

An Indian Jesus From Advaita Vedānta

K.P. ALEAZ*

(Continued from Vol. 38, No. 2, 1996)

3. The important features of our Jesulogy related to the function of Jesus

The function of Jesus is integrally related to the person of Jesus. What one does is inseparable from what one is. Hence we can characterise the work of Jesus as the expression of the person of Jesus.

Our Jesulogy basically agrees with the contention of the Neo-Vedāntins⁶⁵ that unfortunately the universal message of Jesus which comprises the ideas of the indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal ethics, and spiritual realization was distorted by the Christian Church through fettering it in cast-iron dogmas of innate vileness of human nature, the 'scape-goat' and the 'atonement', physical resurrection and the second advent, earthly kingdom and imminence of the Day of Judgement which are purely sectarian is their scope. Human sacrifice was a Jewish idea and to fit the gentle and loving Jesus into Jewish beliefs, the idea of human sacrifice in the form of atonement or as a human scape goat, by Christianity, was really unfortunate.

Our Jesulogy similar to Subba Rao's takes seriously the Neo-Vedāntic criticism of Christian thought that Christianity distorted the religion of renunciation and realization of the potential divinity, of Jesus into a secular dogmatic religion of the innate vileness of human nature and atoning sacrifice of Christ. We believe that there is justification for this criticism and it is high time that Indian understanding of Jesus gets rectified with regard to the major Christological distortion namely the atonement theory. We may have to qualify

**Dr. K.P. Aleaz is Professor of Religions in Bishop's College, Calcutta, W. Bengal.*

atonement theory as a Jewish Christian interpretation of the meaning of Jesus which makes no sense to Indians. That is the reason as an alternative understanding of the function of Jesus, in our Jesulogy we are explaining Jesus elaborately as the expression of the all pervasive, illuminative and unifying power of the Supreme Self; as the expression of the eternally present human liberation. Also we are showing that the function of Jesus is to show us the Supreme Brahman which is Pure Consciousness as the Witness and Self of all. Such an understanding, we believe, can be a meaningful conception of the function of Jesus as far as Indians are concerned.

(a) The life and work of Jesus manifests the fact that the Supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness (*prajñānaghanam*), is the Witness (*sākṣi*) and Self of all (*sarvātma*)

While we try to grasp the function of Jesus first of all we should understand him as the expression of the fact that the Supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness is the Witness and Self of all. The person of Jesus always testified that the Self is eternal Consciousness (*nityacaitanya svarūpaḥ*) and he as the representative of all Jivas in his essential nature (*svārūpaḥ*) also is the same.⁶⁶ In Jesus we come to the conviction that all human perception and knowledge ultimately is through the Supreme Self.⁶⁷ In the person of Jesus, Consciousness is proved to be invariable (*caitanyaśyāvyabhicāritvam*) from the fact Consciousness remains unchanged even when objects change in their essence and because anything, that is known in any way, emerges to consciousness only as such an object of knowledge.⁶⁸ Jesus bears witness to the fact that Consciousness (*viññānam*) is Brahman's own form (*svārūpam*) and he exhorts us that the Self, should be realized in one form only, i.e., as homogeneous Pure Consciousness (*viññānaghani karasaprakāreṇa*) without any break in Him, like the space (*akāśavannirāmtarena*).⁶⁹

Jesus reveals to us that Brahman being eternal Consciousness (*nityaviññāptisvarūpatvāt*) is the Witness of all (*sarvasākṣi*)⁷⁰. Jesus is the prototype of the knowers of the Self (*ātmavida*), those discriminating people (*vivekina*) who know their own Self as the Witness of all intellectual modifications with regard to such objects as sound etc.

(*śabdādiviṣayabuddhipratyayasākṣinam*).⁷¹ We can learn the lesson from Jesus that the eternal vision of the Self witnesses the non-eternal external vision (*nityāatmano drṣṭirbāhyānityadrṣtergrāhikā*); but since the external vision has such changing attributes as growth and decay, the vision of the Self that witnesses it, appears accordingly and seems to be non-eternal owing to human error (*lokasya brāntinimittam*).⁷² The person of Jesus testifies to the fact that the vision of the Witness, the Self, is like the sun etc. revealing things (*ādityā diprakāśakarṇtvavat*)⁷³. And an important aspect of the gospel in the person Jesus is that unless there by some principle running through everything and abiding through all the three periods of time or some unchanging Witness of all (*sarvārthadarśini*) there can be no human dealing involving remembrance, recognition, etc. and that principle is the Self which is Brahman.⁷⁴

