

10 December 1962

TRUE RELIGION

PART 1

Today I want to talk about Religion, and I want to do that for a particular reason. It is not only that Christmas is coming and if we really are Christians Christmas would mean to us something more than Christmas cards and parties, just as the Christmas tree itself and the mistletoe have deeper meanings. My reason is that we live in a house of three storeys, of which the top storey and the lower storey are more or less furnished, but the middle storey is remarkably bare and cold. It is an unlovely place full of empty trunks and bric-a-brac, and there isn't even a fire there. For us the top-room is furnished with a System of Knowledge – a splendid System with which we can find our way about, as with a map. The lowest room, too, is now furnished with a number of practical methods, so that any of us can have all the technique necessary.

But none of this satisfies us if the middle storey is bare and cold. For 'central heating' the middle storey needs the awakening of real Religion. Then the furnishings in the form of the Arts will be beautiful and appropriate.

Now what is real religion and what is pseudo-religion? For people in the Outer Circle, who are not on the Ladder, the situation with regard to religion is as described in an early talk on the System (1915):

Imagine that we are sitting here talking of religions and that the maid Masha hears our conversation. She, of course, understands it in her own way and she repeats what she has understood to the porter Ivan. The porter Ivan again understands it in his own way and he repeats what he has understood to the coachman Peter next door. The coachman Peter goes to the country and recounts in the village what the gentry talk about in town. Do you think that what he recounts will at all resemble what we said? This is precisely the relation between existing religions and that which was their basis. You get teachings, traditions, prayers, rites, not at fifth but at twenty-fifth hand, and, of course, almost everything has been distorted beyond recognition and everything essential forgotten long ago.

[For example, it is impossible to understand Christ's words and actions as recounted in the Gospels without understanding about the Four Bodies, and therefore it is impossible to understand certain words of the Creed which people repeat Sunday after Sunday, nor to understand the meaning of the Mass or the Communion Service. Men of the Outer Circle are quite content to go through the ritual without the understanding; but for men of the Inner Circle the ritual has preserved through the centuries the essential meaning which they continue to understand.]

In those early conversations (*Fragments*, pp. 299–301)

... G. invariably began by emphasising the fact that there is something very wrong at the basis of our usual attitude towards problems of religion.

'In the first place,' he said, 'religion is a relative concept; it corresponds to the level of a man's being; and one man's religion might not be at all suitable for another man, that

is to say, the religion of a man of one level of being is not suitable for a man of another level of being. ... The religion of man number four, number five, and further is something of a kind totally different from the religion of a man number one, number two, and number three.

'In the second place religion is *doing*; a man does not merely *think* his religion or feel it, he 'lives' his religion as much as he is able, otherwise it is not religion but fantasy or philosophy. Whether he likes it or not, he can only show his attitude towards religion by his actions... The vast majority of people who call themselves Christians have no right whatever to do so, because they not only fail to carry out the demands of their religion but they do not even think that these demands ought to be carried out.

'... In order to be a Christian it is necessary not only to desire, but *to be able* to be one.'

'Cannot prayer help a man to live like a Christian?' asked someone.

'It depends upon whose prayer,' said G. 'The prayer of subjective man, that is of man number one, number two and number three, can give only subjective results, namely, self-consolation, self-suggestion, self-hypnosis. It cannot give objective results...

'Ancient prayers have nothing in common with petitions. These prayers are, so to speak, *recapitulations*, by repeating them aloud or to himself a man endeavours to experience what is in them, their whole content with his mind and feeling... For example, a man says – "I want to be serious". But the whole point is how he says it. If he repeats it even ten thousand times a day and is thinking of how soon he will finish and what will there be for dinner and the like, then it is not prayer, but simply self-deceit.' ...

In another talk in 1915 the common varieties of religion were described:

The religion of man number one is a religion consisting of rites, of external forms, of sacrifices and ceremonies of imposing splendour and brilliance, or on the contrary of a gloomy, cruel and savage character. There is the religion of Man number two: the religion of faith, love, adoration, impulse, enthusiasm, which soon becomes transformed into the religion of persecution, oppression, and extermination of 'heretics' and 'heathens'. There is religion of Man number three; this intellectual, theoretical religion of proofs and arguments, based upon logical deductions, and interpretations. Religions number one, number two, and number three are the only ones we know; all known religions and denominations in the world belong to one of these three categories. What the religion of number four or the religion of Man number five and so on is, we do not know, and we cannot know so long as we remain what we are.

