissatisfied about the present state of affairs with regard to religion, emphasizing that all is not well with the religion with which we are so familiar but about which we are not clear.

However, there are other points of contrast between these two men with respect to God and Christ. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is of supreme importance as only through him God and the world become real to us . . . 'in the man Jesus Christ all that is to be known of God in his relation to the world is revealed. We know God only in this human form, in the *incognito* of the flesh, in the weakness of the crib and the cross, in the One whose entire concern was for others—even unto death . . . In him God has reconciled the world to himself, as the Apostle Paul said long ago, and Bonhoeffer emphasized that this fact means that we can never have God without the world or the world without God. In Jesus Christ God and the world are held together in a "polemical" unity that denies both deistic separation and pantheistic identification, and also disallows those oft-used divisions between the sacred and the secular, the revelational and the relational, the supernatural and the natural, the Christian and the worldly'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. D. Godsey, *Preface to Bonhoeffer*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, pp. 12-13.

Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, following Sankara, believes in Brahman, the Absolute God. Brahman is the only reality for him. Radhakrishnan uses the personal pronoun 'He' in spite of the impersonal nature of Brahman. It has been pointed out that this is largely due to the influence of Christianity upon him. Brahman can be described only in negative terms. This does not lead him to Agnosticism, because he admits that 'if somewhere in ourselves we did not know with absolute certainty that God is, we would not live'.<sup>2</sup> It is a crucial problem in his philosophy, and so is the case with all idealistic philosophy. This problem stands in a special relation of relevance to the Christian view of life as inspired by the fact of Jesus Christ. In the light of this, the meaning and values of incarnation are to be noted and the need for salvation is to be considered.

It must be noted that I have chosen Radhakrishnan as an example of the emerging religious thought, philosophy and secularism in India today which is by no means exhaustive. When I grapple with the relevance of religion and religionless Christianity for India in the third section, when reference is made to Hinduism, it is in the larger context of Hinduism and not necessarily only to Radhakrishnan.

It is too early to say what effect the notion of 'Religionless Christianity' will have on India because it has to be tested by time and experience before it becomes history and part of life. The ideas of Bonhoeffer and Radhakrishnan are fairly new and they have to stand the test of time and valid criticism. We are living in a crucial stage in history when the traditional belief in Nature, God, Religion, etc., is being vigorously shaken. The loss of values in human life and the anxiety of a possible nuclear warfare threatening the total annihilation of human life on earth make us feel that the ground under our feet is fast slipping. There seems to be a gap or vacuum; but there can never really be vacuum. For instance, when air becomes warm and rises above, cool air moves into its place causing high-pressure and low-pressure areas in the atmosphere. So also, when the traditional beliefs, creeds and hypotheses about God and Religion, etc., have served their purpose they are displaced by new ones, but whether the new ones are the most appropriate or approximate, workable or worthless is to be seen. Whether Bonhoeffer's 'Religionless Christianity' or Radhakrishnan's 'syncretism' are the true answer to our dilemma or whether there is another answer yet to be discovered and accepted, time alone will tell; but in the meantime we must be content to say with St. Paul that the grace of God is sufficient for us. The point is whether we want a 'Faith' or 'Religion'? Bonhoeffer emphasizes that we should not make religion a precondition of faith. But how long a faith remains 'Faith' without becoming 'Religion' is a matter open to specula-

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<sup>2</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1951, p. 158.

tion in the light of the lessons that history has taught us. Just as Radhakrishnan's syncretism is acceptable to many, Bonhoeffer's 'Religionless Christianity' may also be attractive to some, but in the last analysis whether the religionless Christianity itself will boil down to a new system or school of thought or perhaps even a 'denomination' is yet to be seen. It must be remembered that Bonhoeffer wrote very little about 'Religionless Christianity' (especially in his *Letters and Papers From Prison*) due to his untimely death; but it all depends on how we are going to interpret his theme and adapt it to suit our needs which will really make the difference. In the succeeding sections, let us see Bonhoeffer's position with reference to this theme in his major works; let us see also Dr. Radhakrishnan's position, and examine secularism in India with special reference to Hinduism and see whether 'Religionless Christianity' is acceptable or not.

## I

### DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906-1945)

It has been claimed that Bonhoeffer has done for the twentieth century what Martin Luther did for the sixteenth century. He presents the Gospel's enduring message in a form that compels a deep, powerful response from the secular man of our day. Bonhoeffer first became known as a heroic Christian pastor, martyred in a German concentration camp of the Nazis on 9 April 1945. His voluntary return from the United States to share in the underground witness against the Nazis fired the imagination of Christians everywhere. Slowly, with the translation of his writings, it became clear that in the crucible of Nazi persecution a living theology for twentieth-century Christians had been hammered out.

Influenced by Hegelian philosophy, Bonhoeffer asserts that human nature itself is inescapably social. It is essential to encounter the 'limit', whether experienced as the claim of the other person or as the claim of the divine, so that self-conscious personal life may emerge. These two claims coincide where the divine Thou meets precisely in the human thou. According to Bonhoeffer this is an 'ethical' as opposed to an 'epistemological' interpretation of transcendence.

