

THE MARRIAGE OF EAST AND WEST

A SEQUEL TO *THE GOLDEN STRING*

Bede Griffiths

Formerly a monk of Prinknash Abbey and Prior of Farnborough Abbey in England, Bede Griffiths went to India in 1955 and assisted in the foundation of Kurisumala Ashram, a monastery of the Syrian rite in Kerala. In 1968 he came with two monks from Kurisumala to Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, in Tamil Nadu (the former Madras State). This ashram was founded in 1950 by two Frenchmen, Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, and was a pioneer attempt in India to found a Christian community following the customs of a Hindu ashram and adapting itself to Hindu ways of life and thought. It has become a prayer center, where people of different religious traditions meet together in an atmosphere of prayer and grow together towards that unity in Truth which is the goal of all religion.

\$12.95

ISBN 0-87243-105-3



9 780872 431058

THE MARRIAGE OF EAST & WEST

Bede Griff

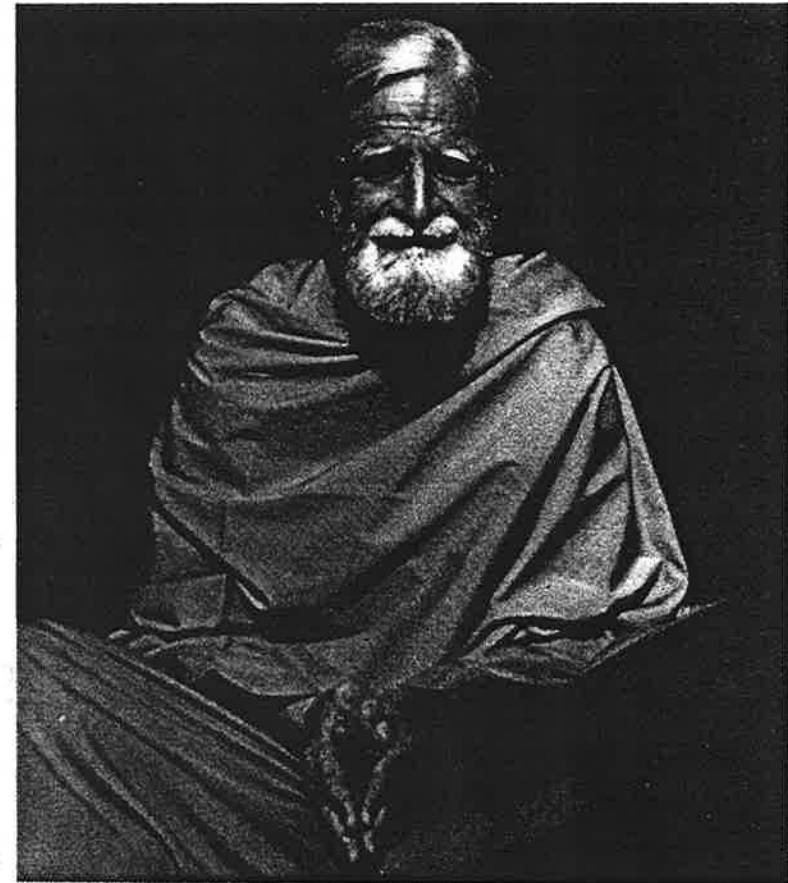
4



BEDE GRIFFITHS

THE MARRIAGE OF EAST & WEST

A SEQUEL TO *THE GOLDEN STRING*



7-10~

The Discovery of India

When I wrote *The Golden String*,¹ telling the story of my search for God, which led me to the Catholic Church and to a Benedictine monastery, I thought that I had reached the end of my journey, at least as far as this world was concerned. But in fact, even while I was writing *The Golden String*, a new era was about to begin in my life, which was to bring about changes, as profound as any that had gone before. I had been led to the discovery first of God, then of Christ, and finally of the Church. But now I have been led in a strange way to retrace the path I had taken and to make new discoveries about God, about Christ and about the Catholic Church. It was as though I had been climbing a mountain, and having reached the peak, discovered further ranges beyond with new peaks, opening up a new horizon.

All this came about through my meeting with an Indian Benedictine monk, who was planning to make a monastic foundation in India. For years I had been studying the Vedanta and had begun to realize its significance for the Church and the world. Now I was given the opportunity to go to the source of this tradition, to live in India and discover the secret of the wisdom of India. It was not merely the desire for new ideas which drew me to India, but the desire for a new way of life. I remember writing to a friend at the time: 'I

want to discover the other half of my soul.' I had begun to find that there was something lacking not only in the Western world but in the Western Church. We were living from one half of our soul, from the conscious, rational level and we needed to discover the other half, the unconscious, intuitive dimension. I wanted to experience in my life the marriage of these two dimensions of human existence, the rational and intuitive, the conscious and unconscious, the masculine and feminine. I wanted to find the way to the marriage of East and West.

My discovery began even before I reached India. I travelled by boat and I remember how at my first encounter with the East, at Port Said and Aden, I was fascinated with the spectacle of this world of immeasurable beauty and vitality. It was not the beauty of nature which struck me now, but the beauty of human nature, of what Blake called the 'human form divine'. It was the same when I reached Bombay. It was not the poverty and the misery which struck me so much as the sheer beauty and vitality of the people. On all sides was a swarming mass of humanity, children running about quite naked, women in saris, men with turbans, everywhere displaying the beauty of the human form. Whether sitting or standing or walking there was grace in all their movements and I felt that I was in the presence of a hidden power of nature. I explained it to myself by saying that these people were living from the 'unconscious'. People in the West are dominated by the conscious mind; they go about their business each shut up in his own ego. There is a kind of fixed determination in their minds, which makes their movements and gestures stiff and awkward, and they all tend to wear the same drab clothes. But in the East people live not from the conscious mind but from the unconscious, from the body not from the mind. As a result they have the natural spontaneous

beauty of flowers and animals, and their dress is as varied and colourful as that of a flower-garden.

Often, looking down on the scene at a railway platform, I have thought that it looked like a flower-garden, the women with their brightly-coloured saris sitting in circles here and there, the children running about with movements and gestures of spontaneous joy. After all these years in India this remains my deepest impression. There is poverty and misery enough in India, but above all in the villages and among the poorest there is an abundance of life and joy.

But, of course, this is not a merely animal life and beauty, it has the grace of human intelligence. They live from the unconscious, but it is the human unconscious, what Jung has called the anima as opposed to the animus. Every human being is both masculine and feminine. In the man the masculine aspect, the animus, is normally dominant, and in the woman the feminine or anima. In every person a certain balance or harmony has to be achieved, but in the West today the masculine aspect, the rational, active, aggressive power of the mind, is dominant, while in the East the feminine aspect, the intuitive, passive, sympathetic power of the mind is dominant. The future of the world depends on the 'marriage' of these two minds, the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the intuitive, the active and the passive. In India and all over the world today these two minds are meeting, but often the impact of the West on the East is that of a violent aggression, whether by armed power as in the past, or by the much more subtle aggression of science and technology exploiting man and nature, as at present.

The present system of industrialism in the West is the product of the violent, aggressive, rational mind of the West – whether organized in a capitalist or a socialist system makes no difference, except that the latter tends to be more

oppressive and inhuman – which can only lead to the destruction of the ancient cultures of the East. Yet it still remains possible to conceive of a development of science and technology which would seek not to dominate nature in the style of the West but to work with nature, building up from the basis of the village economy, as Mahatma Gandhi sought to do, and so create a new culture, in which man and nature, reason and intuition, the Yang and the Yin in Chinese terms, would be brought into harmony.

But there is something more in Indian culture than a search for harmony between man and nature, conscious and unconscious; there is a profound awareness of a power beyond both man and nature which penetrates everything and is the real source of the beauty and vitality of Indian life. I realized this most clearly when I visited the Cave of Elephanta outside Bombay. The cave has a forest of pillars inside it, not uncommon in Hindu temples, which creates an atmosphere of mystery and immensity, and as you approach, the great figure of Siva Maheswara – the Great God – with his three faces, representing his benign and terrible and contemplative aspects, looms out of the darkness from a recess in the wall. It is colossal and overwhelming at first, but when you look into the front face you see that it is in deep contemplation. There is absolute peace there, infinitely distant yet infinitely near, solemn, benign, gentle and majestic. Here carved in stone is the very genius of India and the East. This is what I had come to India to find, this contemplative dimension of human existence, which the West has almost lost and the East is losing. Here engraved in stone one could encounter that hidden depth of existence, springing from the depth of nature and the unconscious, penetrating all human existence and going beyond into the mystery of the infinite and eternal, not as something remote

and inaccessible, but as something almost tangible engraved in this stone. Here was the secret I had come to discover. The mind of the East is open not only to man and nature in an intuitive understanding, but also to that hidden Power which pervades both man and nature and reveals to those who are attuned to it the real meaning of human existence.

If the West as a whole has lost this intuitive awareness of the presence of God in man and nature, the Church in the West is faced with the same problem. Christianity was originally an Eastern religion (like practically all religions), but its movement from the beginning has been predominantly westwards. It passed with St Paul through Asia Minor to Greece and Rome, and then in the course of time to Europe and America. As a result, though always retaining its Eastern basis it has become a Western religion. Its theology is Greek, its organization Roman, its cultural expression European.

This was immediately evident in Bombay. The churches are either Gothic or Baroque; the statues and pictures are from European models; altars and candlesticks and stained glass are often imported from abroad. Everything is done to make the Church appear foreign to India. Yet the Indian people somehow manage to transform even these artificial buildings. They swarm everywhere, pressing up against the altar rails and through the doors and windows, overwhelming the Victorian propriety of the churches with their spontaneous vitality.

Yet this, of course, is on a superficial level. The Indian Church has to undergo a radical transformation, if it is ever to respond to the needs of the Indian people. It has to rethink its theology in Indian instead of Greek terms, and to adapt its organization to Indian instead of Roman models. Even its Semitic base cannot go untouched. Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam a Semitic structure of language and

thought. It has to learn to see this Semitic tradition with all its unique values in the light of the Oriental tradition, to learn what Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism have to teach it. Then only will the 'marriage' take place in the Church as in the world between East and West.

It was only gradually that this realization came to me. When we arrived in Bangalore, we bought a property some miles outside Bangalore in a village called Kengeri and there we began our monastic life. At this time, though I wanted to continue the study of Indian thought, I had no idea of changing our style of life. We wore the traditional Benedictine habit. We built a chapel in Western style, with chairs and reading desks. We had our meals sitting at table with spoons, knives and forks. Our cells were simply furnished with wooden beds and straw mattresses, a table, a chair and a shelf for clothes and books. This was what I then considered a model of simplicity. It was only gradually that I discovered that nearly all these things were unheard-of luxuries in the neighbouring village. A few rich people might have tables and chairs and even a radio or a gramophone, but most of the villagers normally sat on the floor, ate with their hands from a plantain leaf, and slept on a mat on the floor.

Thus I gradually became aware of a standard of poverty and simplicity which was far beyond anything which I had imagined in Europe. At the same time I realized that this poverty and simplicity did not mean that the people were any less cultured. There was an old man in the village who was a Sanskrit scholar, and from him I learned much of the traditional Hindu wisdom. There were also several students studying at the university, well acquainted with Western ways, one of whom became one of my closest friends. He was Western-minded in many ways and admired Western culture, but he had no difficulty in sitting on the floor for his

meals and eating with his hand, and every week without fail he would visit the little temple of the monkey god Hanuman near our monastery and conduct the worship there. So I began to realize how a primeval religion and culture could exist side by side with Western ways.

At this time I was studying Sanskrit with Raimundo Panikkar, who embodies in a unique way this meeting of East and West. His mother was a Spanish Catholic and his father came from a well-known Hindu family. He had been brought up in Europe, had taken degrees in science, philosophy and theology, and had now come to India to discover his Indian heritage. Together we explored this Indian culture which was now beginning to unfold before my eyes. We spent some weeks together visiting the temples in the old Mysore State.²

At the very beginning there was an unforgettable experience, when we were invited by a man whom we met on the way to visit his home. He took us to a tiny two-roomed cottage, where we sat cross-legged on the floor, and two little boys gave us a concert of Indian classical music. There was no furniture in the house. One little boy was lying ill on a mat on the floor and the others sat beside us, one playing a stringed instrument and both singing together, beating the time with their hands and completely absorbed in the music. The mother prepared tea in the kitchen, which we drank from small brass vessels, but later she too came and played and sang herself. The father explained to us the meaning of the songs, which were either in Sanskrit or one of the south Indian languages, and were all, of course, religious. So there we were sitting on the floor in this little cottage with no modern conveniences, brought face to face with one of the most profound religious cultures of the world.

Our visits to the temples only confirmed this impression. At Belur, Halebid and Somnathpur we found architecture

and sculpture of a beauty and refinement equal to the finest Gothic art, but beyond the outward form of beauty there was the deep inner meaning of the temples.

Halebid in particular was a most enchanting place, an old temple set in a lovely valley with a broad river flowing by, reminding one of Tintern or Fountains. Round the outside of the temple there are sculptured friezes in ascending order, representing first the animal world – elephants, horses, birds – then the human world with stories from the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and finally the divine world, the world of the gods and goddesses. It was a manifestation of the cosmic mystery in stone, the divine life manifesting itself in the three worlds, the animal, the human and the divine.