Oh, but now we *do* know! This was one of the chief discoveries in India, though it seemed to come about by chance – a piece of unexpected good luck. It arose in this way:

22nd October 1962

Seeing the temple in the grounds of the Ashram, sitting next to the Priest and his associates at the meetings each day, I had asked my friend and interpreter, Jaiswal, who had spent the first nineteen years of his life in Allahabad, what His Holiness' religion was. Jaiswal replied, 'Sanatan, the same religion to which my own family belongs.' I said that I had never heard of it, what was it? But Jaiswal was rather vague on the subject, he only knew about the external side, the rituals and so on. We agreed we should ask when occasion presented.

Today, as no one else happened to be present except the Priest, we first put a question to know if the Initiation Ceremony which we use was exactly as His Holiness wants it.

We had been instructed by the Maharishi to say, 'First I will recite the Holy Tradition of the Great Masters, the cherished custodians of the Wisdom of the Vedas, of the Upanishads, of the Bhagavad-Gita, and invoke their blessings for Divine Revelation: Narayanam, Shaktim, Vyasa, Govinda Yogeendra, Shri Shankaracharya and many more as far as Brahmanand Saraswati and yourself, Shantanand Saraswati of today.'

When we had finished describing the giving of the Meditation in detail he said that this is exactly how he performs the initiations, and explained why. If we want to go somewhere we have to find the world routes on a map, or else we have to get the direction of people who could guide us on the way. For an individual the direction of the Way is not going anywhere else in the outside world, but going into *himself*. The trouble is that although we live in our own house, yet we don't know it and we don't *remember* what lies inside, but when we remember the names of these great men who are one with the Atman, then their power guides us around inside our own house. They help us to get into the Way, to reach our own Realization. By remembering them we remember ourSelves, and so this is a help to us to come to our Divine Self, the Atman.

Then we put the question: 'What is the meaning of Sanatan?' He replied:

The word Sanatan is made up of two words, Sada and Tan. Tan means the body, the inner body; Sada means Eternal; so Sanatan means 'the body of Eternal religion'. The practice of Eternal religion is called Sanatan Dharma. Dharma is that quality which everything natural contains in itself for its existence, that is the intrinsic goodness of everything and the natural laws which govern it. Sanatan Dharma is the religion of the Atman, the Divine Self, the natural laws of the Atman.

As an example of such a natural law, he said that if somebody wants to speak lies all the day he just cannot do it, because it is not the nature of the Atman to speak a lie. But if somebody wants to learn to speak the Truth all day, it can be done, it is not impossible. This is so because the nature of the Atman is to be truthful. Atman is Truth. The Sanatan Dharma is the original, the root of all religions in the past and of the religions which we see today. The different religions, Hindu, Moslem, Christian, Jain, and so on have somehow come out of this and taken different shapes. Also with the help of great men, lesser men contrive to be helped on their way, so with the help of the Atman, and the religion of the Atman, their religion can also benefit. The original which is Eternal, without beginning and without end, will go on.

Another example is that of a boy who has to learn something. The initial stages of learning are difficult, he has got to work hard; once he gets over that initial stage, things become easier and he hasn't to go on learning all his life. He learns for a short time, and then he has to put into practice what he has learnt over a much longer period. Just so in the creation of Sanatan, the initial laws of the Atman are of course difficult, but once one gets help of all the laws, life becomes easier – without trouble.

Q. Why are the external forms, the rituals, necessary and a part of all religions?

S. They are necessary for common man (Men 1, 2, and 3 our System calls them) because the tendency of the common man is to seize on a set of words, a sentence of some Enlightened man, without troubling to learn what is necessary to understand them.