If man's very nature as a created being is social, then the 'fall' is equally communal or corporate. The doctrine of original sin implies the solidarity in guilt of the whole human race. Hence man's redemption must be corporate in character. This occurs in the creation of a community of the redeemed. In Jesus Christ as a 'collective person', as 'deputy' or 'representative' for all mankind, the humanity of Adam is transformed into the humanity of Christ. Through his life, death and resurrection the communion of saints is realized. In this context, the Church for Bonhoeffer is 'Christ existing as community'.

Bonhoeffer's book, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*, throws considerable light on the concept of man. Bonhoeffer's interpretation is Christological. God's presence is to be found at the centre of existence, not at the periphery. Speaking of the 'image of God' (*Imago dei*), he points out that it consists in freedom, but this does not mean merely man's freedom from the limitations of the true creation. Man's true freedom is a freedom for God and for his fellow man.

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the creation is interesting. The deepest role of woman is to help man with his fundamental problem of learning to live within the limits of finitude. Out of His mercy, God created a companion for man who is to be at once the embodiment of Adam's limit and the object of his love (p. 58 f.). Though Adam and Eve disobeyed God and transgressed their limit, God did not withdraw His mercy but instead made them 'garments of skins and clothed them'. Here we see the orders of creation becoming 'orders of preservation on their way to Christ'.

Bonhoeffer makes a clear distinction between humiliation and incarnation. The humiliation is not God becoming man (for this in itself is glorious), but the subjection of the Incarnate One to the conditions of existence under sin. Humiliation is concealment, while incarnation as such is revelation. Humiliation pertains to the fallen creation, incarnation to the primal creation. Thus humiliation is temporary, while incarnation is permanent. With the return of Christ to the Father, humanity has been assumed into the eternal life of God Himself. It is from Christ as Mediator of creation (i.e. as Logos) that the character of all created things derives. The incarnation reinforces this relationship. Christian life is to be found only in that which is of the world, the 'supernatural' in the natural, the holy in the profane, and the revelational in the rational, just as in Christ the reality of God entered into the world. For in its secularity the world has already been accepted by a gracious God.

Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is firmly grounded in Christology and orientated to man's concrete situation in the present. The important question for ethics according to Bonhoeffer is the 'formation' of man which for Christians means 'conformation' with Jesus Christ the Incarnate One: this means, to have the freedom to be the man one really is. While we are engaged in vain attempts to transcend our manhood, God affirms it by becoming man, real man. According to Bonhoeffer the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ for man is his own proper form into which he is transformed. 'Man becomes man because God became man.' The Christian does not live by prohibitions and requirements but by the commandment of God, which is distinguished from all human laws in that what it commands is freedom. The commandment of God is 'the permission to live as man before God'.

Bonhoeffer is opposed to what he calls the habit of 'thinking in terms of two spheres', which assumes that life is divided into Christian and non-Christian sectors, the problem being somehow to relate the two. Whether it be the scholastic differentiation between nature and grace, or the sectarian view of the struggle of the elect against a hostile world, the mistake is the same; the assumption that there are realities outside the reality of Christ. Actually, 'there are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world'. When I think of this, I am reminded of Archbishop William Temple's 'Universalism'. Instead of the spatial concept of the two spheres, Bonhoeffer proposes the qualitative (or eschatological) categories of the 'ultimate and the penultimate'. The ultimate reality of God's grace in Christ does not annihilate the penultimate reality of man's ongoing life in history but rather validates it, while at the same time limiting it. The penultimate is preserved so that it may become the 'outer covering for the ultimate'.

Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* is most notable for the theological discussions with his friend Eberhard Bethge, in which he presents the idea of 'Christian worldliness'. Bonhoeffer was convinced that we have arrived at the end of the 'religious' era in our culture. Since the thirteenth century, man has been learning how to get on without any hypothesis of 'God' and seems to have practically lost all awareness of what God might mean. Bonhoeffer calls this development of 'secularization' as the world's arrival at 'adulthood', its having 'come of age'. For him this is an irreversible development.

'The thing that keeps coming back to me is, what *is* Christianity, and indeed what *is* Christ, for us today? The time when men could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or simply pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness of conscience, which is to say the time of religion as such. We are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all: men as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" do not in the least act up to it, and so when they say "religious" they evidently mean something quite different. Our whole nineteen-hundred-year-old Christian preaching and theology rests upon the "religious premise" of man. What we call Christianity has always been a pattern—perhaps a true pattern—of religion. But if one day it becomes apparent that this *a priori* "premise" simply does not exist but was an historical and temporary form of human self-expression, i.e. if we reach the stage of being radically without religion, and I think this is more or less the case already, else how is it, for instance, that this war, unlike any of those before it, is not calling forth any "religious" reaction?—what does that mean for "Christianity"?'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York, Macmillan, 1962, pp. 162–63.