Another impression of lasting significance was the figure of a naked man standing upright to be found in many of the Jain temples here, above all the colossal figure in the temple at Sravan Belgola. This, I believe, is the figure of Purusha, the Primeval Man, the Archetypal Man, who appears in the Rig Veda, of whom it is said that he contains the whole creation in himself. 'Three quarters of him is above in heaven, one quarter is here on earth.' This is akin to the Adam Kadmon, the first Adam, of Jewish tradition and the Universal Man of Muslim tradition. When Jesus called himself the Son of Man he was relating himself to this primeval tradition and revealing the underlying unity of religions. Thus the temples in Mysore revealed Hinduism as the Cosmic religion, the religion of God's revelation in the Cosmos and in Man.

But perhaps no less significant was the impression made when we sat down by the river beside a little shrine, in which there was nothing but a roughly-carved lingam and yoni – the male and female organs. A European would be inclined to regard this as 'obscene' but for a Hindu it has no such significance. For the Hindu sex is essentially 'holy'. It is a

manifestation of the divine life and is to be worshipped like any other form of the divinity. God manifests himself in all the works of nature, in earth and fire and air and water, in plant and animal and man. Sex is one of the manifestations of the divine power – the Sakti – which sustains the universe and has the character of a sacrament.

It is this vision of a cosmic unity, in which man and nature are sustained by an all-pervading spirit, which the West needs to learn from the East. It is this that explains the extraordinary sacredness which attaches to every created thing in India. The earth is sacred, and no ploughing or sowing or reaping can take place without some religious rite. Eating is a sacred action and every meal is conceived as a sacrifice to God. Water is sacred and no religious Hindu will take a bath without invoking the sacred power of the water, which descends from heaven and, caught on the head of Siva, is distributed in the fertilizing streams of the Ganges and other rivers. Air is sacred, the breath of life which comes from God and sustains all living creatures. Fire is sacred, especially in its source in the sun, which brings light and life to all creatures. So also with plants and trees, especially certain plants like the tulsi plant and certain trees like the banyan. Animals are sacred, especially the cow, which gives her milk as a mother, but also the elephant, the monkey and the snake. Finally man is sacred; every man is a manifestation of God but especially a holy man, in whom the divine presence can be more clearly seen.

This is the sacred universe, in which man has lived as far as we know from the beginning of history and which has been completely demolished by the Western scientific world. Every trace of sacredness has been removed from life so that Western man finds himself in a universe in which both man and nature have been deprived of any ultimate meaning.

There are some who think that this process of secularization, which has abolished the sacred order of the ancient religions, is itself the effect of the Christian revelation, which placed the whole creation under the dominion of the one supreme God and took away the power of the 'gods'. It is true that the tendency of the Cosmic religion in all its forms is to deify the powers of nature and so to make man subject to what St Paul called the 'cosmic powers', but this is not the authentic tradition of Oriental religion whether Hindu, Buddhist or Taoist. In all these religions the powers of nature or the 'gods' are held to be subject to the one supreme Being, by whatever name it may be known. In Hinduism it has always been held that the 'gods' are but names and forms of the one Being, who has no name or form. Moreover, Christianity in rejecting the 'gods' of Greece and Rome did not make the world any less sacred but on the contrary made everything without exception sacred, because of its living relation to God its creator. The degradation of the Western world has come not from Christianity (except, perhaps, in some of its more debased forms), but from the rejection of the very idea of God.

The difference between the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and the Oriental religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism) seems to lie in this; that in the Semitic tradition God is represented as the transcendent Lord of creation, infinitely 'holy', that is separate from and above nature, and never to be confused with it. But in the Oriental tradition God – or the Absolute, by whatever word it may be named – is immanent in all creation. The world does not exist apart from God but 'in' God; he dwells in the heart of every creature. The danger of this position is that God is very easily confused with nature; the transcendent aspect of Being is lost sight of and the result is pantheism. In the same way since

God is conceived as present in everything, in the evil as well as the good, the distinction between good and evil is easily lost.

But perhaps the greatest weakness in the Oriental tradition is that the material world tends to be regarded as an illusion – as *maya* – the product of 'ignorance' (*avidya*). The world of ordinary experience is held to have only an apparent reality and in the ultimate state of 'knowledge' (*paravidya*) all differences disappear and the one, absolute reality alone remains.

When I first came to India I encountered this doctrine among almost all the educated Hindus with whom I talked, who all claimed to follow the teaching of the great Sankaracharya. But further study and experience has convinced me that this is not the teaching of the Upanishads or the Bhagavad Gita, and the doctrine of Sankara himself is far more subtle and profound than it is often made out to be. The authentic Hindu tradition does not deny the reality of the material world. It sees the whole creation as pervaded by the one, eternal Spirit, who creates, sustains and finally dissolves the world, and this all-pervading Spirit – the Brahman – is no less transcendent than immanent. It is 'unseen, inconceivable, unimaginable, indescribable'. Of every name and form which may be given to this supreme Being, we have to say: not this, not this – *neti, neti*.

This Hinduism starting from the immanence of God in creation ascends to the awareness of his infinite transcendence, and in the same way the Hebrew-Christian tradition starting from the infinite transcendence of God or Yahweh sees this God descending to earth, manifesting himself through his angels, speaking his Word to his prophets and finally becoming 'incarnate' – the Word became flesh – and communicating his Spirit to man.

The true character of this original Semitic tradition was brought home to me when I left Bangalore and settled in Kerala. We were unable to make the foundation which we had planned in Kengeri, and I was invited by a Cistercian monk, Father Francis Mahieu, to join in making a foundation³ in Kerala. I had now realized that it was necessary to change our style of life, if we were to enter into the authentic tradition of Indian culture, and we now adopted the *kavi* habit of the Hindu *sannyasi* – one who renounces the world in order to seek for God – which corresponds in India to the vocation of the Christian monk.

We also followed the normal customs of the *sannyasi*, going barefoot, sitting on the floor both for meals and for prayer, eating with the hands, and sleeping on a mat. We were therefore able to come nearer to the condition of the poor man in India. This was assisted by the fact that when we began our monastic life in Kerala, we were compelled to live in a palm-leaf hut. The stone building, which we were erecting, was not yet complete and we had to spend the whole of the monsoon season, with nearly two hundred inches of rain, in this frail hut. Yet we found that we were able to survive even under these conditions. The floor of the hut, which was made of earth, became so damp that we had to cover it first with straw and then with planks in order to keep dry. But apart from this, we were also able to continue our monastic life, celebrating the 'Qurbana', the Eucharist in the Syrian rite, which we had adopted, chanting the prayer, continuing our study and doing all the necessary work without a break.

I shall always be thankful that I was able to experience not only something of the hardships but also the joy in simplicity of the poor man in India. I remember that when I first saw the little huts in which the people live in the villages I wondered

how it was possible for human beings to live under such conditions. But experience has taught me that the simple mud hut with a thatched roof, with no furniture and no conveniences, is sufficient for all basic human needs and can bring more peace and joy than many of the houses of the rich. I thus began to understand the meaning of the words of the Gospel: 'Blessed are you poor, blessed are you that mourn, blessed are you that are hungry.' The poor of India suffer and go hungry, but they have a blessing on their lives which the Western world has lost.

When we came to Kerala, we adopted the Syrian rite, to which the majority of Christians in Kerala belong. The Christian faith is said to have been brought to India by the apostle Thomas, and there has certainly been a church in Kerala from a very early time. The earliest historical evidence points to a Church existing in India from at least the fourth century and forming part of the Persian or East Syrian Church. It is often forgotten that while the Christian Church was spreading westwards, through Asia Minor to Greece and Rome, it was also spreading eastwards through Syria and Mesopotamia. The centre of this Eastern Church was the city of Edessa on the borders of Syria and Mesopotamia, which spoke a form of Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his disciples, which came to be known as Syriac. This Syrian Church spread in the following centuries through Persia to China and India and had hundreds of churches and monasteries throughout this region. Unfortunately, it adopted a 'Nestorian' form of the Christian faith, which was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon, and thus became separated from the Churches of the West. Yet it represents a remarkable witness to an Oriental form of Christianity, which has its value to the present day. Later this Syrian Christianity was overwhelmed by the forces of Islam and

only small pockets remain today in the Middle East as relics of a once-great Church.

In Kerala, on the other hand, this Syrian Church survives in greater strength than any other Christian Church, but unfortunately, the divisions of Western Christendom are reflected in it. There are Syrian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Protestants, and to complicate matters there is an earlier division of the Syrian Church, which took place in the fifth century when the East Syrians with their centre in Persia adopted the 'Nestorian' form of the Christian faith with its emphasis on the human nature of Christ, while the West Syrians with their centre in Antioch adopted the 'Monophysite' form of faith with its emphasis on the divine nature in Christ.

When we decided to make our foundation in Kerala, we adopted the West Syrian rite of Antioch, the Malankara rite, as it is known in Kerala, as being a more purely Oriental rite, the East Syrian, or Malabar rite, having been much Latinized as is often the way with the Eastern Churches which are united with Rome. We were thus faced from the outset with all those tragic divisions which have plagued the Christian Churches from the earliest times. In a sense, of course, these divisions are perfectly normal and natural. It is normal and right that the Christian faith should find a different expression in both East and West, and that there should be further divisions based on local differences in the expression of faith and worship. What is tragic is that each of these Churches should have contended that its own form of faith and worship was the true form and should have condemned all others as opposed to the true faith. Today we realize that the one Faith can have different forms of expression in theology and liturgy and organization, and each can learn to appreciate the particular witness of the other Churches.

The Syrian liturgy and theology to which we were introduced in Kerala is something of extraordinary interest. It is first of all an Oriental form of Christianity, which though it owes something to the Greek world through its centre in Antioch, remains rooted in the Semitic world of the Middle East. It belongs, in fact, to the same world as the Bible itself. It is as though it sprang from the same soil as the Bible, using the same language as was used in Palestine and expressing itself not in the metaphysical terms of Greek theology, but in the rich, symbolic language of the Bible. The liturgy consists largely of long prayers of great beauty and solemnity and of songs and chants set to solemn music and composed for the most part in the golden age of the liturgy between the fifth and the tenth centuries. It is pervaded by a sense of the majesty and the holiness of God, which is typical of the Semitic genius and is found alike in the Bible and the Koran.

There is, in fact, much in common between Syrian Christianity and the Islamic religion which surrounded it and there was at times mutual influence. Thus Bar Hebraeus, one of the great theologians of the Syrian Church, seems to have modelled his mystical treatise, *The Book of the Dove*, on a work of the great Muslim theologian, Al Ghazali. There is in all Semitic religion a profound sense of the infinite holiness of God, his moral righteousness and refusal to tolerate sin, but also of his infinite compassion and willingness to forgive the sinner who repents. There is also in the Syrian liturgy a wonderful sacramental sense; the sense that through the Incarnation the divine power has penetrated the whole creation and man begins to participate in the new life of the Resurrection. This cosmic vision was expressed marvellously in the work of Dionysius the Areopagite, which incorporated so much of Neo-Platonism into Christian

theology, and who is now generally believed to have been a Syrian monk.

Yet, though this Syrian Christianity shows the possibility of an Oriental form of Christianity, distinct from all its Occidental forms, it is not enough. It belongs to the Middle East and has affinities with Islam, but it has nothing in common with the Far East or with Chinese and Indian thought. Every form of Semitic religion also has its own serious limitations. Each of them has a deep sense of the holiness of God, of his moral purity and rejection of sin together with his immense compassion and mercy, which represents a profound insight into the nature of Reality itself, yet in each of them there is also a spirit of intolerance, which has become a serious obstacle to their acceptance. Each of them has grown up with the conviction that it alone is the true religion and Christians and Muslims, at least, are driven by the logic of their position to try to convert all others to their faith. When these views are supported, as they have often been in history, by force of arms, the result is disastrous, not only for the religions themselves but also for religion itself.

It is here that the Semitic religions have to learn from the Oriental tradition. In the Oriental religions we find nothing like this. There are innumerable sects and divisions in Hinduism, but though there have been occasional conflicts, they normally manage to live together in peace and harmony, each respecting the faith and worship of the others. In Buddhism also there is the great division between the Hinayana and the Mahayana, the Greater and the Lesser Vehicle, but it has not led to violence and hatred and persecution like similar divisions in the Christian Churches. It is not any particular form of religion, but religion itself which is on trial in the modern world, and only an

ecumenical movement among religions, each learning to accept and appreciate the truth and holiness to be found in the other religions, can answer the need of religion today.

I was able to face this challenge of a genuine religious ecumenism, when I moved from Kerala to another ashram in Tamil Nadu, the old Madras State. This ashram was founded by two French fathers, Monchanin and Le Saux, who had been the pioneers in the attempt to adapt monastic life in India to the traditional forms of Indian life and prayer.⁴ They called the ashram 'Saccidananda Ashram', *saccidananda* being the Hindu name for the Godhead as Being, Knowledge and Bliss, which they took as a symbol of the Christian Trinity, the Father as Being, the Son, or Word of God, as the Knowledge of the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the Bliss of Love, which unites Father and Son. They themselves took the names of Parama Arubi Ananda, the Bliss of the Supreme Spirit, and Abhishiktananda, the Bliss of Christ. Thus they sought to identify themselves with the Hindu tradition of *Sannyasa*, the renunciation of the world in order to experience the bliss of the divine life. But this was much more than a matter of names. They sought by the study of Yoga and Vedanta to integrate the whole spiritual tradition of India into their lives as Christians, thus working towards that unity of religion which is the goal of mankind.