He once told us a story to illustrate this:

A man went to a saint and asked to be told about God. The saint said: 'I will give you the simplest and shortest answer possible, just three words, 'God is everywhere'. But even that you won't understand, I warn you.' Well pleased and

thinking he now knew it all, the man set off for home. On the road he saw an elephant approaching, ridden by his mahout. He thought, 'Perhaps I should get out of the way; but no, the saint said God is everywhere, so God must be in the elephant and God must be in me too; can God hurt God? – of course not!' So he walked on. Coming nearer the mahout shouted to him to get out of the way, but saying 'God is everywhere' he walked right on to the elephant, who took him in his trunk and hurled him out on to a pile of stones by the roadside. When he had recovered a little from his hurt he limped back to the saint and said, 'Look, I carried out your instructions and see what has happened to me.' The saint said, 'Tell me exactly what happened', and he gave him a complete account. The saint then said, 'You see, I warned you you wouldn't understand. You remember some things but forget others. Certainly God is everywhere. God was in the elephant and God was in you, but God was also in the mahout, and the mahout ordered you to get out of the way and you disobeyed God and got what you deserved!'

I asked, 'Can one enter into Sanatan religion by inner understanding of it, or must one be admitted into it and adopt its rituals?'

S. It is not necessary at all to embrace our Sanatan Dharma. *Every religion contains Sanatan Dharma*. If each one follows his own religion truthfully, he would for certain be following Sanatan Dharma. It is the basis of all religions and their centre. There is no need for anybody to change his present religion.

The interpreter, Jaiswal, becoming very interested, asked him: 'Who founded the tradition of Sanatan Dharma and how was it supported and carried on?'

He answered that the Tradition was founded by just those men whose names you pronounce at Initiation, Narayanam, the first one and those who followed him, Shaktim, Vyasa,[†] Govinda Yogeendra, Shri Shankaracharya and all down to the present day, and they are the real men, the Realized men who were behind Sanatan Dharma. When we use their names we want their blessing so that they can help us on our way. In the world, if we go on a long tour we take some companion. In the tour to the Atman these people are our companions.

Once a King announced that he would give his Kingdom to any person who would come to him by 4 o'clock. All the people heard it and thought it a good idea to go and meet him at 4 o'clock and get the Kingdom. But what the King did was this. In his capital city he put beautiful shops containing everything that can be had, jewellery, gold, silks, toys and everything that anybody would want to have, and at every gate and in every quarter of the city there were people to give away all these things without payment, all free. Thousands of people started out to come and get the Kingdom which the King had promised to give away, but they let themselves be persuaded to go to the shops and be given free all that they wanted and just enjoy themselves. So they lost themselves among the golden ornaments, silks and jewels, the beautiful clothes. But one man did not listen to anyone of those people. He went straight without letting anyone dissuade him and he just went through and met the King at the appointed time

[†]Verse 75, Ch.18 of the Bhagavad-Gita reads:

'By the grace of the poet Vyasa I heard these words of secret silence.'

and demanded the Kingdom, which the King duly gave him. The moment he took over the Government, he issued an edict to arrest all those people who were taking those things without paying for them, and put them to useful work.

The same can be related to our Work. If somebody wants the Kingdom he has to go straight inward for it and get it. But unfortunately the pleasures and the beauties of the world tempt nearly everyone away. That is the Kingdom about which Sanatan Dharma tells and the Kingdom to which the Meditation and the System lead.

Jaiswal asked him as follows:

I understand that rituals are also important part of Sanatan Dharma. How could one find the relation between the real Sanatan Dharma and the rituals? What is it that the people in the West should take?

S. Rituals are for ordinary common people, the physical way of bringing about the feeling of religion. If one possesses the right feeling one does not need the rituals. There is no need for Western man to change his religion or resort to daily rituals at all. We dress ourselves up when we go to meet important people, so we do the rituals to get prepared in feeling. When people's level is very low and they cannot hold much in their heart and mind in its purity, they create physical ways and means of doing that. Sanatan Dharma in purity is nothing to do with race, religion, or external culture of men. The laws of nature are above these temporary limitations.

From this conversation, it at once became clear that there can be no conflict at all between true religious feeling and the search for true Knowledge. It is the same Ladder of understanding of Natural Laws (Physics or Dharma) and the same goal – Real 'I', the Atman, which can be sought and found from any of the three rooms. From the lowest room union with Atman can be achieved by any of the physical Ways; from the middle room the same result can be reached by religious or devotional Ways; from the top room by the Way of knowledge. On the Fourth Way (the Way of Understanding), both in the Shankaracharya's Tradition and in ours, it is sought by the Meditation and by all three simultaneously, so the result can come much quicker.