This passage raises a few important factors. For one thing, a Christianity appropriate to a world-come-of-age could speak of God 'not on the borders of life but at its centre'. Bonhoeffer does not like the use of God as a 'stop-gap' for the incompleteness of our scientific knowledge. According to him, 'we should find God in what we do know, not in what we don't'. Secondly, the Church in the new age will have to learn what it means to live in deputyship for man. Thirdly, a new language will be required when the Church speaks again. The words that we use have lost meaning, power and authenticity.

Bonhoeffer introduces a new proposal for a 'non-religious interpretation of Biblical terminology' in this connection. The New Testament is not a mythological garbing of the universal truth. This mythology (resurrection, etc.) is the thing itself, but the concepts must be interpreted in such a way as not to make religion a precondition of faith. Bultmann had not gone far enough in the latter direction. Neither had Karl Barth who, though he had begun that criticism of religion, had nevertheless lapsed into a mere 'positivism of revelation', a 'take it or leave it' attitude.

In undertaking a non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts such as Bonhoeffer proposes, the Church would only be permitting the Bible to assume its own true character again, for the Bible knows nothing of 'religion' in the ordinary sense. 'Religion' is concerned with inwardness, the Bible with the whole man. 'Religion' is individualistic, while the Bible is concerned with corporate existence. 'Religion' is metaphysical, i.e. interested in a world beyond. The non-religiousness of the Bible is clearest in the case of the Old Testament, but it is equally true in the New Testament, when it is interpreted in the light of the Old Testament. 'Jesus does not call men to new religion, but to life.'

Bonhoeffer wrote many of his letters from prison to his friend Eberhard Bethge; who has now attempted to define the four characteristics of religion according to Bonhoeffer:

'First, it is individualistic. The religious man is pre-occupied with himself and his interior states in such a way as to forget his neighbour, even though this individualism may take ascetic and apparently self-sacrificial forms. Secondly, it is metaphysical. God is brought in to complete, as the supernatural, a fundamentally man-centred view of reality. Thirdly, the religious interest becomes more and more one department of life only. Scientific discovery and other forces push it more and more into insignificant areas of life. And, fourthly, the God of religion is a *deus ex machina*, one who comes in from the outside to help his children when they are in trouble. He is not the One at the centre of life, who controls and directs it and meets and sustains us in our strength as well as our weakness.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> D. Jenkins, *Beyond Religion*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1962, pp. 34-35.

According to Martin E. Marty:

‘By *religion* Bonhoeffer meant hyperindividualism, self-contained inwardness, bad conscience or the sin-sick soul as psychological *a priori*s for Christian experience, devotion to a particular metaphysic, stance, or piety. These belong to Christian advocacies of angelism, spirituality, pure transcendence in mysticism or Docetic theology. They never could belong to one who began by locating the theological question in the sociological setting of the Church! Yes, the later letters have newness but not unanticipated, breath-taking newness. That is why they are doubly valuable to the people who stand in Eastern or Western, Catholic or Protestant, Lutheran or Calvinist, clerical or lay lineages!’<sup>5</sup>

Though in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer draws a sharp contrast between the Church and the world, his main line of thought, with regard to ‘Christian worldliness’, can be seen in his *Ethics, Creation and Fall*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. It is in his doctrine of Christ both as the Mediator of creation and as the crucified Redeemer, appearing in humiliation to reconcile God and the world, that we see roots of the Christian worldliness of Bonhoeffer:

‘Man’s religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world; he uses God as a *Deus ex machina*. The Bible, however, directs him to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help. To this extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God, and clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible, who conquers power and space in the world by his weakness. This must be the starting-point for our “worldly” interpretation.’<sup>6</sup>

Bonhoeffer further points out that because the Church has confined God to herself and the private life of man through her religious interpretation, she is now forced to face ‘the secularized offshoots of Christian theology’ like the Psychotherapists and existential philosophers, who try to answer life’s problems, distresses and conflicts without dependence on ‘God’. Even the clergy watch men in order to expose their sins of weakness. Bonhoeffer feels that there is a twofold theological error here: for one thing, only on the basis of his weakness is man called a sinner; secondly, that man’s essential nature consists in his inner life. Bonhoeffer points out that the Bible is not concerned with the outer or inner life of man but with the *whole* man in relation to God.

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<sup>5</sup> M. E. Marty, *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, New York, Association Press, 1962, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

There are dialectical poles in Bonhoeffer's thought. On the one hand, he insists that 'Christians must rediscover what he calls an *Arkandisziplin*, an arcane, or secret discipline that would preserve the mysteries of the Christian faith from profanation'.<sup>7</sup> Bonhoeffer connects this idea of secret discipline with his ultimate and penultimate, the last things and things before last. In Christian life this secret discipline is essential for our worldly life and at the same time for our going back into the world. Perhaps Bonhoeffer was closely examining the words of Jesus when He said, 'Be ye in the world and yet be not of it.' The other pole of his thought is the worldliness of Christianity itself.