Jesus in his person shows us that the terms Self and Brahman qualify one another (*ātmabrahmaśabdayoritaretaraviśeṣaṇaviśeṣyatvam*); it becomes established in Jesus that Brahman is the Self of all (*sarvātmā*).⁷⁵ Jesus through his life exhorts us that the Supreme Lord is to be realized as one's own Self (*atmetyeva paramēśvaraḥ pratipattavyaḥ*).⁷⁶ The fact proclaimed by the person and life of Jesus that Brahman is the Self of all shows in the human body the existence of Brahman as well as Its indescribability: Everyone feels that his/her Self exists; had there been no general recognition of the existence of the Self (*yadi hi nātmāstitvapasiddhiḥ syāt sarveloko*), everyone would have felt, 'I do not exist'.⁷⁷ Brahman as the Self in Jesus shows the indescribability of Brahman because no self-revelation is possible by anything, just as fire which burns and illumines, does not illumine or burn itself (*na hyātmānam prakāśayati dahati*).⁷⁸

b) *The life and work of Jesus reveals the all-pervasive power (sarvagatatvam) of the Supreme Self*

Jesus is the expression of the all-pervasive power (*sarvagatatvam*) of the Supreme Self.⁷⁹ The Self as Witness pervades the sight, hearing, thought and knowledge of Jesus, the human representative. The vision of Jesus originates and

ends pervaded by the eternal vision of the Self (*tatā vyāptaiva jāyate tathā vinaśyati ca*).⁸⁰ The person of Jesus teaches us that we cannot see, hear, think about and know the eternal Witness, hearer, thinker and knower who pervades (*vyāptāram*) our ordinary sight, hearing, thought (*manovṛtteḥ*) and knowledge (*buddhivṛtteḥ*).⁸¹ The elements related to Jesus have activity only when they are presided over (*sādhyaksāṅgāmeva*) by the Supreme Lord; they perform their activity through the pervasive presence of the Supreme Lord (*paramēśvarāveśavaśādeva*).⁸² The effect is pervaded and held together by its cause and the Supreme Cause, the Brahman-Ātman pervades and holds together everything including Jesus the human representative; though at the same time totally different from all its effects. The person of Jesus testifies to an ascending gradation of pervasiveness from grossness to subtleness, from the gross senses to Puruṣa who is the culmination of subtleness, greatness and inner Selfhood, through the intermediary stages of subtle elements, mind, intellect, Hiranyagarbha and the Unmanifest.⁸³

The five sheaths (*pañcakosāḥ*) of the human person Jesus are physical, vital, mental, intelligent and blissful and the Self is implanted (*mayah*) in each of them as well as innermost to all of them. As the Self permeates each of these sheaths of the human representative Jesus they each are called physical (*annamayah*), vital (*prāṇamayah*), mental (*manomayah*), intelligent (*vijñānamayah*) and blissful (*ānandamayah*).⁸⁴ Perhaps one of the important meanings of Jesus which India proclaim through Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta is the gospel that the Supreme Brahman as the Self of all always pervades all the aspects of our being and this is what the implantation of the Self in the different human sheaths of Jesus points to. The person and work of Jesus direct us not to consider any of the sheath-selves of us as the Supreme Self, but at the same time his life insists us that at every sheath of our person we should identify and affirm the presence of the Supreme Self. The self implanted in the vital force (*ātmā prāṇamayah*) of Jesus is within and different from his self implanted in food (*annamayah ātmā*); within that is his self implanted in mind and self implanted in intellect (*tadāntarmanomayo*