Unfortunately Father Monchanin died after a few years and Father Le Saux finally settled in the Himalayas as a hermit, where he wrote several books in which he showed the most profound insight into the relation of the Hindu to the Christian tradition. When he left Shantivanam he invited us to take it over and I came there with two other monks from Kurisumala Ashram to continue his work. Here we were able to start our monastic life again in a more radical way. The Benedictine life, to which I had been accustomed,

was that of a community of monks sharing a common life, of prayer and study, supporting themselves by the work of their hands. But now I embarked on something different. An ashram is not primarily a community like a monastery. It is a group of disciples gathered round a master, or Guru, who come to share the prayer life, the experience of God, of the Guru. The life, therefore, centres not on the common prayer of the liturgy but on the personal prayer of each member. It is the hour of meditation at dawn and at sunset, the traditional time for meditation in India, which forms the basis of the life, the silent communion with God, and the common prayer of the community is as it were an overflow from this.

In Shantivanam, the Forest of Peace, we each have a small thatched hut among the trees in which we live and pray, and we meet together for prayer three times a day, not for the formal prayer of the liturgy as at Kurisumala, but for a more informal prayer in which there are readings from the scriptures of different religions as well as psalms and readings from the Bible. In the morning we read from the Vedas, at midday from the Koran and the Granth Sahib of the Sikhs, and in the evening from the devotional poets, especially those of Tamil Nadu like the great Tamil mystic, Manikkar Vasagar. We are thus confronted day by day in our prayer with the question of the relationship between the different religions.

It is no longer possible today for one religion to live in isolation from other religions. In almost every country people of different religions and of no religion are meeting with one another and being compelled to face their differences. For a Christian and for members of the other Semitic religions this presents a real problem. Each of them has been taught to regard itself as the one true religion and to reject all other religions as false, so that to enter into dialogue

with other religions is not easy. Yet more and more the necessity for contact is being realized, and those who attempt to do so are finding that dialogue, when properly understood, is not a compromise with error but a process of enrichment by which each religion opens itself to the truth to be found in the other religion, and the two parties grow together in the common search for truth. Each religion has to hold the fundamental truth in its own tradition and at the same time to allow that tradition to grow, as it is exposed to other aspects of the truth. Thus we begin to realize that truth is one, but that it has many faces, and each religion is, as it were, a face of the one Truth, which manifests itself under different signs and symbols in the different historical traditions.

The Semitic conception of God is that of an utterly transcendent Being, set over against the world as its Creator and Lord and ruling its destiny from above. The spatial imagery is, of course, only symbolic, but the concept is one of utter transcendence. The Hindu and the Oriental concept of God – or rather of ultimate Reality, since it may not receive the name of God – is that of an immanent power in nature and in man, hidden in the heart of every creature. The figure of Siva Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance, is a perfect symbol of this. He creates, sustains and dissolves the world by his rhythmic dance, and the whole cosmic order is nothing but this dance of Siva. What is distinctive in this vision is that God is conceived not so much above the universe as in it. As it is said in the Upanishads: 'The God who is in the fire, the God who is in the water, the God who has entered into the world, the God who is in the plants and the trees, adoration to that God, adoration to him.'⁵

It is true, of course, that in the Christian tradition God is also conceived as immanent in nature, and St Paul himself

quotes the saying: 'In him we live and move and have our being.' But the emphasis is quite different. The Hebrew starts from the transcendence of God and gradually discovers his immanence; the Hindu starts from the immanence and reaches towards his transcendence. It is a difference of point of view. Each is complementary to the other and opens up a different perspective.

When the Christian faith is seen from the Oriental perspective, another aspect of the Truth contained in the original revelation is disclosed. In the first place the use of the word 'God' comes to be questioned. In the context of Semitic thought 'God' is conceived as a Person, but the word 'Person', like all other terms applied to the ultimate Reality, is a term of analogy. This is not to deny personal being in God, but to recognize that he is beyond every concept which we can form and therefore 'beyond personality'. In Christian history, the same perspective was reached by Dionysius the Areopagite who, under the influence of Neo-Platonic thought, described God as 'beyond being'. But for the ordinary Christian brought up on biblical thought, God remains essentially a person and the limitations of such language are scarcely recognized. It seems necessary, therefore, if we are to keep the right perspective to use some phrase like Ultimate Reality, Ultimate Truth or, with Tillich, Ultimate Concern, when speaking of the Godhead itself, as distinct from the personal aspect of God. The Oriental, though using personal language about God, habitually goes beyond such language and speaks of Brahman, Atman, Tao or in the extreme negative language of Buddhism, Nirvana or the Void. These are all words which point towards the nameless reality, which cannot properly be conceived and is as much beyond personality as it is beyond any human concept. But in speaking of God in this

way the Oriental is not concerned with theory or doctrine. All Oriental doctrine arises from an experience of God, or Ultimate Reality. In Hinduism Brahman is the name given to that Reality conceived as the Source from which everything comes, the Ground in which everything exists, the Goal to which everything aspires. It is the One, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Transcendent, or whatever name we choose to give to the 'beyond' of human existence.

When the mind in meditation goes beyond images and concepts, beyond reason and will to the ultimate Ground of its consciousness, it experiences itself in this timeless and spaceless unity of Being, and this is expressed in the 'great sayings' of the Upanishads: 'I am Brahman', 'Thou Art That' . . . The Ultimate is experienced in the depth of the soul, in the substance or Centre of its consciousness, as its own Ground or Source, as its very being or Self (*Atman*). This experience of God is summed up in the word *saccidananda*. God, or Ultimate Reality, is experienced as absolute being (*sat*), known in pure consciousness (*cit*), communicating absolute bliss (*ananda*). This was the experience of the seers of the Upanishads as it has been that of innumerable holy men in India ever since. It is an experience of self-transcendence, which gives an intuitive insight into Reality. It is this knowledge which Western man has to learn to acquire. All alike have to discover this other dimension of human consciousness, this feminine, intuitive awareness, in which the rational mind is no longer the master, but has to submit itself to a higher law of its own being and transcend its limitations. This is what the West has to learn from the East and the East has to re-learn, if it is not to lose its own soul.

There are signs already that this new consciousness is beginning to dawn as the West comes into contact with the East. The age of scientific materialism, which dominated the

nineteenth century is passing and a new age of spiritual wisdom is coming to birth. Western science itself has prepared the way for this. The 'scientific' image of the world which prevailed from the time of Socrates as an objective reality extended in time and space, which could be observed objectively by a detached human observer, has collapsed under the impact of science itself. The Newtonian universe of solid bodies moving in absolute space and time has given way to the view of relativity and quantum physics.

'In modern Physics,' it has been said, 'the universe is experienced as a dynamic, inseparable whole, which always includes the observer in an essential way.'⁶ It is not only that science no longer recognizes a world of separate bodies moving in an objective space and time, but rather a complicated web of relationships between the various parts of a unified whole.⁷ It goes far beyond this and recognizes that the human consciousness is essentially involved in the object which it observes. 'Natural Science,' says Heisenberg, 'does not simply describe and explain nature; it is part of the interplay between nature and ourselves.'⁸ In other words, science does not give knowledge of reality as such, but of reality reflected through the human consciousness. This, as the author of *The Tao of Physics* observes, brings Western science very near to the traditional Eastern view of reality. There is no objective world outside us as opposed to a subjective world within. There is one Reality, which manifests itself objectively outside us and subjectively within, but which itself is beyond the distinction of subject and object, and is known when the human mind transcends both sense (by which we perceive the 'outside' world) and reason (by which we conceive the mental world of science and philosophy) and discovers the Reality itself, which is both being and consciousness in an indivisible unity.

How, then, are we to describe this new vision of the world, which is also the vision of the ancient seers? We have to say, that there is one Reality, 'One only without a second' which is indivisibly being and consciousness (*sat* and *cit*) and this Reality when known in its origin is experienced as the source of ineffable joy (*ananda*). This one Reality is manifested to our divided consciousness as on the one hand an 'objective' world extended in space and time and obeying apparently mechanical laws, and on the other hand a 'subjective' world of sensations, feelings, images and ideas arising in our consciousness. We find ourselves divided therefore between conscious and unconscious, psychological and physical, mind and matter, or in Hindu terms between Purusha (Spirit, Consciousness) and Prakriti (Nature or the Unconscious). But the more we penetrate into mind or matter, the more we find that they themselves interpenetrate, that they cannot be divided. Mind and matter, conscious and unconscious, Purusha and Prakriti, interpenetrate, and at the deepest level of consciousness the division disappears, mind and matter, Spirit and Nature, are one.

In other words, there are three worlds, the worlds of matter, mind, and Spirit, which we experience in ourselves as body, soul and spirit. But these worlds are not really divided. It is due to ignorance (*avidya*) and illusion (*maya*) in Hindu terms, to sin and the Fall in Christian terms, that we experience this division in ourselves. The aim of all religion is to restore this undivided consciousness and unity of being to man, which in Hinduism is called moksha or liberation, in Buddhism nirvana or 'suchness', and in Christianity is represented by the redemption of man and his restoration to union with God.

Primitive Man experienced this undivided unity of being and consciousness and expressed it in terms of Myth. For

Myth in its origin is the symbolic expression of the one Reality experienced as a living unity in an undivided consciousness. Vedic man, for instance, in whom the mythical consciousness is most richly developed, experienced the world and himself in what Dr Panikkar in an awkward but significant term has called a 'cosmotheandric' unity. In other words, God, man, and the world are originally experienced in a total unity. But as Reason developed distinctions began to be made and the original unity was broken up. It was necessary, of course, for reason to develop and for distinctions to be made. But in the process man has become divided. He experiences himself as divided from nature and from God and divided in himself. This in Christian terms is the Fall of Man. It is a fall from a state of undivided consciousness into a state of divided consciousness. In past times this division was experienced in varying degrees, but in modern times it has reached the furthest limit. Never before has man felt so isolated, alone in a vast, impersonal universe obeying mechanical laws, shut up in his own individual consciousness divided both from nature and from God. But this, of course, is an illusion; this is the great Maya, the ignorance, the Sin, which every religious tradition has seen to be the cause of all human misery. There is no external universe outside us obeying mechanical laws. The whole universe is penetrated by Mind; it obeys, when rightly seen and understood, not merely mathematical laws but the law of the Spirit. 'The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world.'⁹ To realize this living unity of man and the world in the life of the Spirit has been the purpose of all ancient religion.

The myths and rituals of primitive peoples, the Australian Aborigines, the African Bushmen, the American Indians, tribal people everywhere, have all been seen as ways to set

man free from his isolation and restore him to unity with himself and the universe. In India today this primeval religion is still a living reality, rooted not only in myth and ritual, as conducted daily in the temples, but also in profound philosophical reasoning. In the Upanishads and the subsequent systems of Vedanta the mythical world of the Vedas was submitted to searching philosophical investigation, and we have in the Vedanta the most profound and systematic study of the ultimate nature of Reality to be found in the history of the world.

How, then, does the Bible fit into this pattern of human development? We have to recognize first of all that the Bible belongs essentially to this world of Myth. Myth, as we have said, is the symbolic expression of Reality in terms of the human imagination. The story of Adam and Eve and Paradise is clearly a mythological story of the origin of man and his Fall from his original state of unity with God. The story of the Redemption of Man, the Son of the God becoming man, of his death and resurrection, of his descent into Hell and his ascension into Heaven, of his coming in glory at the end of time, is clearly the language of mythology. This, of course, is not to say that it is not true, but on the contrary that it is the nearest to the Truth that we can come. It is an illusion to think that scientific language is 'true' and poetic language is 'untrue'. Scientific language, above all in its most typical form of mathematics, is the most abstract and unreal language that is, furthest from the total concrete reality. Poetry, or the language of symbolism, is nearer to reality but Truth itself can only be known by a pure intuition which is beyond all language.

The Bible, like all religious literature, is rich in this language of symbolism but the symbolism of the Bible is distinguished by the fact that it is a historical symbolism. History is the

record of events, not merely the physical event in space and time, but also the psychological event, the meaning of the physical events in human consciousness. In this respect poetry is often nearer to the reality than bare history. Homer's *Iliad* brings us nearer to the reality of the Trojan War than any history could do, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* gives an insight into the reality of Napoleon's invasion of Russia which no history could give. But Homer and Tolstoy also give an insight into the cosmic order behind the human story and help us to realize something of the meaning of human history as a whole.

It is to this world of historic symbolism that the Bible belongs. The Bible is history, the record of events in the history of a particular people, which can be situated in the concrete historical circumstances of the time. In the New Testament in particular Jesus is placed in a historic situation, born in the reign of the Emperor Augustus, a contemporary of Virgil and dying 'under Pontius Pilate', the Roman governor of Palestine. But this history is placed in the light of an imaginative vision of human history seen as a progressive movement towards an 'end', an *eschaton*, when the full meaning of human history will be revealed.

There is thus profound psychological as well as historical truth in the Bible, but above all, it is a record of events seen in the light of ultimate Reality. Jesus is seen as the Person in whom the ultimate meaning of human life and history is revealed. This is expressed in the symbolic language of the Hebrew tradition, of the coming of the 'kingdom of God', of the 'Son of Man' who is also 'Son of God', of his birth to a Virgin, of his death and Resurrection and Ascension. This is clearly the language of mythology, that is of symbolism, but it is based on actual physical and psychological events. It is no use trying to separate the physical from the psychological so

as to arrive at some abstract 'scientific' reality. The physical and psychological events have to be seen in the light of the total Reality and then their true meaning becomes clear. Jesus was man in the sense that he possessed a human body and a human soul like every other man, and he experienced himself through this human body and soul as other men do. But in the depth of his spirit, in that Ground or Centre of the soul, which exists in every man, he knew himself as one with that ultimate Reality, which he called God, and he experienced himself in this Ground of his being in the relationship of a Son to a Father. This experience of relationship, which he expressed in terms of knowing and loving the Father and being known and loved by him, seems to be the unique character of Jesus's experience of God. There is no reason to doubt that Jesus experienced his relationship to God in this way, though the way in which it is expressed in the New Testament, especially in St John's Gospel, is clearly a development of his original teaching.