Jesus claims for Himself the whole of human life in all its manifestations and faith makes possible a total response which Bonhoeffer calls 'Polyphony of life' (*cantus firmus*). In other words, Christian faith has many different dimensions of life which at the same time brings about a wholeness. The Christian leads a 'worldly' life as he lives in the world. 'The Christian does not try to make something out of himself (a saint, a penitent, a churchman, etc.), does not try to become a *homo religiosus*, but is content to be a man, pure and simply a man who takes life in its stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its joys and sorrows; a man in whom an arcane discipline and true worldliness interact to produce a life lived completely "before God"'.<sup>8</sup>

In speaking about 'worldly' Christianity, Bonhoeffer tries to bring about a new understanding of the relation between God and the world. We can know God only in and through our concrete encounter with others in our life in the world and not just by an 'idea' of God. The transcendence of God for Bonhoeffer can be known in human form, as man existing for others, and the sole ground for his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence is his freedom from self, maintained to the point of death. With this new understanding, Bonhoeffer would have us reinterpret the Biblical concepts.

Bonhoeffer makes a plea that the Church works out and proclaims a 'non-religious' interpretation of the Biblical concepts. What did he mean? A non-religious interpretation would call men to participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world. The problem of a non-religious interpretation is not merely a hermeneutical one but involves the whole existence of the Church itself. It is an interpretation that is not concerned with religion but with *life*. It is by living in the midst of the world, by taking life in our stride that we come face to face with God. Bonhoeffer would interpret the central Biblical concepts in terms of responsible involvement in life itself.

In order to evaluate Bonhoeffer's thought, I shall briefly cite the criticism of Daniel Jenkins in his book, *Beyond Religion*. He points out that 'Religionless Christianity' can become a shallow

<sup>7</sup> J. D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, p. 254.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.



excuse for those who are unwilling to face the inescapable implications of concrete engagements and commitment. He recognizes with appreciation Bonhoeffer's plea for 'Religionless Christianity' but finds Bonhoeffer's definition of religion narrow and is sceptical of Bonhoeffer's speculation that this modern world's 'coming of age' means that contemporary man is essentially irreligious and must be approached by non-religious methods. This shows that the approach of Barth and Bonhoeffer to religion is too narrow, too negative and too one-sided according to Jenkins. The main idea, however, is that mature Christian faith can exist independently of the religious activities with which it has always been closely associated. Indeed, there is reason to believe that it must exist in this form if it is to have meaning for large segments of the population today. For Jenkins, sincere authentic doubt can be an attribute of 'Religionless Christianity', but this doubt is born only of that faith which realizes that the 'last word' has not been spoken about God's activity in the Church and in religious formulations, and which tries to transcend these formulations and make continuing experience cohere with the reality of the ever-acting God. Jenkins criticizes those who do not really 'transcend' but only 'reject', i.e. those who simply arrogantly set aside but do not build upon the creeds. Here, again, Jenkins points out the *error* and truth in Religionless Christianity.

Religionless Christianity may strictly be impossible, but the Church must transcend her religion in the venture of faith. Secularism can be avoided by self-transcendence through commitment of faith. Bonhoeffer was not able to develop completely his idea of the 'coming of age of man in the modern world', but he obviously referred to the increasing amount of power man has over nature through scientific and technological achievements. Modern man having 'come of age' is no longer under the tutors of this world but is called to freedom and responsibility. He can only find fulfilment of his freedom in the service of Christ.

According to Martin E. Marty, 'One of the deficiencies of Bonhoeffer's last concerns is his inability to bring the fullness of Trinitarian witness to bear at all times on all points. Thus one of the classical Christian safeguards for transcendence seemed to be limited.'<sup>9</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that, for Bonhoeffer, to be truly Christian one must be truly human and not 'religious' in a particular way. To be truly human means to live and serve under Jesus Christ who has made all things and who redeems and remakes.

The greatness of Bonhoeffer can be discerned in his Ethics, Christology and the relation of Christian faith to contemporary society. He has clearly pointed out that God still comes to us as He did in Biblical times, concretely in specific events, in the midst of our joys, sorrows, perplexities and doubts.

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<sup>9</sup> M. E. Marty, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

## II

### DR. SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was born on 5 September 1888 at Tirutani, near Madras, in a middle-class Brahmin family of the orthodox type. His early boyhood and youth were spent in Christian institutions, under Christian influence. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which Christian influence contributed to the moulding of the man. He has had a brilliant career and has served our nation as President of the Indian Republic. He is a lucid writer and the author of many books. He is the champion and modern apologist for Hinduism. Of all the Indian philosophical thinkers, he is the best known in the West.