viññānamayaḥ) and thus by stages the self has been made to enter into the cavity of the intellect of Jesus (*iti viññānagu hāyāṃ praveśitaḥ*). And there, again, has been presented a distinct self of Jesus that is implanted in bliss. And Jesus realised within this cavity of the intellect through knowledge that Self which is Brahman as the culmination of the growth of bliss.⁸⁵ All the five selves of Jesus which are made up of the elements beginning with space (*ākāśādi bhūtārabdhaiḥ*) that are the creation of ignorance (*avidyākṛtaiḥ*) successively pervade the preceding one (*pūrvapūrvavyāpibhiruttarottaraiḥ*) and the Self pervades all (*sarvagataḥ*).⁸⁶ The self constituted by the essence of food of Jesus (*aṇṇarasamayā*) has a human shape (*puṣṇavidhatvaṃ*) and hence the succeeding selves of Jesus also become humanly shaped. The vital force (*prāṇaḥ*) of Jesus is the representative life of all and the food-self is filled with it just as belows are filled with air (*vāyuneva drtiḥ*) and similarly the earlier selves of Jesus, the human representative are filled up by the succeeding ones (*pūrvāḥ pūrvāścottarottareṇa pūrṇaḥ*).⁸⁷ The mental self of Jesus consists of the Vedas (*manomayo vedātmoktaḥ*) and his intelligence-self represents the well ascertained knowledge (*niścayaviññānaiḥ*) regarding them.⁸⁸ The intellect of Jesus is pervaded by the reflection of Pure Consciousness that is Self and it causes the knowledge of Brahman due to its nearness to Brahman.⁸⁹ The bliss-self of Jesus acts as a pointer (*liṅgaḥ*) to the Supreme Self, though it belongs to the category of the conditioned selves.⁹⁰ The life of Jesus teaches us the all-pervasiveness of Brahman: Being all-pervasive like space, Brahman can very well dwell inside everything (*sarvagatat-vāt brahmaṇo vyomavatsarvāntaratvopapatteḥ*); It remains ever attained by everybody (*nityāptasvarūpatvātsarveṇa*).⁹¹ Thus the function of the person of Jesus is to proclaim the gospel that the Supreme Self pervades everything, everywhere for all times.

c) *The life and work of Jesus proclaims the illuminative power of the Supreme Self (ātma-*jyotiḥ*)*

The life and work of Jesus always proclaimed that Brahman is the light of the Self which is Consciousness (*caitanya-*

jyotih svabhāvam); the Supreme Lord (*paramēśvaraḥ*) is the self-effulgent Self (*svayamjyotirātmaiva*), self-effulgence meaning the character of Pure Consciousness (*caitanyātmavabhāvatā*).⁹² The manifestation noticed in the case of names, forms, actions and results (*nāmarūpakriyā kārakaphalajātasya*) of Jesus, the human representative is caused by the existence of the light of Brahman (*brahmajyotih sattānimittā*).⁹³ The light of Brahman is implied (*avagamyate*) by the light seen in Jesus who was born from It. The mission of Jesus was to communicate to humanity the uniqueness of Brahman as the only illuminative principle.⁹⁴ And Jesus proclaims that Brahman reveals all others, but Brahman is not revealed by them (*brahma hyanyadvacanakti natu brahmānyena vyajyate*).⁹⁵ Jesus, the human representative always acknowledges that since the Self constitutes the essence of everything, the internal organ cannot act with regard to its own Self (*sarvaviśayam prati pratyagēveti svātmani na pravartate antahakaraṇam*); the mind can think only when it is illumined by the light of Consciousness within (*atasthena hi caitanyajyotiṣāvabhāsitasya manaso mananasāmarthyam*).⁹⁶ In Jesus we get a glimpse of Brahman because the person and work of Jesus proclaims the Supreme Self as the Ear of the ear (*śrotasya śrotam*), the Mind of mind (*manasomanoh*), the Speech of speech (*vāco vācam*), the Life of life (*prāṇasya prāṇah*) and the Eye of the eye (*caḥṣusaścaḥṣuḥ*) as all these organs can perform their functions only through the radiance of the light of Consciousness (*caitanyajyotiṣā dīpitam*).⁹⁷

The person of Jesus is the affirmation and proclamation of the fact that as an emerald or any other gem (*marakatādirmanih*) dropped for testing into milk etc., imparts its lustre to them (*ātmacchāyameva tatḥṣīrādiravyam karoti*) the luminous Self (*ātmajyotih*) unifies and integrates (*ekīkṛtya*) the intellect and all other organs within the human body (*kāryakaraṇasamghātam*) and imparts His/Her lustre to them (*ātmajyotiśchāyam karoti*).⁹⁸ The life of Jesus teaches us that it is always through the grace of the light of Self that all our activities take place (*ātmajyotiranugraheṇaiva hisarvadā sarvaḥ samvyavahārah*).⁹⁹ The message of Jesus to the whole creation is that the Supreme Self is one and illumines (*pra-*

kāśayati) all bodies, the whole material being (*kṣetram*) from the unmanifest (*avyaktaḥ*) down to the unmoving objects from the great elements (*mahābhūtāni*) down to courage.¹⁰⁰ Jesus is the affirmation that the light of Consciousness (*caitanyaḥ*) exists in all alike, in the moving and unmoving objects, directly proportional to the sattva principle they possess.¹⁰¹

d) The life and work of Jesus is the manifestation of the unifying power (ekīkrtya) of the Supreme Self