If we want to translate this symbolic language of the Bible into more universal terms, we can say that the one Reality, God, Truth, Spirit, by whatever name we choose to call it, has been manifesting itself from the beginning in all creation and in all human history and in every human consciousness. But though the one Reality is manifested in the world, it is also hidden. Every man and every thing both hides and reveals the Reality. In certain holy people everywhere the Reality becomes, as it were, transparent. The unity of man and the universe begins to shine through. This vision of Reality is embodied in the myths and rituals, the doctrines and sacraments of the different religions throughout the world. In each religion the divine Reality is manifested under different signs and symbols and we need to be able to discern this hidden Truth in each religious tradition. Each has

something to contribute to human understanding and to human fulfilment.

In Christianity the divine Reality manifested itself in the Person of Jesus, in his life and death and resurrection. This was a unique historical revelation within a unique historical tradition, with both its values and its limitations. Jesus came at the end of a long historic process to bring to fulfilment the hopes of a particular people and to reveal the final purpose of God in their history and in human history as a whole. The birth of Jesus from a Virgin was the sign of the birth of a new humanity, born 'not of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God'.¹⁰ His miracles were the sign of the 'new creation'¹¹, the transformation of matter by the Spirit, that is, through its penetration by consciousness. His death and resurrection were the sign of the passage through death to new life in the Spirit, which man has to undergo in order to 'realize' God. His 'descent into hell' and his 'ascension into heaven' are the signs of the penetration of the Spirit into the depths of the Unconscious and the passage to the Super-conscious state, the 'fourth' state of Hindu tradition, which is beyond our present state of consciousness in space and time. Finally, his Second Coming is the final manifestation of the Truth, of Reality itself, when the whole creation and the whole of humanity passes out of its present state of being and consciousness into the total consciousness of Reality – the Being, Knowledge and Bliss of Saccidananda.

Jesus, therefore, knew himself in the depth of his consciousness as the New Man, in whom the destiny of mankind is revealed. The sin which brought a divided consciousness into the world is overcome, and nature and man are restored to their original unity with God. In the Resurrection the body and soul of Jesus were transformed by the Spirit and the total Reality of God, man and nature was

revealed in its indivisible unity, a unity which is at once physical, psychological and spiritual. But beyond even this Jesus reveals a further depth in the Being of God. Jesus knew himself in the depth of his Spirit beyond time and space as the Son of the Father, participating in the knowledge of God and communicating in his Bliss. Yet this was not a pure identity of Being and Consciousness, but a communion of love. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and they are united in the love of the Holy Spirit, which is the expression of their mutual love.

This, of course, is 'mythological' language, but it expresses a profound metaphysical truth, the truth that Being itself is not only consciousness but also love, that there is relationship at the heart of Reality. In thus revealing his own relationship to God as his Father in the love of the Spirit, Jesus also reveals what is the destiny of man. Every man is destined to discover this relationship of Sonship in the depth of his Spirit. As we pass beyond our limited rational consciousness and become aware of the depth of the Spirit within, we discover this unfathomable depth of knowledge and love opening up within us and uniting us to one another and to the whole creation in the light of God. And this is not an identity of being without distinction but a communion of love, by which each is 'in' the other, as Jesus expressed it in his high-priestly prayer: 'I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfectly one.'¹²

How then are we to understand the Church in the light of this perspective? The Church in this sense is clearly the communion of those who are united by the love of the Spirit in the knowledge of the Word of God, the Eternal Truth, and through him return to the Father, the Source, the Origin and Ground of all creation. But the Church has also a beginning in time as a historical institution. When the Holy Spirit

descended on the disciples at Pentecost, the power of the Spirit which had transformed the body and soul of Christ at the Resurrection was communicated to his disciples. A new consciousness dawned, a consciousness beyond the ordinary rational consciousness, which set the disciples free from the limitations of our present mode of existence and consciousness and opened to them the new world of the Resurrection. The Church is the community of those, who experienced this new birth 'in the Spirit' and whose lives were transformed by the experience. The effect of this was seen in the fact that they were 'all of one heart and mind'¹³, and that they sold all that they possessed and 'had everything in common'¹⁴. The new life in the Spirit thus penetrated the economic and social order and brought a power to transform human society but it remained essentially beyond our present human limitations. The Church was from the beginning a 'charismatic' community, a community of the Spirit.

Yet it had also an elementary organization. Jesus left behind him twelve 'apostles', whom he clearly intended to be the nucleus of the new Israel, a new 'People of God'. There was also a ceremony of initiation into the new life and a meal in common, in which the new life with Christ was shared. This was apparently all that he left by way of organization. In the course of time other ceremonies were added and 'elders' and 'overseers' were appointed in the different Churches, but these seem to have been appointed as the need arose. There was a reason for this. Jesus left his disciples with the expectation that he would return again in their own lifetime and bring about the final 'restoration of all things'. This is the perspective of the New Testament.

Jesus was not concerned with the 'history' of the Church as an institution, but with its transcendent Reality. Jesus himself enjoyed the new life of the Resurrection, and his disciples

were called to share this new life with him. The historical development of the Church is secondary to this great reality of the experience of the Spirit in the new life of the Resurrection. In this perspective the time of the second coming is of little importance. As the second letter of Peter was to say, when the time of his coming was questioned: 'A thousand years in his sight are but a day.'¹⁵

It would seem that the Christian Churches have to recover this perspective, which is that of the New Testament, if they are to recover their meaning in the world today. The Church has its place in human history, but for the Church, as for Christ himself, history is subordinate to the transcendent reality of life in the Spirit. The organization of the Church as a human community is necessary for its evolution in history, but it belongs to this world of signs and appearances, not the world of ultimate Reality. In the course of history the organization of the Church has grown in various ways and its faith has come to be expressed in various creeds and formulas, but these developments are all conditioned by historical circumstances and none of them can be considered as final and definitive.

A Catholic may believe that the development of episcopacy and papacy and the elaboration of the doctrine and sacramental life of the Church in later times has been the work of the Holy Spirit, but he need not deny that other Churches have also been guided by the same Spirit and he will always be conscious that the Church is a living and growing organism so that its discipline and doctrine are always capable of reform and renewal. What remains fundamental to all Christian Churches is a common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, which was expressed in the early Church in the simple formula, 'Jesus is the Lord'¹⁶, and a common baptism by which all alike receive forgiveness of

sins through the gift of the Holy Spirit and are made members of the one Body of Christ. This common basis of faith for all Christians was summed up by St Paul in the formula, 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all'¹⁷. This alone is sufficient basis for Christian unity.

But beyond this we have to enlarge our vision of the Church to include not only all Christians but also all those who sincerely seek God. As we have seen, God is revealing himself at all times to all men in all circumstances. There is no limit to the grace of God revealed in Christ. Christ died for all men from the beginning to the end of time, to bring all men to that state of communion with God, with the eternal Truth and Reality, for which they were created. This gift of eternal life is offered in some way to all men without exception. Wherever man encounters God, or Truth, or Reality, or Love, or whatever name we give to the transcendent mystery of existence, even if he is formally an atheist or an agnostic, he encounters the grace of God in Christ. For Christ is the Word of God, the expression of God's saving purpose for all mankind. That Word 'enlightens every man coming into the world'. Everyone either in life or in death is brought into contact with that Word, that Truth, in some form or other and everyone who responds to that Word is a member of that body of redeemed humanity which is the Church. In a broad sense, therefore, we have to say that every human being is potentially a member of the Church. The Church is an open society. These who belong to the visible Church by faith and baptism are not an exclusive group of the 'saved', but a sign or sacrament of salvation, that is to say, they manifest God's saving purpose for all mankind.

But the question remains, are there some who do not attain salvation? The Christian Churches have always maintained that eternal punishment awaits those who reject God. What

are we to say about this? Of course, the language which the New Testament uses about heaven and hell is mythological language. Jesus himself spoke of it always in parables, and no other language can properly be used, since heaven and hell are names for the ultimate state beyond our present mode of consciousness. But what is signified by this language? We must be clear in the first place that the ultimate state is beyond time and space.

There can therefore be no question of suffering – or of happiness – going on in an endless time. Eternity is a timeless moment and a spaceless point. It is total realization of being in pure consciousness, of absolute bliss. But outside this state there is ultimately no being at all. Sin and evil, as we know them, are the effects of a divided consciousness, a consciousness conditioned by space and time. Such a consciousness cannot be eternal; it belongs essentially to this world of becoming and of change. Hell can therefore be nothing but the loss of God, the loss of one's soul, the failure to 'be'. Ultimately, there is only one Reality, one Being, one eternal life and Truth. To realize this Truth is eternal life; to fail to realize this Truth, which is a truth of being, is to fail to be. There is no being outside God. This, at least, would seem to be a possible interpretation of the meaning of heaven and hell, yet when we speak of the ultimate state we are speaking of a mystery which cannot properly be expressed, and all language is defective. But at least, we can dismiss from our minds all thought of an endless suffering in time.

When I and my friends were led to reject the industrial revolution, and to try to shape our lives by a simpler and more traditional way of life, we were almost blindly seeking an escape from the world in which we had grown up and trying to discover a more natural way of life on our own. But since that time this rejection of the present system of

civilization has spread throughout the world. Everywhere there is a search for an 'alternative society', a way of life which will be more natural and more human and is equally opposed to the capitalist and the communist systems.

I myself was led to the discovery of religion and Christianity as giving a meaning to life, and to the monastic life as an alternative way of life. Yet it is clear that religion and Christianity, and to a large extent monasticism, are caught up in the present system, and have failed to offer the way of life which people are seeking.

It would seem that we have come very near to the state of the Roman Empire in the fourth century after Christ. At that time there was a flourishing Christianity. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople had laid the foundations of Christian doctrine which were to prevail for the next thousand years, and the Church had been organized in a system of government which has survived even to the present day. There were, moreover, great saints and doctors of the Church, who remain as examples of wisdom and holiness, who are still a source of inspiration today. Yet the Roman Empire, and the whole system of civilization based upon it, was unable to survive. By the beginning of the next century the collapse had begun and by the end of the century it was complete. It would seem likely that the same fate awaits the present civilization. By the end of this century the shortage of the natural resources, on which the whole system depends, will have brought about a fundamental change in the present way of life. The search for an alternative form of energy may decide the future of our civilization. If the choice of nuclear energy is made then it may well lead to the destruction of this world, but if an attempt is made to use the natural sources of energy in the sun and water and wind, it may be that civilization will survive.

But whatever the fate of this present world, the real need is to find a way of life which is able to survive all such disasters. In the Roman Empire it was the monastic life which saved the world. It was the monks who fled to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, and founded a way of life based on prayer and work in conditions of the utmost poverty and simplicity, who alone survived the collapse of the Roman Empire, and whose teaching and example led to the foundation of monasteries all over Europe, in which the basis of a new civilization could be found.

Today there has been a revival of monastic life all over the world. Communities are to be found in Asia, Africa, and South America as well as in Europe and North America. Many are too much involved in the present industrial system to offer real hope of an alternative way of life, but many are seeking to adapt themselves to the problems of the Third World. The hope of the future would seem to lie with the small communities, sometimes associated with a larger community, which are springing up all over the world, consisting of men and women, married and single, seeking a new style of life which will be in harmony with nature and with the inner law of the Spirit. These communities cross all barriers of race and religion and are the expression of the urge to go beyond the present economic, political and religious systems and to open a way to the future of man. They can be likened to the monasteries of the Middle Ages, the centres of a ferment which would gradually transform society and make possible a new civilization.

It is to such a community that now at the end of my life the Golden String has led me. It was put into my hands while I was still a boy at school and led me first to the discovery of God, then to the discovery of Christ and the Church. I thought then that I had reached the end of my journey, at

least in this world, but then it led me to India, and a whole new understanding of the world opened before me. At every stage I have been conscious that it was not I who was leading, but that something was leading me. Now it has led me to the point where I have become a 'Sannyasi'. A Sannyasi is one who renounces the world to seek for God, but his renunciation goes far beyond what is ordinarily understood by the 'world'. A Sannyasi is one who renounces not only the world in the biblical sense of the world of sin, the world which today is so clearly set on the path of destruction. A Sannyasi renounces the whole world of 'signs', of appearances.

The world which is studied by science, the world of politics and economics, the world of social and cultural life, which most people take for reality, is a world of appearances with no ultimate reality. It is all passing away at every moment and everybody is passing with it. The Church also belongs to this world of 'signs'. The doctrines and sacraments of the Church are human expressions or signs of the divine reality, which are likewise destined to pass away. So also Christ himself is the 'sacrament' of God; he is the sign of God's grace and salvation, of God's presence among men, and this sign also will pass, when the Reality, the thing signified, is revealed. Finally God himself, in so far as he can be named, whether Yahweh or Allah or simply God, is a sign, a name for the ultimate Truth, which cannot be named. Thus the Sannyasi is called to go beyond all religion, beyond every human institution, beyond every scripture and creed, till he comes to that which every religion and scripture and ritual signifies but can never name. In every religion, whether Christian or Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim, it has been recognized that the ultimate Reality cannot be named and

the Sannyasi is one who is called to go beyond all religion and seek that ultimate goal.