It is Sankara's rather than Ramanuja's version of Vedanta to which he addresses himself, and it is the Brahmanic phase rather than the medieval form of Hinduism which represents for him 'the' religion of India. He prefers to apprehend ultimate reality as proclaimed by the seers and sages of India and, within this tradition, he prefers the Upanishads in the peculiar interpretation of the Advaita School. The two great traditions which he has confronted all his life are the Indian and the Christian. It is rather unfortunate that till recent times this meant 'Indian' and 'Western' respectively. We can trace the identification of Christianity and the West in the minds of the people of the East, especially Indians, throughout the Victorian Age and into the twentieth century. Though his guiding-star throughout has been truth, perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that without Christ and Christianity, we should have a different Radhakrishnan.

Radhakrishnan does not treat man merely as a mundane being or a creature but as essentially a divine being, a spark of God. He recognizes the empirical self which is subject to change, pleasure and pain. The empirical self changes from man to man but the *atman* remains the same for it is universal and real.

Man is a self-conscious being. He is able to dominate Nature and increase his knowledge. He has the privilege of committing mistakes and rectifying them, of committing sin and suffering for it. His true progress lies in employing his own unique gifts for the benefit of all. Man is a free agent. He is free either to mend himself or mar himself. The life of every individual is an organic whole, each successive growth through death and births. This is what the Hindu 'Law of Karma' affirms. This law is not so much a principle of retribution as of continuity, according to Radhakrishnan. It should not be confused, says Radhakrishnan, with either a hedonistic or a juridical theory of rewards and punishments, in the shape of pleasure and pain. The law is both prospective and retrospective. The Law of Karma brings out both the internal freedom and the external necessity present in human actions.

Radhakrishnan points out: 'Human co-operation is an essential condition of the progress of the world, and the freedom of man introduces an element of uncertainty. The struggle is not a parade, nor is history a mere pageant. Though God is ever ready to help us, our stupidity and selfishness erect barriers against the persistent operation of his love.'<sup>10</sup>

Man is essentially a spiritual being, ultimately identical in some way and to some degree with the Absolute; and yet man is a complex being, belonging to both orders, the infinite and the finite, the divine and the human. In this way, as in his doctrine of the relationship between the Absolute and the empirical world, Radhakrishnan metaphysically justifies both man's highest spiritual aspirations for identity with the ultimate and the significance of his ethical conduct in the empirical world.

'There is in the self of man, at the very centre of his being, something deeper than the intellect, which is akin to the Supreme . . . The consubstantiability of the spirit in man and God is the conviction fundamental to all spiritual wisdom.'<sup>11</sup> 'The true and ultimate condition of the human being is the divine status.'<sup>12</sup> 'For the Hindu, the spiritual is the basic element of human nature.'<sup>13</sup> 'We belong to the real and the real is mirrored in us. The great text of the Upanishad affirms it—*tat tvam asi*—(That art Thou). It is a simple statement of an experienced fact.'<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, while man is essentially spiritual he is a creature of this world as well, and it is important—especially in connection with the problem we are discussing—to recognize Radhakrishnan's doctrine of *māyā*. It is the reminder that the empirical world is not the ultimate; for, to hold that it is would be the essence of ignorance, and ignorance is the cause of bondage, suffering and false living; this could apply equally well here to the nullification of significant ethical conduct in the empirical world. 'The realm of spirit is not cut off from the realm of life. To divide man into outer desire and inner quality is to violate the integrity of human life . . . The two orders of reality, the transcendent and the empirical, are closely related.'<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Christians look at man as sinner. Sin is disobedience to God, defiance and rebellion against God and is due to distrust. The *Theos pantokrator* is replaced by *Ego autokrator*. In other words, man has put a false infinite (himself) over against the true infinite (God) and has chosen to serve the former. Sin is a total act of person. It has its seat in the heart

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<sup>10</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1939, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, pp. 103 f.

<sup>15</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1948, p. 13.

of man. Only in Christ, that is as believers, do Christians see the solidarity of sin to which they belong. Only in Christ Christians know that they are united in His redemption, i.e. knowledge of Christ creates unity both in the past and in the future.

Radhakrishnan speaks of sin as 'handicap'. He makes the doctrine of Karma and transmigration central to his thinking. In support of the reasonableness and justice of Karma, he says that it makes God rational, that it is a sound explanation of human inequality, that it takes account of heredity and environment, and that it is more sound than the traditional conception of 'an account-keeping God'.

Radhakrishnan says that 'salvation is to be earned; God cannot thrust it on us'. He points out that the only way to *moksha*, or at-one-ment with God, is by the casting away of 'man's separate individuality', and further adds, 'until all traces [disappear] . . . there is no release possible'.<sup>16</sup>

According to him, religion is salvation for the Hindu and the Buddhist. 'All, however, are agreed in regarding salvation as the attainment of the true status of the individual' (*ātmaprāpti lakṣaṇam mokṣam*).<sup>17</sup> But the question is, how is he going to attain his true status? Will it be on his own, or by the way prepared by God?

'*Moksha* or release of any one individual does not bring about the destruction of the world but only the displacement of a false outlook by a true one, *avidyā* by *vidyā* . . . the world is not so much denied as re-interpreted.'<sup>18</sup> The interpreter has become one with reality, and the world of appearance even to a *jivanmukta* is not real and significant. The thing which seemed to be a snake turns to its real nature as rope. *Moksha* is beyond space and time.