Jesus stands out in history proclaiming the gospel that the Self is the only common referent of the universe (*ātmasāmānyatva*), its origin and its end; all things are unified in Brahman because the varieties of genus and particulars are not different from It.¹⁰² Jesus is the visible manifestation of the Self's identification with everything. He reminds us that the Self cannot be taken apart from anything else (*kutaścitpravibhajya*).¹⁰³ The person of Jesus as the representative name and form is the symbol of unification of the elements, organs, objects, mind, intellect and vital force in the Self. In Jesus we see the organs (*karaṇam*) to be of the same category (*samānājātīyam*) as the objects (*viśayam*) and the generalities (*sāmānyānām*) of these are unified (*praviṣṭam*) is a general consideration by his mind (*manoviśayasāmānyamātre*) which in turn is unified in a general cognition by the intellect (*buddhiviśayasāmānyamātre*) and this through discrimination (*viññānamātrameva*) is merged (*pralīyate*) in Pure Consciousness. And the general functions of the motor organs are again nothing but the vital force of Jesus (*prāṇamātram*) which in turn is only Pure Consciousness (*prāṇaśca prajñānamātram*).¹⁰⁴

The Self, illumining the intellect of Jesus, illumines throught it the entire body and organs (*kṣetramavabhāsayati*) and therefore through the similarity of the intellect of Jesus (*buddhisāmānyadvāreṇa*) the Self assumes the likeness of everything (*tena sarveṇa samānaḥ*).¹⁰⁵ As each particular organ of Jesus functions, the Self is internally present to it (*tasya tasyendriyaśya vyāpārodbhave tattnnayo bhavati*) and this fact proclaims to us that as each particular organ of us functions, the Self is internally present to it.¹⁰⁶ The vital force and the

organs of Jesus and us are merely the Self's names according to functions (*karmajāni nāmāni*) and they are unified in the Self or become non-different (*ekamabhinnatām bhavanti*) from the unconditioned (*nirupādhike*) Self only as His/Her own essence (*vastumātrarūpeṇa hi*).¹⁰⁷ The Self unifies Jesus and all of us, in Him/Her as His/Her homogeneous essence and it is in this way that Jesus can be designated as the expression of the unificative power of the Supreme Self. The point is that because of Jesus, us and the manifold universe, no heterogeneity (*anekarasatā*) happens to the Self; the Self is always One of homogeneity (*ekarasatā*). It is this knowledge of the homogeneity of Jesus, us and the whole creation as Brahman that constitutes the realization of the unity of the Self (*ātmaikatvadarśanātmikām*).¹⁰⁸

e) *The life and work of Jesus is the affirmation of the eternally present (nityasiddhasvabhāvam) human liberation*

Jesus, our representative points to human liberation as simultaneous with the rise of illumination. Jesus' representative vision as the Self of all (*sarvātmavām*) occurs simultaneously with the rise of complete illumination (*samyagdarśanakārameva*) and it is a matter of immediate direct result (*pratyakṣaphalatvāt*), the result of knowledge being a matter of direct experience (*anubhavārūḍham tu jñānaphalam*).¹⁰⁹ The life of Jesus is the proof that sin becomes dissipated when Brahman is known (*brahmādhigame duritakṣaya iti shitaṁ*);¹¹⁰ as a result of knowledge (*vidyayā*) there is a dissociation of the Self from the senses and elements.¹¹¹ The gospel of Jesus from India for the whole humanity is that liberation is an ever attained fact (*nityasiddhasvabhāvam*).¹¹² The life of Jesus points to the fact that liberation is the cessation of bondage and not the production of any fresh result (*bandhaniṁvṛtti mātrūpeṣā, nāpūrvopajana nāpeṣā*).¹¹³ Liberation in Jesus is the removal of ignorance and the affirmation of one's own real nature which is the Self who is beyond acceptance and rejection.¹¹⁴ Jesus tells us that we cannot reach where we already are; the Supreme Brahman can never become a goal to be attained (*gamitavyatā*) as It pervades everything (*sarvagatām*), is inside everything

(*sarvāntaram*) and is the Self of all (*sarvātmaṁ*).¹¹⁵ The person of Jesus is the affirmation of the gospel that because the Self is our own Self, He/she cannot be produced, attained, modified or improved (*notpadya āpyo vikāryaḥ samskāryovā*) by any means (*kenacitsādhanena*) like son, rites, etc.¹¹⁶ Also, it is not possible that a knower of Brahman like our representative Jesus should depart or have any path to follow (*utkrāntirgatih*) because realization of the Self can take place in his very life and very body.¹¹⁷ The life of Jesus affirms that the knowledge of the Innermost Self becomes possible for the whole humanity when the ego vanishes (*nivṛttavagamaḥ siddhiḥ svātmanoanubhavaśca naḥ*); when the identification of other things as Self is destroyed (*anyātmabhāvanivṛtau*) the experience of the Self as one's own Self which is natural alone will remain (*ātmabhāvāḥ svātmani svābhāviko yaḥ sa kevalo bhavati*).¹¹⁸ Also, in the knowledge leading to liberation promised in Jesus, there can be no such distinction as superiority and inferiority (*utkarṣanikarṣātmakaḥ*).¹¹⁹