Yet when we say that the Sannyasi goes beyond religion this does not mean that he rejects any religion. I have not felt called to reject anything that I have learned of God or of Christ or of the Church. To go beyond the sign is not to reject the sign, but to reach the thing signified. In the language of St Thomas Aquinas, it is to pass from the *sacramentum* to the *res*. As long as we remain in this world we need these signs, and the world today cannot survive unless it rediscovers the 'signs' of faith, the 'Myth', the 'Symbol', in which the knowledge of reality is enshrined. But equally fatal is to stop at the sign, to mistake the sign for the ultimate reality. It is this that sets one religion against another and divides Christians from one another, from people of other religions and from the rest of the world. This is essentially idolatry. Whether it is the Bible or the Church or any dogma or creed, when it is forgotten that they belong to the world of signs and appearances, to the world which is passing away, they become idols far more deadly than any graven image. The Sannyasi is one who is called to witness to this Truth of the Reality beyond the signs, to be a sign of that which is beyond signs.

But when we have said this, we have admitted that the Sannyasi, though he may witness to the world beyond signs, yet himself still belongs to this world. To be true to his vocation he also must disappear, as Jesus himself, the great Sannyasi, disappeared after the Resurrection. He showed himself to his disciples after his Resurrection speaking of the kingdom of God¹⁸, and then he disappeared. Only when he had gone could the Spirit come. As he himself said: 'It is for your advantage that I go from you, for if I do not go the Spirit will not come.'¹⁹ Like the Master, the disciple must

disappear. 'Unless the grain of wheat die, it cannot bear fruit.'²⁰ We have to die in order that we may live. An 'Ashram' is only a stopping place, in which a Sannyasi may live for a time – or for all 'time' – but he is always journeying beyond time to the eternal reality. So also every Church, every religion, every human community, is only a stopping place, a tent which is pitched on this earth by pilgrims who are on their way to the City of God.

I had said²¹ that the dogmas and sacraments of the Church are the 'walls of Jerusalem', the City of God, and that faith is the gate by which we enter the City. But when we have entered the City there are no more walls and no gates, for faith itself must pass away. The City itself is without boundaries in time or space. In it everything is contained: both heaven and earth, both fire and air, both sun and moon, and whatever there is in this world,²² but no longer divided by sin and ignorance, no longer limited by space and time, but all realized in the one Reality, which is pure Consciousness, the consciousness of the eternal Logos²³ and unending bliss, the bliss of the Holy Spirit, which is love, peace, joy.²⁴

There are many people today who think that the kingdom of God will come in this world, that peace will be established on earth, that mankind will enjoy lasting happiness. But all this is an illusion. It is the great 'maya' which deceives the world which veils the truth. It arises from a refusal to face death. For those who seek fulfilment in this world, death is an end, a boundary that cannot be passed. But for these who are willing to die, death is the gateway to eternal life.

The new world, the world which we seek, is the world of the Resurrection. But this world is already present among us. The kingdom of heaven is in your midst.²⁵ Death is the

breakthrough to a new consciousness, a consciousness which is beyond the senses and beyond the mind and opens on the eternal and the infinite. We may only catch glimpses of it now, but it is spreading throughout the world: 'The former things have passed away. Behold, I make all things new.'²⁶

II

The Vedic Revelation

I

THE VEDIC MYTH: THE COSMIC VISION

I have said that since my coming to India I have been led in a strange way to retrace the path of the Golden String. My awakening to the mystery of existence had come to me through the experience of the beauty of nature, which I have described in the opening chapter of *The Golden String*, and this experience had been expressed and interpreted for me in the writings of the Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. Wordsworth had taught me to find in nature the presence of a power which pervades both the universe and the mind of man. Shelley had awakened me to the Platonic idea of an eternal world, of which the world we see is a dim reflection. Keats had set before me the values of 'the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination'. These were for me not merely abstract ideas but living principles, which were working in me over many years and which I tried to comprehend in a reasoned philosophy of life.

But when I came to India these ideas took on a new life. I discovered that what in Europe had been the inspired intuition of a few poets, had been the common faith of India for countless centuries. That power which pervades the

The Vedic Revelation

universe and the mind of man had been revealed with marvellous insight in the Vedas centuries before the birth of Christ. The eternal world of Plato was only a reflection in the Western mind of the profound intuition of the seers of the Upanishads. Above all, I found that that 'truth of the imagination', of which Keats had spoken, was a primordial truth, a truth which takes us back to the very roots of human experience. The Western mind from the time of Socrates and Plato had concentrated on the development of abstract, rational thought which had led to the great systems of theology in the Middle Ages and to the achievements of modern science and philosophy. But India had been nourished from the beginning by the truth of the imagination, the primordial truth, which is not abstract but concrete, not logical but symbolic, not rational but intuitive. So it was that I was led to the rediscovery of the truth which the Western world has lost and is now seeking desperately to recover.

The Vedas, which contain the germ of all the later developments of the Hindu genius, probably took their present shape in the second millennium before Christ, but their roots go back to far more ancient times and take us back to the very beginning of human speech. Perhaps nowhere else can one observe the whole process of human evolution from its primordial utterance to the most elaborate poetic speech and the most profound philosophy. The Vedas are known as *sruti*, that which has been 'heard'; they are not merely the product of human ingenuity but of revelation, that is an 'unveiling' of the truth. They are also called *nitya*, that is 'eternal', signifying that they do not derive from this world of time and change, but are reflections of the eternal. Finally, they are said to be *apauruseya*, 'without human authorship', they are expressions of the eternal word, the

Vac, and the human authors are *rishis*, those who have 'seen' the truth, and 'poets' (*kavi*), those whose utterance is inspired. This shows how in ancient times speech – the word – was held to be something divine, a gift of God, and poets, those who had the gift of speech, were inspired by God.

Human speech was originally poetic; as Vico¹ wrote: 'Poetry is the primary activity of the human mind. Man before he has arrived at the stage of forming universals forms imaginary ideas, before he can articulate, he sings, before speaking in prose, he speaks in verse, before using technical terms, he uses metaphors.'

It is difficult for modern man with his prosaic mode of thought to realize that poetry is more natural to man than prose, and yet all the evidence of history shows it. The further we go back in time the more we come not on prose but on poetry. The literature of India begins with the hymns of the Rig Veda, that of Greece with the poems of Homer. The Bible itself is as much poetry as prose, and its earliest strata are all poetic. The reasons for this are obvious. Poetry is the expression of the whole man. It expresses not merely his mind but his sensations, his feelings, his 'heart's affections'. This is why the imagination, as Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats so well understood, holds the key to human understanding. The imagination is the link between the mind and the heart, between intellect and sense, between thought and feeling. Modern man has broken this link; he has created a world of science and reason, whose language is prose, and has cut himself off from the sources of life in the imagination, which is the language of the heart.

Ancient man, that is man from the earliest times until the first millennium before Christ (and even after that in the greater part of the world until the present day), lived in the world of the imagination, that is the world of integral

wholeness. Of this world of the imagination the supreme expression was the Myth.² Myth is a symbolic utterance which arises from the depths of the unconscious, or rather from the deep levels of consciousness which lie below the level of rational consciousness. The rational mind, with its abstract concepts and logical constructions, is like the tip of an iceberg, while below it are vast levels of consciousness which link our human nature with the universe around us and with the archetypes or transcendent principles which govern the Universe. The Myth is the reflection in the human imagination of these archetypal ideas, those cosmic principles and powers, which were known in the ancient world as the gods or angels.

Through the Myth ancient man was brought into contact with this world of the gods and of the transcendent Source both of gods and men. At the same time, the Myth took shape in his imagination, engaging all the powers of his being, his intellect and will, his feelings and affections, his senses and his whole physical being. In other words, the Myth was the means of his total integration, with the universe around him, with his own inner experience and with the transcendent world of the spirit.

It may seem an exaggeration to credit primeval man with this exalted consciousness, yet all the evidence of ancient myth and poetry from all over the world confirms the fact of this primitive mode of experience. I myself first received an insight into this when, as an undergraduate, I was lent by C. S. Lewis a book written by his friend Owen Barfield on *Poetic Diction*.³ I have never looked at this book again but it left an indelible impression on my mind. Barfield showed how a word like 'spirit' (Latin *spiritus*, Greek *pneuma*, Hebrew *ruah*, one may add Sanskrit *atman*) originally had many meanings. It could mean wind or air or breath or life or soul or spirit. A

common understanding of this phenomenon is that the word originally meant wind or air, then as the connection between breath and air, and between life and breath and between soul and life was realized, man gradually grew in understanding until he came to conceive of a supreme universal spirit.

Barfield was able to show that this view has no basis in reality. These words, as originally used, contained all these meanings without distinction. That is why primitive language, and the language of the Vedas for instance, is so incredibly rich in meaning. The fact is that in primitive speech a word contains a multiplicity of meanings. The imagination, which is the faculty of primitive thought, expresses itself in symbols (literally, from the Greek, that which is 'thrown together'), which reflect this multiplicity of meaning in a single word. In other words, primitive thought is intuitive; it grasps the whole in all its parts. The rational mind comes later to distinguish all the different aspects of the word and to separate their meanings. These are the two basic faculties of the mind, the intuitive which grasps the whole but does not distinguish the parts, and the rational which distinguishes the parts but cannot grasp the whole. Both these powers are necessary for the functioning of the human mind. Intuition without reason is blind; it is deep and comprehensive but confused and obscure. Reason without intuition is empty and sterile; it constructs logical systems which have no basis in reality.

In the Vedas there is a marvellous meeting of the intuitive and the rational mind. They are deeply rooted in the world of myth, but the rational mind has already begun to draw out all the complex meanings of words and to integrate them in a Cosmic vision. We owe to Sri Aurobindo, the sage of Pondicherry, the understanding of the complex symbolism

of the Vedas.⁴ For many centuries their deeper meaning had been lost and they had been interpreted with a crude literalism. But Sri Aurobindo was able to show how a deeper psychological meaning underlay the external physical sense. The Vedic seers had reached an understanding of the threefold nature of the world, at once physical, psychological and spiritual. These three worlds were seen to be interdependent, every physical reality having a psychological aspect, and both aspects, physical and psychological, being integrated in a spiritual vision. The cows and horses of the Vedas were not merely physical cows and horses, they were also the cows and horses of the mind, that is psychological forces, and beyond that they were symbols of the cosmic powers, manifestations of the Supreme Spirit.

This understanding of the threefold nature of the world underlies not only the Vedas but all ancient thought. In the primitive mind (which is also the natural mind) there is no such thing as a merely physical object. Every material thing has a psychological aspect, a relation to human consciousness, and this in turn is related to the supreme spirit which pervades both the physical world and human consciousness. It is interesting to observe that Western science is now slowly coming round to the Oriental view of the universe, which is, in fact, the view of the 'perennial philosophy', the cosmic vision, which is common to all religious tradition from the most primitive tribal religions to the great world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

The view of the universe on which Western science has been built, that of matter as a solid substance extended in space and time, and of the human mind as a detached observer capable of examining and describing the universe and so gaining control over it, has now been demolished by science itself. The Newtonian model of a world of solid

bodies moving in space and time has been replaced by the model of relativity and quantum physics, in which matter is seen as a form of energy and the universe as a field of energies, organized in space-time, so as to form a unified and interdependent whole.

This comes very close to the Buddhist view of the 'insubstantiality' (*anatman*) of the universe and of the dynamic character of the elements (*dharmas*) as constantly changing parts of an organized whole. But Western science has been compelled to go even beyond this and to recognize that the human mind as observer is already involved in that which it observes. What we observe is not reality itself, but reality as conditioned by the human mind and senses and the various instruments which it uses to extend the senses. What we observe, as Heisenberg said, is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.⁵ The old understanding of science is gradually giving way to the view that 'consciousness and physical reality (or empirical reality) should be considered as complementary aspects of reality'.⁶

Thus a revolution is quietly taking place in Western science and it is slowly beginning to rediscover the ancient tradition of wisdom, according to which mind and matter are interdependent and complementary aspects of one reality. The same process can be observed in Western medicine where it is gradually coming to be realized that all disease is psychosomatic and that the human body cannot be properly treated apart from the soul.

We are slowly recovering, therefore, the knowledge which was universal in the ancient world, that there is no such thing as matter apart from mind or consciousness. Consciousness is latent in every particle of matter and the mathematical order which science discovers in the universe is

due to the working of this universal consciousness in it. In human nature this latent consciousness begins to come into actual consciousness, and as human consciousness develops it grows more and more conscious of the universal consciousness in which it is grounded. Thus we begin to discover the threefold nature of the Vedic universe. There is the physical aspect of matter (*Prakriti*), the feminine principle, from which everything evolves, and consciousness (*Purusha*) the masculine principle of reason and order in the universe. These correspond to the Yin and Yang of Chinese tradition and the matter and form of Aristotle. Beyond both the Yin and the Yang, beyond both matter and form, is the supreme principle, the ground of Being, the Great Tao, from which everything comes and which pervades all things. In the Vedic tradition the two principles were conceived as heaven and earth, and the whole creation came into being through their marriage.

These two principles, which are to be found in all ancient philosophy, are no less fundamental in Christian doctrine. St Thomas Aquinas, who built up his system of philosophy on the basis of Aristotle, regarded the 'form' and 'matter' of Aristotle as the basic principles of nature. Matter according to this philosophy is pure 'potentiality', form is the principle of actuality. Pure matter, or 'prime matter' as Aristotle calls it, does not actually exist. It is a metaphysical principle which is basic to all physical being. Matter, as we know it, is a combination of form and matter, or of act and potency. In every physical object there is a form, a structure, an organizing power or active energy, and a material principle, a passive energy, a potentiality of being which is actualized by the form.