*Avatāra* and incarnation intended for the salvation of man are basically not different, but they differ only in degree. There is one unique incarnation of God in Christ according to Christianity. There are a number of incarnations of God according to Hinduism, of which the *dashavatāra* of Vishnu are notable. Living and limiting Himself in the world, Christ has not only given the true and highest revelation of God but revelation of man also. God's act is unique and one unique *avatāra* will serve the purpose according to Christians. 'Thus the idea that God is in Jesus crucified and the fact of the death of Jesus upon the Cross act and re-act upon the other. The belief that God Incarnate died upon the Cross makes the event of everlasting and universal significance; and the event itself is for ever putting new content into the idea of God.'<sup>19</sup> Radhakrishnan points out that God has

<sup>16</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Heart of Hindusthan*, Madras, Natesan & Co., 1932, pp. 103-4.

<sup>17</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Hindu View of Life*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1927, pp. 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> E. W. Thompson, *The Word of the Cross to Hindus*, Madras, C.L.S., 1956, p. 97.

never said His last word on any subject ; he has always more things to tell than we can now bear.

In Radhakrishnan's opinion, the Cross is not an offence or a stumbling-block to the Hindu as showing how love is rooted in self-sacrifice. He strongly rejects, however, atonement and reconciliation. He does not seem to be aware that in the God-centred religion of the Bible, salvation has its real meaning in atonement and reconciliation, because in it is expressed the fact that God solely and really creates a way where there is now no way. Without Christ the crucified, Christianity would be a heaven without a sun, an arch without a keystone, a compass without a needle, a clock without a spring, a lamp without oil. The Cross is the interpreter of man, of God, of Law, of Sin, of the Gospel and Service.

Radhakrishnan presents instead, as a Hindu, the Ways or *Mārgas* of Salvation, namely: The Way of Devotion (*Bhakti Mārga*), the Way of Action (*Karma Mārga*), and the Way of Knowledge (*Jñāna Mārga*). Sometimes, a fourth way, the *Yōga Mārga* is also added as a Way of Salvation.

At the point where Jesus completes His life, He reveals three things: (a) the reality of God as holy and merciful ; (b) the reality of man as sinner ; and (c) the genuine reality of man in God. Thus the revealing work of Jesus Christ culminates in His priestly work of reconciliation of man to God.

The difference between Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ as Saviour and Redeemer points up the fact that man is helpless in his sinfulness, his sin having broken the relation, communion and fellowship with God and, therefore, God took the initiative. This is central to the Christian Faith. God's initiative in the redemption and salvation of man is of great significance. But for Radhakrishnan, it is man who is in search of his God and salvation. In Hinduism, man takes the initiative and goes on in search of God and salvation through one of the *mārgas* or ways of salvation mentioned above.

Dr. Radhakrishnan supports the view of universal religion, also known as syncretism or eclectism. This is an attempt to gather the good things in each religion and reassemble them in one universal religion. In other words, it points out that all religions are different ways or roads leading to the same God. So, why not live in peaceful coexistence and co-operation? The greatest difficulty in this 'Relativism', or the view of the relative truth of all religions which is popular in India these days, lies in the fact that Christian faith refuses to be treated in such a way. It refuses to take its place as just one among many ways to God ; it denies that Jesus Christ is only a relative revelation, and that Jesus Christ is simply a religious leader, one among many discoverers of spiritual things. Christians cannot compromise with the idea that 'all ways lead to one God'.

### III

## 'RELIGIONLESS CHRISTIANITY' AND SECULARISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

After having observed what Bonhoeffer and Radhakrishnan have to say, we see how they seem to be close to each other on some issues but how widely they differ on main issues due to the difference in their religious orientation, faith, environment and upbringing. However, we can learn many profitable things from these two great men.

Just as Radhakrishnan's thought has considerably influenced the Indian mind, so also Bonhoeffer's thought is influencing the minds of Western thinkers, theologians, ministers and seminarians. One can already feel the impact of Bonhoeffer's thought. There is a reorientation in Christian theology in the West due to Bonhoeffer's influence. This will sooner or later reach the shores of India and, when it does, it will certainly affect the thought of India with regard to the conception of man and his struggle in the present day in India. Then, again, the question whether secularizing Christian theology in the West is favourable to India is difficult to answer at this stage. India is a land of religion, and Religionless Christianity can be offensive to India. At the same time it must also be noted that India is a Secular State, politically, and I need not say that this considerably influences contemporary Indian thought.