Looking at the Nyaya Ladder again, we see that Religion, like everything else, will appear quite different according to the step from which we look, or to men in the Common life, the Special Life or the Singular life; and each step can be taken from the rational, the devotional or the instinctive angle.

To the discerning Christian who learns to 'separate the false from the True', Christ is saying the same thing:

Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel... thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and the platter that the outside of them may be clean also...

And to the lawyer who asked, 'What is the great commandment in the law?':

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.

That is real Sanatan Dharma. Then there followed (at the last Monday meeting) a recording made of the *Hymn of Jesus* from the *Apocryphal Gospel of St. John*.

*

PART 2

The rest of this recorded conversation with the Shankaracharya suggests a way of speaking to unprepared people in order to attract them to the Meditation, whereby the Spiritual life and the external life can go hand in hand:

Everybody in the world, the whole human being, has universally certain things in common. White man, red man, black man, yellow man, brown man, they all show pleasure or happiness just in the same manner, and that applies to many other instinctive functions as well. They weep or laugh in the same way. Nowhere are these things different among human beings, so there must have been initially something common to all people – and he quotes three things which everybody in the world wants and has always wanted:

The first is a thirst for knowledge; everybody wants knowledge in this direction or that. It is inherent in human nature that it must have knowledge, and always bigger and wider knowledge. The second want is that a happy moment, happiness or pleasure, should endure for ever. People have always wanted good moments to last, they have wanted eternal happiness with all the resources for happiness. The third is based on the instinct of self-preservation, the desire that he himself should remain for ever. No man wants to die, and even if a man is prepared for the death of the body, he would like to live on in fame or remembrance, he would like something of himself to remain for ever. Ask yourself the question, isn't perhaps your deepest fear that the whole of you might be blotted out of the Book of Life for all time?

Now if you look beyond these three primary desires, you will see that this is what is expressed in the three Indian words, Sat-Chit-Ananda, the qualities of God. 'Sat' means Eternal Truth, that which exists for ever; 'chit' means Consciousness or awareness; 'ananda' means Happiness. Those three together would give people what everybody has always wanted. It is to this Sat-Chit-Ananda that the system of Meditation leads, and it is the most direct method possible for any man, for all men alike. This is also the *inner* meaning of all religions, whatever their external forms, and this is what is provided by a System of Knowledge, just that Knowledge necessary about the structure and nature of man and his place in the world to take him to the Realization of his Divine Self with his full possibilities.

Because of the confusion of the times, we have forgotten what we really know. We simply look for the outside, we don't look inside. If we go a little further within past the threshold, we may enter the domain of Sat-Chit-Ananda by ourselves. Again, in the world we look for the form, we look for beauty of form. What is beauty?

We want to contemplate it, but can we? Do we have the power to see the Beauty always in everything, and can the beauty stay the same for ever? It is always changing. But the Higher or Divine Self, the Atman, which is within every man, does not change. Everything else changes, everything else belongs to the Maya, the illusion, and is always changing. But if you look inside, you see the Eternal Beauty and the Eternal change remains outside.

Now again, supposing somebody wants wealth, wants to accumulate things, wants possessions, and he works very hard for this; but how much harder he *could* work! Suppose you go to him and say, 'Well, I'll give you the entire world, everything; everything except one thing, we won't let you rest.' He might try for a day or even two or three days, but he could not go beyond that; he will readily give up the entire world and say, 'I just want a little rest. Let me have that, that is enough for me; you can take

your entire world.' Now what is that rest that everybody wants at times? It is inner food, the inner food of the Atman. Just as we need the food of impressions in the world, we live by impressions, so Atman needs certain kinds of food which he can get only through a man's rest. We must go in, physically and mentally also. This is the conception of Sat-Chit-Ananda and the reason for the universal need for meditation.

Perhaps that part of a man which is most hungry nowadays, most starved, is the middle storey, his emotional life. For this, some idea of the inner meaning of religion is very useful.

* * *