It is difficult to grasp this principle of potentiality precisely because it has no actuality and is not intelligible in itself; for

form is the principle of intelligibility as well as of actuality. It can only be grasped in relation to the form which actualizes it. It can be compared to a womb, a darkness, a capacity of being, to which form brings life and light and actuality. It is the chaos, the 'tohu' and 'bohu' of the book of Genesis. It is the source of flux, of change, of that indeterminacy which science discovers even in the atom. This is what in Hindu tradition is called *maya*, which Sankara described as 'neither being nor not-being'.⁷ It is the irrational element in existence, the meaningless, the absurd. Yet this principle is not evil in itself. In itself it is a pure potency, a pure capacity of being, and as such has a kind of purity, an innocence, a simplicity which exists at the heart of creation.

This principle is, of course, not merely a physical but also a psychological principle, since the physical and psychological are but two aspects of one reality. It is the ground of the unconscious in man. Beyond all the levels of human consciousness, mental and imaginative and emotional and physical, there is a ground of unconsciousness, a primeval source, a womb of darkness, from which all life and consciousness springs. It is the world into which we enter in deep sleep, what in Hindu doctrine is called *Sushupti*, the state of being beyond the waking and the dreaming state. It is the source of irrationality, of those violent contradictions in human nature, of the insanity which plagues us. And yet it is not insane or irrational in itself; it is only in association with sanity and reason that it develops these characteristics. In itself, as has been said, it has a certain purity and innocence. It is pure receptivity, which is the feminine aspect of the human soul. The masculine aspect is active and communicative, the feminine aspect is passive and receptive. The feminine has its roots in the unconscious, in the darkness of the womb, and is the source of instability and change like the waxing and

waning of the moon; the masculine is the source of stability and order and has its source in the light like the sun. Yet both are necessary for existence – without the feminine principle the infinite variety of nature would not exist; the white light of the sun would never be broken up into the multiple colours of the rainbow.

Moreover, these two principles have their source in the Supreme Spirit itself. The one who is beyond all change and multiplicity manifests itself in these two principles eternally. Purusha is the active principle in the Godhead manifesting itself as light and life and intelligence; Prakriti is the feminine principle, which in the Godhead is the Sakti, the divine power or energy. In the Christian tradition there has been very little recognition of this feminine aspect of God. Yet God is both Father and Mother, and in Oriental tradition this has always been recognized.

It is a fact, however, that in the Bible the name for the spirit (*ruah*) is feminine and in the later Syriac tradition, which preserved the same name, the Holy Spirit was spoken of as Mother. There is also in the Old Testament the tradition of a feminine Wisdom (Hebrew *hochmah*, Greek *Sophia*, Latin *Sapientia*) which reveals a feminine aspect in God. It may be possible therefore to see in the Holy Spirit the feminine aspect of God in the Trinity. The source of the Trinity is both Father and Mother, the Son or Word is the active principle of intelligibility, the source of order in the Universe; the Holy Spirit is the feminine principle of receptivity, an infinite capacity for love, which receives perpetually the outflowing of Love through the Son and returns it to its source in the Father.

The Vedic understanding of the mystery of existence is revealed in the Vedic Myth.⁸ This myth centres on the Sun as the source of light. But the Sun in the Vedas is not merely a

physical body which gives light to the eyes. It is a cosmic power which gives light also to the mind. The gods (*devas*) of the Vedas are the 'cosmic powers' of St Paul.⁹ They are what both the Greek and the Arabian traditions called the 'intelligences' which rule the universe. In the theology of St Thomas Aquinas these are conceived as the angels through whose agency the order of the world is maintained. In the Vedas these 'gods' are all conceived as names and forms (*nama-rupa*) of the 'one being' (*ekam sat*) from which the whole universe, both material and spiritual, derives. The Sun therefore is a god in this sense, the source of intellectual no less than of sensible light. It is to him, under the name of Savitri, that the Gayatri mantra, the most sacred verse in the Vedas, is addressed: 'Let us meditate on the glorious splendour of that divine light (*Savitri*). May he illuminate our meditation.'

In the Vedic myth there is a constant conflict between the light and the darkness. The darkness is represented by Vritra, the primeval monster, who holds back the waters of life and hides the light of the sun. He represents the primeval darkness of the unconscious, conceived as a rocky cavern in which the cows of the sun are concealed. The cows themselves, strange as it may seem to us, are symbols of light. They are called the Cows of the Dawn and represent the rays of the sun, so that the dawn can be described as the releasing of the cows from their pen. But these rays of light are not merely earthly light, they are the light of the mind, and the search of the rishis in the Vedas is a search for illumination of mind. Elsewhere the powers of darkness are called the Panis and their chief is named Vala. It may well be that these sources of darkness represent the dark, Dravidian people who were the enemies of the fair-skinned Aryans, or again they may represent the dark thunder clouds which withhold the rain,

but this only reveals the multiple symbolism of the Vedas. Everything has at once a physical and a psychological, including a social, meaning and behind all the symbols is the one supreme Reality which is manifesting itself at every level of existence.

It is this vision of the universe which we need to recover. The Western mind has split the world into two halves, conscious and unconscious, mind and matter, soul and body, and Western philosophy swings between the two extremes of materialism and idealism. This is due to a disease of the mind, a schizophrenia, which has developed in Western man since the Renaissance, when the unitive vision of the Middle Ages was lost. This medieval vision is in other respects no longer adequate, and Western man has to recover his equilibrium by rediscovering the vision of the ancient world, the perennial philosophy, which is fully developed in the Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism, but is implicit in all ancient religion. In this vision of the world the three principles matter, mind and spirit are seen to interpenetrate one another. It is a disease of the merely rational mind that causes us to see them as separate from one another, to imagine a world extended outside us in space and time, and the mind as something separate from the external world. In reality the world we see is a world which has been penetrated by our consciousness; it is the world as mirrored in the human mind. But beyond both mind and matter there is a still further principle of Spirit which interpenetrates both mind and matter, and is the source of both energy and consciousness.

The understanding of man as body, soul and spirit is found in St Paul¹⁰ and in the early fathers of the Church, though later it was unfortunately displaced by the body-soul conception of Aristotle. But in India this threefold character

has always been accepted. Man has a body, a physical organism, a structure of energies, forming part of the physical universe. He has a psychological organism, consisting of appetites, senses, feelings, imagination, reason, and will, which forms his personality and is integrated with the physical organism. But beyond both body and soul, yet integrated with them, is the spirit, the *pneuma* of St Paul, the *atman* of Hindu thought. This spirit in man is the point of his communion with the universal spirit which rules and penetrates the whole universe. This is the point of human self-transcendence, the point at which the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the many and the One, meet and touch. It is to this point of the spirit that we are led by meditation, when going beyond both physical and psychological consciousness we experience the depth of our own inner being and discover our affinity with the spirit of God. 'The spirit of God,' as St Paul says, 'bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.'¹¹

Man was created in this state of communion with God, and all ancient religion bears witness to the memory of this blissful state of consciousness. The fall of Man was a fall from this spiritual consciousness with its centre in God to the plane of psychic consciousness with its centre on the ego, the separated human soul bound by the laws of the physical organism. This is the state in which we find ourselves today and for many people even the memory of that higher state of consciousness has been lost. The psychic consciousness dominated by the rational mind is taken to be the norm of human life and as a consequence man finds himself dominated by the powers of the physical world, the 'elemental spirits' of St Paul, or in Indian terms the darkness of ignorance (*avidya*) and the illusion of *maya* which is the world separated from God. In India from the earliest times

man has sought to be liberated from this bondage to matter (or *maya*) and to attain to enlightenment, the state of the Buddha, the enlightened one, and so to discover his true self, his spirit or Atman, in which he knows himself as one with God, the universal spirit and source of all.

II

THE REVELATION OF THE UPANISHADS: THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF

The revelation of the Vedas, which was given in the rich poetic language of myth and symbol, was developed in the Upanishads in a more philosophical form. The Upanishads come at the end of the Vedic period (500 BC) and form the basis of the Vedanta – the end (*anta*) of the Vedas. In them is to be found the quintessence of Hindu doctrine, the supreme wisdom, which is one of the great inheritances of mankind. They belong to that period in the middle of the first millennium before Christ, which saw also the rise of Jainism and Buddhism in India, of Taoism and Confucianism in China, of Zoroastrianism in Persia, of philosophy in Greece and of prophecy in Israel. It has been called by Karl Jaspers the 'axial period' in human history. It marked the emergence of rational understanding out of the mythical imagination of the ancient world. From the beginning of history, or more accurately from the time of the first emergence of human speech, man had lived in the world of the imagination, of intuitive wisdom in which sense and feeling, desire and thought and will had all been focused on symbols of words and gestures, of dance and song, of images and paintings, of rituals and sacrifices, in which the world of the gods, of the cosmic and psychic powers, was seen reflected in

the human imagination. This was the world of the Vedas. Now in this period of the Upanishads, the rational mind breaks through the image and the symbol and emerges into the light of pure thought. The concept begins to take the place of the image.

Yet we must be clear that this is not a case of reason replacing imagination. It is rather that the 'truth of the imagination', as Keats had called it, emerges into a clearer light. At this period precisely we find the perfect marriage of imagination and reason in intuitive thought. Intuition, as we have said, is at first blind; it is a confused and obscure grasp of reality, in which the seeds of all future knowledge are contained. It is embryonic thought, in which the future structure of thought is contained, as the structure of the mature human being is contained in the embryo. As the power of reason develops, this dark embryonic knowledge, which is the knowledge of childhood, begins to be illumined by reason, and the language of images and symbols is formed, creating the vast, rich world of myth in which man lived for thousands of years. Then in this 'axial' period reason pierced through the veil of the symbol to discover the truth contained in it.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this moment in human history. It is the point at which man reaches the knowledge of himself, the Atman, the Self, of the Vedic seer, the 'know thyself' of the Delphic Oracle. From the night of the moon and the stars with all their brilliance, he emerges into the light of the sun and the day.

But there is no break in continuity at this point. The power of reason which was already at work in the imagination, creating the myth and the symbol, now breaks through into a pure intuition of reality. The first intuition of the soul had been dark and confused, it had grown with the rich symbolic

intuition of the imagination; now it passes beyond images and symbols into the pure light of thought. Yet human understanding can never dispense with images and symbols. Even when it passes beyond into pure intuition, it still needs images and symbols to clothe its thought. That is why at this period we come upon the great flowering period of poetry, the epic of Homer and the Greek tragedians, the imaginative genius of the Hebrew prophets, the Book of Poetry in China, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in India. This is the time when reason and imagination meet in a marvellous marriage, and the masculine and the feminine unite to form the complete man. It is no accident that at the end of this period we meet the figure of the perfect man, in the form of Rama and Krishna in India, the Bodhisattva in Buddhism, and Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, who brings to fulfilment the promises made to Israel and the prophecies concerning the Messianic Priest and King.

It is to this supreme period in human history, therefore, that the Upanishads belong. They spring from the soil of the rich imaginative tradition of the Vedas, and they bring to it the pure light of the intelligence. At this point we can watch the human spirit emerging into self-consciousness, human reason beginning to form clear concepts and the physical world becoming the object of scientific knowledge. The wisdom of the Upanishads is inexhaustible. It arises from a profound intuition of ultimate reality, a passing beyond all the outward forms of nature and the inner experience of man to the pure intuition of the spirit.

Man is body, soul and spirit. At first the spirit manifests itself in bodily activity, in the search for food and clothing and shelter, in marriage and family life, in religious ritual and sacrifice. But already the powers of the soul, the psyche, are at work, creating language, constructing myths, building

up the great world of the imagination. Then as reasoning power develops the spirit begins to manifest itself in rational discourse, in moral perception, in the awakening of self-consciousness. Finally passing beyond the limits of body and soul, man awakes to the reality of the spirit, the transcendent mystery behind all the forms of the universe, behind all human experience, a reality which had been present but hidden from the beginning but now comes into full consciousness.

There are three words which are used to describe this ultimate reality in the Upanishads – Brahman, Atman and Purusha. None of these words is adequate because no words can describe what is ultimate in human existence. As a Buddhist saying has it: 'We use words to go beyond words and reach the wordless essence.' Human language derives from the physical nature of man. 'It was the nerves and not the intellect which created speech,' as Sri Aurobindo has said.¹² Words originally express vital and sensational experience. But this vital and sensational experience gives rise to images which reflect the world in the human imagination. It is then that poetry comes into being. Words are symbols in which the archetypal images of the unconscious are focused and brought into consciousness, so that in becoming conscious of the world around him man becomes conscious of himself. Yet this consciousness is still diffused, the symbol is rich and varied but it is not yet clear. Man is still living in the imagination. The word is accompanied by music and gesture and dance and ritual action. It is the way by which man experiences his oneness with the world. It is only gradually that reason comes in to distinguish clearly the self from the world and the world and the self from their common ground.