As far as the Church is concerned, this raises the problem of dialogue between Christianity and other religions, reinterpreting the guidelines of strategy for Evangelism, Mission and Service in the light of these considerations.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on community in his book, *Life Together*, is a *Gemeinschaft* representation. In India also the *Gemeinschaft*-like community (family—the primary group) is closely knit together as opposed to the *Gesellschaft*-like society. However, urbanization, technological development and geographical mobility are not only breeding secularization but laying foundation for *Gesellschaft* society. But it is interesting to note that *Gemeinschaft* can take root and emerge in the *Gesellschaft* environment. Is secularization part of *Gesellschaft* pattern as opposed to religion as part of *Gemeinschaft* pattern? Can these two come together and form an 'Ideal Type Analysis'? The meaning and value of life with relation to God and Jesus Christ are emphasized by Bonhoeffer through his 'Religionless Christianity' while Radhakrishnan emphasizes 'Universal Religion' as a way of life which I feel is one way of expressing the emerging secularism in India today.

Traditional orthodoxy in Hinduism has for centuries taken the position that to affirm the Realm of the Spirit is necessarily to discount the reality of the world of matter and to withdraw

from all involvement in earthly concerns for human betterment and material advance. This has not been true of popular Hinduism, though the ideal of *sannyāsa* (renunciation) is generally accepted as the ultimate goal of the spiritually inclined. To say that Hindus in general have all along neglected to reckon with the demands of life would not be true.

It may be claimed that in the increasing acceptance in New India of the worthwhileness of this-worldly being, especially since Independence, the idea is rapidly gaining ground that as a people Hindus should give more thought to the immediate concerns of life in the living present so that we take more closely to heart the urgency of building the nation on lasting foundations of social justice, economic security and political vitality. The essential task of the present Hindu renaissance is to discover a religious basis for this new secularism which could lend support to this earthly pre-occupation calling for active involvement in purposive plans for the development of long-neglected natural resources, the re-ordering of time-honoured social institutions and for determined efforts to concentrate attention more on the present welfare of all men rather than on the realization of the ultimate destiny of the individual. This kind of secularistic emphasis in contemporary Hinduism is new, though not altogether alien to the Hindu religious heritage.

Dr. Radhakrishnan emphasizes 'a recognition of spiritual realities not by abstention from the world, but by bringing to its life, its business (*artha*) and its pleasure (*kāma*), the controlling power of spiritual faith. Life is one and in it there is no distinction of sacred and secular. *Bhakti* and *mukti* are not opposed. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* go together'.<sup>20</sup>

Many factors have been responsible for this new secularism which dominates Hindu life and thought today. It is a secularism with a difference that it is not to be regarded as a view of life which denies Ultimate Reality and which holds to the theory that life in this world can be organized without any reference to ends and values which are resident, as it were, beyond and outside this world of present existence. Primarily it is secularism because it gives significance to the world of things as contributing to the individual and collective welfare of man in this present moment in history, as a desirable and worthwhile end to be purposefully realized. This kind of secularism recognizes material values; it gives worth and dignity to human person; it places importance on all purposive endeavour to realize a just social order and, above all, it points to the need to take this present moment in world-life seriously. The analysis of the scientific culture which has been increasingly adopted in India indicates that it is primarily a call to purposive action in present history in order to achieve human welfare.

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<sup>20</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1948, p. 106.

The problem is that the traditional understanding of world-life as *saṃsāra* and of the highest religious good as *moksha* in the long course of Hindu religious history has created a dichotomy between 'secular' and 'sacred' which despite the easy claims of Radhakrishnan remains unsolved. The fact would seem to be that in Hindu tradition there is not one, as is commonly supposed, but there are three distinct views about the world. One is the Vedic idea of the world as a reality which is full of promise of gain and happiness. The second is that of the world as a reality full of misery and sorrow. And the third is that of the world as only relatively real. All the three views are present and are fused together in strange combination at all stages of the historical evolution of Hindu religious thought, so that there is at the same time an affirmation, or negation of the question, 'Is this manifold world of things and values, of matter and spirit, of the secular and the sacred real?' This *sat-asat* (true and false) view of the world-life has made possible Hindu acceptance of present history as valid.

The adoption of the secular ideal of the State has raised the question of the co-operation of people of various religions for the common good of the nation as ends which are to be pursued for what they are worth in terms of present world-life. The question is: As Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, etc., where do Indians as Indians find the secular common ground for co-operative endeavour to further the material welfare of all? In this regard contemporary Hindu secularism gives an answer. In the world of everyday experience, some Hindus would hold that the differences which so-called religious people draw in beliefs and practice do not ultimately matter, for religions, like everything else of this world, are not of the stuff that abides.