Thus we saw above a practical demonstration of an Indian dialogical theology, more specifically an Indian dialogical Jesology in terms of the perspective of Pluralistic Inclusivism for the relational convergence of religions, in this case of Hinduism and Christianity. It also points to the fact that our hermeneutical context, a major factor of which is Advaita Vedānta, decides the content of our theology. We tried to make the very content of the revelation of God in Jesus truly pluralistic by elaborating the contributions of Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta to it. There is a possibility of understanding the person of Jesus as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*) of Brahman, the name and form (*nāmarūpa*) of Brahman, the effect (*kārya*) of Brahman, as well as the reflection (*ābhāsa*) and delimitation (*ghatākāśaḥ*) of Brahman. There is also a possibility of interpreting the function of Jesus as to manifest the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvaṁ*), illuminative (*jyotiḥ*) and unifying (*ekīkṛtya*) power of the Supreme Ātman; as to manifest that the Supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness (*prajñāna-ghanam*) is the Witness (*Sākṣi*) and Self of all (*Sarvātmā*) and as to manifest the eternally present (*nityasiddhasvabhāvam*) human liberation.

References

65. cf. K.P. Aleaz, *Jesus in Neo-Vedānta. A Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity*, Delhi; Kant Publications, 1995.
66. *B.S.B.*, 2.3.29; *U.S.*, 18.118; *Pr.U.B.*, 6.2.
67. *Ka.U.B.*, 2.1.3.
68. *Pr.U.B.*, 6.2.
69. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.1.1; *Pr.U.B.*, 6.2.
70. *Ka.U.B.*, 1.3.15; *B.S.B.*, Introduction.
71. *Mu.U.B.*, 2.2.10.
72. *Ai.U.B.*, 2.1. Introduction; *Br.U.B.*, 1.4.10.
73. *Br.U.B.*, 4.3.23.
74. *B.S.B.*, 2.2.31.
75. *C.U.B.*, 5.11.1.
76. *B.S.B.*, 4.1.3.
77. *B.S.B.*, 1.1.1; *Ke.U.B.*, 1.3.
78. *Ke.U.B.*, 1.3.
79. *B.S.B.*, 3.2.37.
80. *Br.U.B.*, 3.4.2.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *B.S.B.*, 2.3.13.
83. *Ka.U.B.*, 1.3.10, 11.
84. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.2.1.
85. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.6.1.
86. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.3.1.
87. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.2.1.
88. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.4.1.
89. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.6.1; *U.S.* 12.1,6.
90. *Ta.U.B.*, 2.5.1.
91. *U.S.*, 18.15.7.
92. *Br.U.B.*, 4.3.22; *Ka.U.B.*, 2.3.1; *Br.U.B.*, 4.4.22.
93. *BS.B.*, 1.3.22.
94. *Ka.U.B.*, 2.2.15.
95. *B.S.B.*, 1.3.22.
96. *Ke.U.B.*, 1.6.
97. *Ke.U.B.*, 1.2.
98. *B.S.B.*, 4.3.7.
99. *Ibid.*
100. *B.G.B.*, 13.33.
101. *B.G.B.* 15.12.
102. *Br.U.B.*, 2.5.1; 2.4.9.
103. *Br.U.B.*, 4.3.7.
104. *Br.U.B.*, 2.4.11.
105. *Br.U.B.*, 4.3.7.
106. *Br.U.B.*, 4.4.5.
107. *Br.U.B.*, 1.4.7.
108. *B.S.B.*, 1.3.1; *Br.U.B.*, 1.4.7; 5.1.1.
109. *B.S.B.*, 3.3.32.
110. *B.S.B.* 4.1.13.

111. *B.S.B.* 1.4.22.
112. *B.S.B.*, 3.4.52.
113. *B.S.B.*, 4.4.2.
114. *U.S.*, 16.41.
115. *B.S.B.*, 1.1.4; 4.3.14.
116. *Br.U.B.*, 4.4.22.
117. *B.S.B.*, 4.2.13; 4.3.14.
118. *Br.U.B.*, 4.4.20; *U.S.*, 16.41.
119. *B.S.B.*, 3.4.52.