The word Brahman is said to derive from the root *brh*,

which means to swell or to grow. This seems to have signified originally the rising of the word from the depths of the unconscious, the growth into consciousness. It is used of the Vedic word or mantra, which Sri Aurobindo has described as the 'voice of the rhythm which has created the world'. Brahman is the mysterious power in nature which comes into consciousness in the word. 'In the beginning,' it is said in the Upanishads, 'this was Brahman, one only.'¹³ 'This' is the world, the reality in which we find ourselves, and at this point the intuition is reached that this reality is 'one only'. This is an immensely important stage in human thought when the world in which we live with all its disturbing diversity is seen to be 'one only'. This is the intuition which underlies all Indian thought. It is a fundamental human intuition. In all of us the universe is originally experienced as a unity. As reason develops the different aspects of this unity are discerned, and the underlying unity is very easily lost to sight. This is what has befallen modern man. Reason has grown to such an extent that there is an ever-growing diversity of knowledge, but the unifying vision of the whole is lost in the process. Primitive man had very little knowledge of the diversities of nature, but he had a profound sense of the whole. Everything in nature was related to everything else in a cosmic order. This is the vision of Vedic man. In the Upanishads this principle of unity, this ground of creation, comes into consciousness and is called Brahman.

No words can express what this Brahman is. It is everything and it is nothing. It is the source of all creation, of all the diversities of nature. It pervades all things 'from Brahma (the creator) to a blade of grass'.¹⁴ The whole world, the earth, the water, the air, the sun, the moon, the stars, the gods (the cosmic powers) and their creator, are all 'woven' on this Brahman. He is the 'honey', the subtle essence of

everything. In a real sense he is every thing. 'All this (world) is Brahman.'¹⁵ And yet he is nothing: 'he is "not this, not this" (*neti, neti*). There is nothing higher than if one says, he is not this.'¹⁶

Thus when we come to the ultimate reality, we come upon paradox, and this must necessarily be so. Human reason is a discriminating power. It is the power to distinguish, to analyse, to objectify, that is to make an 'object' distinct from the 'subject'. This is the great divider, which separates man from nature and man from himself. It creates a world of duality and destroys the original paradise in which man had lived in harmony with nature and himself. But when reason has done its work of division and separation it can return to itself, it can re-discover its original unity, it can learn to know the Self.

The Upanishads are the record of this human discovery of the self. They seek to answer the questions: Who am I? Am I this body, this physical organism which is part of the physical organism of the universe, or am I this mind, this soul, which thinks and feels and suffers and enjoys? Or is there something beyond both body and soul, in which the real meaning of my existence is to be found? There is the story of how the gods and demons (the powers of nature both positive and negative) came to Prajapati, the creator, and asked him to tell them about the true self.¹⁷ First he told them to look in a pool of water, so they looked in the water and saw themselves 'even to the very hairs and nails', and thought that this, that is the body, was their self. But then they realized that this was not what they were seeking and so they returned to Prajapati and he told them, 'the self you see in dreams, that is your true self'. So they thought that the inner self, the self of thoughts and feelings and desires was their true self. But then they realized that this was not what they were seeking and so they

returned to Prajapati and he said 'the self which exists in deep sleep, when both body and mind are at rest, that is the true self'. So they came to see that the self which is beyond both the body and the mind is the true self, but still they were not content, since that self is unconscious. So they returned to Prajapati again and finally he revealed to them the 'fourth' state (*turiya*), the state beyond waking and dreaming and deep sleep, the state of the awakened self, in which man attains to self-knowledge.

This story is deeply significant. There are three states of consciousness in the Hindu tradition, the waking, the dreaming and the state of deep sleep. Most people think that the real world is to be found in the external world presented to the senses, and that their real self is their bodily existence – the thing which you see in a mirror, the face which you present to the world. When we mature to some extent we begin to realize that the inner self, the self which thinks and feels, with its hopes and fears and joys and anxieties, is the real self. This is what corresponds to the dream state.

But beyond the waking and the dreaming state, there is the state of deep sleep (*sushupti*). This is somewhat surprising from a Western point of view. Most people would feel that the state of deep sleep is simply a state of unconsciousness, and has no significance. But, the Hindu asks, when the body is no longer conscious through its senses, and the mind is no longer conscious through its thoughts, what is that self which remains in deep sleep? It is this self, which is beyond both the body and the soul, beyond all conscious activity, which comes nearest to the real self in the Hindu view. This is the return to the source, to the root, to the ground of being.

But in this state there is no consciousness. It is necessary therefore to go beyond this state to what is called the 'fourth' state (*turiya*). This is the state beyond body and soul, beyond

feeling and thought, in which the person awakes to its true being, in which it discovers its ground, its source, not in unconsciousness but in pure consciousness. This is the goal to be sought, in this is to be found self-realization, self-knowledge. This is the knowledge of the Self, the Atman, the Spirit, where the spirit of man reaches and touches the Spirit of God.

We can put it in another way. Human life springs from the darkness of the unconscious, the womb of nature to which we return every night. In that darkness we are one with the earth and the water, the fire and the air. We are in the womb of the Mother. Yet just as all the forms of nature, of sun and moon and stars, of mountains and rivers and seas, are latent in that darkness so all the future forms of life and consciousness are already present in that womb. As the organs of life begin to develop in the child in the womb, so the powers of life begin to develop in nature. The earth brings forth living things, plants and trees and flowers, all these forms were latent in the darkness of the earth, and the light of consciousness, shining in the darkness, brings them forth in the light of day. Life and consciousness are already present in matter from the beginning, but there were no organs through which they could act. In the plant and the tree a dim consciousness is already awakening as recent experiments have proved. They are beginning to emerge from the state of deep sleep, in which the earth is involved, into the dreaming state. The animal lives in the dreaming state. It has appetites, feelings, sensations, imagination, memory and a rudimentary intelligence. The light of consciousness is beginning to dawn, but the animal has no self-consciousness. It remains a part of nature, determined by an external law, reflecting the world, through its senses and ruled by its appetites. In man, nature awakes to self-consciousness. There is a breakthrough from

the dreaming to the waking state. Man becomes conscious of himself, conscious of the world, but this also brings with it a relative freedom. He can detach himself from the world around him, from his appetites and desires, and reflect upon himself. That reason which had been latent in matter from the beginning, organizing the stars and atoms, building up the living cell, giving form to plant and animal, now emerges into consciousness. Yet this light of reason is still very precarious. Man is still largely conditioned by his appetites and desires, he still feels himself to be a part of nature, is scarcely conscious of an individual self. Yet that little spark of reason and self-consciousness is there.

It is now that the drama of human existence begins. Man can allow himself to be ruled by his appetites and senses, to submit to the powers of nature and become their slave. Or he can awake to the 'fourth' state, he can discover the source of reason and consciousness within him, open himself to the power of the spirit and awake to his true self. This is what took place in the Upanishads.

All through the Vedic period consciousness had been growing, but it was still an imaginative consciousness. The world was reflected through the human imagination, a world of gods and demons, in which the divine power was mysteriously hidden. But now the mind breaks through into pure intuition of reality. Man's first intuition had been blind and confused, that obscure intuition of ourselves with which we all begin our lives. As the light of reason grew, this intuition had been filled out with the forms of nature, with the consciousness of the world and the self, of physical and psychic being in which the divine spirit was seen to be reflected in the world of gods. Yet the intuition remained of a whole behind all this diversity, of 'one being' (*ekam sat*) of which all the forms of nature and the self were but 'names and

forms' (*name rupa*).¹⁸ Now in the Upanishads this intuition issues into the light, into a pure awareness of being, an absolute self-consciousness, an experience of the spirit, the Atman, the self, as the ground of being and consciousness, the source of reason itself.

We must try to fathom this intuition of the Upanishads. It is basic to all human experience, it is the ultimate truth; it is 'that which being known everything is known'. It was discovered by the seers of the Upanishads and has been passed down in India from generation to generation; in it is contained the 'wisdom' of India. It has been known in other religions too, in the traditions of Buddhism and Taoism and in the mystical tradition of Islam. It has been present in Christianity from the beginning, and is the inner secret of the Gospel. But it has often been obscured, and today in the West has almost been lost. It is in the Upanishads that this intuition of ultimate reality has been most clearly expressed and where we can see it, springing, as it were, from its source. But to discover it we have to be able to receive it. It will not yield itself to any merely human effort or learning. 'Not through much learning is this spirit reached, nor through the intellect, nor through sacred teaching, it is reached by him whom it chooses, to him the spirit reveals himself.'¹⁹ This is the great stumbling block. If we think that we can learn the meaning of the Upanishads by any methods of modern science, or philosophy or by Vedic scholarship or linguistic analysis, we are doomed to failure. The Upanishads demand a *metanoia*, a total change of mind, a passage from rational knowledge to intuitive wisdom for which few today are prepared.

Perhaps we can best approach this inner mystery of the Upanishads by way of Katha Upanishad. It is a short

Upanishad belonging to the middle period (about 500 BC), coming after the early period of the long prose Upanishads (the Brihadaranyaka and the Chandogya), written in verse and forming a real initiation into the secret doctrine of the Upanishads. It begins significantly with the descent of the young man, Nachiketas, to the realm of the dead to receive instructions from Yama, the god of death. In every great religious tradition, it has been recognized that to reach the final truth one must pass through death. It is the meaning behind Aeneas's descent into the underworld in Virgil, and of Dante's descent into hell in the *Divine Comedy*. It is, of course, the meaning of Christian baptism. 'You who were baptized were baptized into the death of Christ.'²⁰ We have to die to this world and to ourselves, if we are to find the truth. What Nachiketas asks of Yama is 'What lies beyond death?' This the question which man has asked from the beginning of history and which people are still asking today. But an answer cannot be given on the level of rational discourse. 'This doctrine is not to be obtained by argument,' says Yama.²¹ It can only be learned from one who has had experience of the mystery, who has passed through death into a new life.

This is expressed in the words which take us to the heart of the teaching of the Upanishads. 'The wise man, who by means of meditation on the self, recognizes the Ancient, who is difficult to be seen, who has entered into the dark, who is seated in the cave, who dwells in the abyss, as God, he indeed leaves both joy and sorrow behind.'²² This is the death we have to undergo, to go beyond the rational understanding, beyond the imagination and the senses, into the primeval darkness, where God, the divine mystery itself, is hidden. It is a return to the womb, to what the Chinese call the 'uncarved Block', to the original darkness from which we came. But

now that darkness is filled with light, it is revealed as God. The senses, the imagination and reason by itself cannot pierce through that darkness, but when we die to ourselves, to the limitation of our mind which casts its shadow on the light, then the darkness is revealed as light, the soul discovers itself in the radiance of a pure intuition; it attains to self knowledge.

This brings us to the third aspect of this supreme reality, that of Purusha. Purusha is the cosmic man, of whom it is said 'one fourth of him is here on earth, three quarters are above in heaven'.²³ This is the archetypal man, the pole (*qutb*) or Universal Man, of Muslim tradition, who is akin to the Adam Kadmon, the first man and the son of Man, of Hebrew tradition. This is one of the most profound symbols of the ancient world. It is based on the recognition that man embraces both heaven and earth. Though his body occupies only a little space on a small planet, his mind encompasses the universe. This was beautifully expressed in the Chandogya Upanishad. 'There is this city of Brahman (the human body) and in it there is a small shrine in the form of lotus, and within can be found a small space. This little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun and the moon and the stars; fire and lightning and wind are there, and all that now is and is not yet – all that is contained within it.'²⁴ This is based on the view to which we must constantly return, that the universe is a unity and man is a mirror of the universe. He contains within himself the principle of all material elements and of all psychic consciousness, so that he is a 'microcosm', a little world. So it was that the macrocosm, the 'great world', came to be conceived as a Cosmic Man, in whom matter and life of consciousness are gathered into the unity of the spirit.

Purusha is the cosmic person, who contains the whole

creation in himself and also transcends it. He is the spiritual principle, which unites body and soul, matter and conscious intelligence in the unity of a transcendent consciousness. The structure of the universe is described in detail (following the Samkhya Philosophy) in the Katha Upanishad. 'Beyond the senses,' it is said 'are their objects, beyond these is the mind (*manas*), beyond the mind is the intellect (*buddhi*), beyond the intellect is the Great Self (*mahat*), beyond the Great Self is the unmanifest (*avyakta*), beyond the unmanifest is Purusha. Beyond Purusha there is nothing – that is the end, that is the supreme goal.'²⁵ This is the basic structure of the universe according to the Vedanta. First there are the senses (*indriyas*) and their objects the *bhuta* or elements. Then comes the mind, the *manas*, the discursive mind, which works through the senses, what today is called the scientific mind. It is the lowest level of intelligence, since it is wholly dependent on the senses, and is consequently fragmented and dispersed. Above this is the *buddhi*, the intellect or pure intelligence, the intuitive mind, from which the principles of reason and morality are derived. It is the 'nous' of Aristotle, the *intellectus* of St Thomas, as compared with the *ratio* or reason. It is the point at which the human mind is open to the divine light. It is also the point of unification of the personality. It is at this point that we become fully human. It is at this point that the drama of human existence takes place. If the *buddhi* turns towards the light, it is illumined by the divine light and transmits the light to the *manas* and the senses. But if the *buddhi* is turned away from the light then the mind is darkened and the personality is divided.

Beyond the *buddhi* is *mahat*, the Great Self, that is the cosmic order or cosmic consciousness. This is a concept which is scarcely to be found in Western philosophy. Yet it is fundamental to the doctrine of the Vedanta. The *buddhi* is the

point where the human being is individualized, where man becomes a person. But the human person is not isolated; it is a dynamic point of communion. Just as every element in the physical world is a dynamic point of relationship with every other element, so every human person is a point of intercommunion and the interdependence with every other person. The *mahat* is the sphere of consciousness in which the human mind opens upon the universal mind. In Buddhism it is called the 'store-consciousness' (*Alaya-vignana*). It corresponds with Plato's world of 'ideas'.