Radhakrishnan points out, 'Truth for Hinduism is a reality experienced, a light which breaks through the transcendent in man into the partial world reflected by sense and intellect, the world of objectification in which the light is dimmed. The contradiction of theological thought arises when we apply to the spiritual life conceptions drawn from and suitable only to life in this world. To identify the truth with the intellectual form is the sin of rationalism, which is insensitive to the meaning of creative mystery and to the primary spiritual experience in the existential subject in which truth and revelation are one. Those who have had this experience are remote from atheism as much as from unimaginative theism which is lost in outworn and distorted forms of the knowledge of God.'<sup>21</sup> Such a view of religions may be interpreted in two ways. It may be understood to imply that credal affirmations and devotional practices of different religions do not really matter, for on this side of reality, which is the locus of the empirical, 'manyness' is essentially unreal. Or, it may be under-

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<sup>21</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1956, p. 190.



stood to imply that in the final analysis there is in all religions an abiding essence of the universal which men of all faiths need to cherish; the spirit of *sarva samaya samatvaya*, that all religions are basically the same. On both these scores contemporary Hinduism seems to lend support to the new secularism. But in so doing it undermines the basis of responsible co-operation of men of all faiths, and of no faith, in the secular concerns of the State, and it raises once again the question of the ultimate significance of present life by insistence on a dogma which seems to destroy on the one hand what it seeks to build on the other.

Basing his thoughts on Dr. P. D. Devanandan's insights (in his booklet, *The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism*), Dr. Van Leeuwen explains, 'The point at issue is, what exactly does Hinduism continue to represent, if this modern secularism is indeed a part of it? It looks as though this secularism, whilst it means on the one hand a thorough revision of the pattern of society and the modes of Hindu thinking, is on the other hand the prime factor in making Hinduism the national ideology of India. The very unity created by the modern Welfare State is transforming Hinduism from a composite religion of various *samayās* and *mārgas* into a *sanātana dharma*, a comprehensive religion universally applicable to mankind everywhere and at all times. The basic principle of religious relativism, made popular by Gandhiji, acts as the cement so vitally necessary to building up a unified nation.'<sup>22</sup>

In discussing these issues we notice that we are talking about secularism and secularization, which are two different processes. 'Secularism should be understood as that ideology which believes that the process of secularization is the ongoing self-explication of truth, which requires belief from all people. While in the process of secularization metaphysical realities have lost their functionality and are no longer working hypotheses, secularism denies their existence and becomes a historical materialism, which enslaves man anew.'<sup>23</sup> Pointing out the ambiguity of secularization, van den Heuvel claims, 'Bonhoeffer has already carefully indicated that although the Gospel speaks about secular realities in a secular world, it is easy to fall into the pitfall of speaking about *secularized* realities in a *secularized* world. There is a great difference in these two concepts. We have discovered that the Bible is a secular book, or, in other words, that in it the main interest is in what happens on earth. God revealed Himself definitely and fully in Jesus, to whom we give the title Christ for that very reason. We, men, do neither come from heaven, nor are we looking forward to eternal life in heaven. We are *earthlings*, born on *earth* of *earthly* fathers and mothers. When we are

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<sup>22</sup> A. Th. Van Leeuwen, *Christianity in World History*, New York, Scribners, 1965, pp. 364-65.

<sup>23</sup> A. van den Heuvel, *Secularization as Freedom and Yoke*, Study Encounter, Vol. I, No. 2, 1965, p. 60.

reborn by God's heavenly action in Christ, which took place on earth, we are expecting and hoping for the new earth . . . The secularized man, however, is the one who has fallen for secularism. He *refuses* to pray and proclaims that God is dead. He is no longer an agnostic who only knows little and who only accepts the—secondary—metaphysical aspects of the Gospels because they were dear to his Master, but he has become the faithful slave of a new ideology. He speaks about the secular world—which only means the concrete world—as if it is now without God, forgetting that he can only say that because God himself has told him to live that way. The secularized man lives on the fruits of secularization, pretending that they are his rights.<sup>24</sup>

In the light of these considerations, we note that India is more concerned with secularism than with secularization; but as both of these processes are closely related and as they are ambiguous, we can only know their merits and demerits by their fruits. Though some people are prejudiced against these processes either due to lack of understanding of their meaning or by deliberately closing their eyes thinking that they do not exist, this will not lessen the impact of these processes in the present time.

It must be realized that there is only one reality—the reality of God manifest in Jesus Christ in the reality of the world. There is no distinction of 'sacred' and 'secular'. In Jesus Christ the radical separation between Church and world has not simply been transcended but broken down. In Jesus Christ the distinction between churchly existence and worldly existence is relativized. Ultimately, eschatologically, the distinction disappears. As Bonhoeffer points out, though his distinction does indeed remain as a significant distinction, the Christian community must nevertheless always give evidence that it lives in the light of the 'End' in which it believes and for which it hopes.

After having considered these issues, in conclusion, it can be stated that 'Religionless Christianity' might be the answer to India's religious quest after all. India is passing through a period of transition and fermentation, politically, socially, ethically and theologically. It is seeking an answer, a solution that will be meaningful and useful in its struggle. The Church as the 'Community of Saints' (*Sanctorum Communio*) has the tremendous responsibility of presenting Christ as the answer, the solution to the secular man in secular terms in the present context. To this end we strive and struggle, formulating and reformulating the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the issues considered above, so that the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ may be shed abroad in our hearts. I have no pretensions to presenting a solution to the problems raised but only to enumerate them and examine them hoping for a solution to be discovered eventually that will be valid for India.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.