Everything in the physical world has a psychic aspect, a psychological character. The idea which was propagated by Descartes, of a material world extended in space and time outside the mind, is an illusion. It corresponds exactly with what in Vedanta is called *maya*. It is a mental fiction. In reality the physical world is permeated by consciousness; it is one aspect of a complex whole. It is like a reflection in matter of conscious intelligence. In the ancient world it was always understood that every material thing has a spiritual counterpart. These are the 'ideas' of Plato, the intelligences of Aristotle and the Arabian Philosophers, the 'angels' of the Greek fathers and the scholastic theologians. These are the gods, the 'devas' of the Vedas.

For modern Western man the gods and angels are relics of a discarded mythology, and of course, they are mythological figures, that is symbolic forms; but they are symbols of realities. They are the 'cosmic powers' of St Paul, the powers that rule the universe – the powers of earth and water and air and fire, of gravitation, magnetism and electricity. But these powers are not outside the sphere of consciousness. Just as our bodies with all their physical and chemical properties are contained within our human consciousness, so all the powers of nature are contained within the universal consciousness,

the Mahat. In our experience these powers operate within the sphere of what has been called the Unconscious, but which is really another level of consciousness. Beneath the level of the reflective, rational consciousness there are other levels of consciousness, imaginative, emotional, vital and physical in which the cosmic powers act upon us. The gods and angels are reflections in the human imagination of the 'archetypes', the primordial principles of creation, by which the universe is governed.

These powers, of course, are not only good but also evil. Beside the gods, the devas, are the 'asuras', the demons, and beside the good angels are the evil spirits, the *daimones* of the Gospel. It cannot be too strongly affirmed that these are real powers which act on the unconscious, as depth psychology has recognized, that is, on the lower levels of consciousness, bringing man into subjection to the powers of nature. The fact that modern man does not recognize them is one of the many signs that he is under their power; only when they are recognized can they be overcome.

Yet we must not think of these powers as separate beings without connection with one another. They are all parts of the cosmic whole, in which positive and negative forces are both at work, just as they are in the physical world. They form an ordered hierarchy of being representing different levels of consciousness. In the medieval Christian scheme of the universe there were nine orders of angels, beginning with the angels themselves, who are on a level of consciousness just above that of the rational human consciousness. Above them are the arch-angels, the 'thrones, dominations, virtues, principdoms, powers' of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the powers at work in the destiny of nations, and finally the cherubim and seraphim, the powers of wisdom and love nearest to the Supreme. The evil angels are powers which are in rebellion

against the cosmic order, centres of conflict, of violence and disintegration, at work in nature, in the individual human being and in human society. Of these in the Hebrew tradition Satan is said to be the head, the Diabolos, the Deceiver, the source of the Cosmic illusion, the Maya in Hindu terms, the principle of sin and ignorance (Avidya).

But beyond the Mahat, the Katha Upanishad tells us, is the Avyakta, the unmanifest. This brings us to the two final principles of the cosmic order, in the Samkhya Philosophy, the earliest system of Hindu philosophy, Prakriti and Purusha. The avyakta is Mula-Prakriti, that is Nature, considered as the womb, the Mother, the ground of all the creative powers of the world. Prakriti is the principle of 'potentiality', the first matter of Aristotle, which as we have seen has no being in itself, but is a sheer potency, a *dynamis* in Aristotle's terms, a capacity to be; in this womb of nature the seeds of all future forms of matter and mind lie hid. The gods as well as men all lie hidden in this primal darkness. It is the void, the Emptiness which, in Buddhist terms, contains all fullness. It is the ground of human consciousness, the cave, the abyss of which the Katha Upanishad spoke, the unplumbed depth of consciousness, the deep sleep, from which consciousness arises and the world comes into being. But beyond this avyakta, this Prakriti, is Purusha, the Person, the Supreme, beyond which it is impossible to go.

Purusha is pure consciousness, or rather it is pure being and pure consciousness in one, because at this point all distinction of subject and object disappears. It has been called the 'Person of light consisting of knowledge.'²⁶ But how do we know this person? It is known by meditation. So the Katha Upanishad continues: 'a wise man should keep speech in mind, and keep that in the self which is knowledge. He

should keep knowledge in the self which is the Great (the Mahat) and he should keep that within the self which is Peace.'²⁷ Here we have set before us the path to the knowledge of the Self. We have first of all to enter into silence, to shut out the world of the senses. Then we have to silence the mind, the busy active mind, in the self of knowledge, that is the *buddhi*, the point of integration of the personality. Now we have to surrender this self, the individual self, to the Great Self, the cosmic consciousness, to those higher spheres of consciousness beyond the rational mind.

Then finally we have to surrender this cosmic consciousness, which still belongs to the created world, to the self of Peace, the Peace which passes understanding. At this point we pass beyond the created world, physical and psychological, the world of men and angels, and we enter into communion with the Supreme, the Purusha, the ultimate Reality. Brahman, Atman and Purusha are now known to be one. Brahman is the one eternal Spirit, infinite and transcendent, pervading the whole creation, one and yet manifold, the ground of all creation, 'unseen but seeing, unheard but hearing, unperceived but perceiving, unknown but knowing'.²⁸ In him all this creation, both gods and men and nature, are contained. Atman is that same eternal Spirit, infinite and transcendent, considered as the self of man, the ground of consciousness. When we transcend the limits of the rational mind and open ourselves to the cosmic, universal consciousness, we are carried beyond the limits of this world, both human and divine, and approach the Supreme, the 'one without a second'. This is the leap of faith, which cannot be reached by any human effort. It is the flight to the One of Plotinus. It is of this that the Katha Upanishad says, 'He whom the Atman chooses, he knows the Atman'.²⁹ The lower self cannot reach the higher self, it can only allow itself

to be drawn up into its presence, to surrender itself to the self, to the spirit within.

This raises the question, What is the relation of the human spirit – the *jivatman* – to the supreme spirit, the Paramatman? Of this the Katha Upanishad says: ‘there are the two, drinking their reward in the world of their own works, entered into the secret high place of the heart. Those who know Brahman call them light and shade.’³⁰ The Svetasvatara Upanishad draws out this image: ‘Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating.’ Then it explains, ‘On the same tree man sits grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence (*anisa*), but when he sees the other, the worshipful Lord (*isa*) in his glory, his grief passes away.’³¹ This shows clearly the state of the human soul. The soul is set between the physical world, the world of the senses and the world of spirit. When it inclines to the material world and becomes attached to it, it becomes confused and powerless, but when it ‘looks up and sees the Lord’ then its grief passes away. If we would understand this relationship between the soul (the *jivatman*) and the spirit, we can think of the soul as a glass which is held up to the light of the spirit. When the glass is clouded by sin and ignorance, then the light cannot shine through, but when the glass is clean, then the soul is illuminated by the divine light and the whole being, body and soul, is irradiated by the divine presence.

The spirit in man is the ‘fine point of the soul’, as St Francis of Sales called it, the point of contact between the human and the divine. It is a reflection of the divine light in us. It is a dynamic point, turned to both God and the world. This is the ‘pneuma’, the ‘spirit’ of St Paul, as compared with the ‘psyche’, the soul, of which he says, ‘we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is from God, that we

might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God’³² The spirit in man is a ‘gift’ or grace; it is the presence in us of the divine spirit. When body and soul are moved by the spirit, then the whole being of man is transfigured. This was the very purpose of creation from the beginning, that body and soul, matter and mind, man and the universe, might be moved by the spirit and drawn into the divine light and life. Sin is the fall from this state of grace into the state of the ‘natural’ man, the ‘anthropos psychikos’ of St Paul as opposed to the ‘anthropos pneumatikos’, ‘the spiritual man’.³³

There are schools of Hindu thought which consider that when the spirit of man (the *jivatman*) is thus united with the spirit of God (the *paramatman*), the individuality is lost. But this is not necessarily so. It is true that the individual soul ceases to exist as a separate being. It is transfigured by the light and participates in the very being and consciousness of God. This is the state of *saccidananda*, the state of being (*sat*) in pure consciousness (*cit*), in which is found absolute bliss (*ananda*). But the soul that enters into this state of bliss does not lose its individual being. It participates in the state of universal being and consciousness, it enjoys perfect bliss, but that personal being which was conferred on it by creation, that unique mode of participation in the divine being, which constitutes it as a person, is eternal. It may be that in the state of union, as many mystics have testified, the soul no longer experiences any difference between itself and God, but the difference remains. The very purpose of creation was that other beings, both men and angels, and through them the whole creation, should participate each in its own unique way in the one being of God. The state of union is often illustrated by saying that it is like a drop of water merging in the ocean, but it can equally be said that it is like the ocean being present in the drop. In the ultimate reality, the whole is present in every

part and every part participates in the being of the whole.

This state of union has been beautifully described in the Svetasvatara Upanishad: 'as a metal disk (or mirror) which was tarnished by dust shines brightly when it has been cleaned, so the embodied being (the *dehi* – the dweller in the body) becoming one, attains the goal and is freed from sorrow.' Then the final state of the soul is described in unforgettable words: 'When by means of the real nature of the self he sees as by a lamp the real nature of Brahman, then having known the unborn, eternal God, who is beyond all natures, he is freed from all bondage.'³⁴ This is perhaps the clearest statement in the Upanishads of the nature of ultimate reality. It can be known only by the purified self, the spirit in man, cleansed from all attachment to body or to soul. Then this purified spirit sees the real nature of Brahman, the eternal being, mirrored in itself and in the whole creation. Finally this Brahman and this Atman is recognized as the 'unborn eternal God', the personal God, the Purusha, who is the Lord of Creation, beyond all created being.

III

THE REVELATION OF THE PERSONAL GOD

In the early Upanishads, the centre of interest is the Brahman and the Atman, the eternal spirit immanent in nature and in man. Yet this spirit is recognized as also transcendent. It exists in all things, but it also exists without. In the later Upanishads, such as Svetasvatara (c. 300 BC) the transcendent aspect of the one reality comes into evidence. Even in the earliest Upanishad, the Brihadranyaka, we find evidence of this, when it is said, 'If a man clearly beholds this Self as God and as the Lord of what is and what will be, then he is more

afraid'.³⁵ Again in the Isa Upanishad, it is said 'all this, whatsoever moves on earth, is enveloped by the Lord'.³⁶

But it is in the Svetasvatara Upanishad that the concept of the personal God is fully developed. There it is said that in the supreme Brahman there is a triad. This triad consists of first of all the *pradhana*, the perishable, that is, the material world: then there are the souls, the *jivatmas*, and finally there is Hara, the Lord, the Imperishable who rules both matter and souls. When a man finds out these three, it is said, that is Brahman.³⁷ How are we to understand this? What is the relation between God and nature and man, and how are they related to Brahman? There are different schools of Hindu thought in regard to this – *advaita*, *visistadvaita* and *dvaita*³⁸ – and the debate continues to the present day. In a sense, of course, there can be no answer to this question. The ultimate reality, whether we call it Brahman or Atman or God, is beyond conception. These are words taken from common speech which reflect the reality but can never express it. This applies to all human speech. Language reflects the world, reality itself, through the medium of the human senses and imagination and the concepts of the rational mind. But the reality itself is always beyond our images and concepts. It can only be known when we transcend both body and soul and experience the one reality in the depths of our being where we are one with that which we contemplate, when being and knowing are one. Yet in the light of this inner experience words can be used to indicate the nature of this reality, words which reflect it, however remotely, and point towards it. This is what we find in the Upanishads.

Let us return to the analogy of the three worlds. There is the material world, including the human body, which is experienced through the senses. But this world, as we have seen, is not independent of the senses. The material world is

present to us in and through our senses. This material world, as modern physics describes it, is a field of energies, and our own bodies with their senses and their appetites and their mental images and concepts are part of this field of energies. The energies, which make up the world as we experience it, are both physical and psychological. Together they form an interdependent whole. This is what in Hindu terms is called *prakriti* or nature. But beyond *prakriti* there is *Purusha*, the principle of consciousness. Human consciousness is normally reflected through the senses and the imagination, but there is a sphere of consciousness beyond the senses and the imagination, which can be experienced in meditation, in which, as we have seen, the soul attains to self-knowledge by a pure reflection on itself. This sphere of consciousness is *Purusha*, the spirit, the self, which is the source of all consciousness, the principle of all real knowledge, the ground of personal being. In this ground of truth and reality, the source of personal being, all souls find their centre of unity.

Just as the physical and psychological worlds are recognized as an interdependent whole, so in this world of the spirit all consciousness is seen to have its source in one consciousness, an all-pervading spirit, which penetrates and embraces the whole field of physical and psychic energies and unites them in one. This sphere of consciousness can be experienced as the 'ground' of all being, pervading the whole creation, when it is known as Brahman. Or it can be experienced as the ground of human consciousness, the inner spirit, when it is known as Atman, the self, that is the immanent principle of both being and knowing. But it can also be experienced as transcendent being, as 'God' the 'Lord', and then it is known as *Purusha*. This is how the concept of the personal god arises.

Reality is experienced as one, infinite, eternal being, at

once immanent and transcendent, pervading everything and enveloping everything. But this same reality is also experienced as consciousness (*cit*), as a pure intelligence, as totally transparent to itself. But a being possessed by conscious intelligence is what is meant by a person (*purusha*) and so the infinite, eternal spirit, the 'one without a second', is recognized as a person. This is what we find in the Svetasvatara Upanishad. This is a comparatively late Upanishad which marks the awakening of devotion to a personal God. The gods of the Vedas, it is true, were personal, but there each God – Agni, Mitra, Surya – is seen as an aspect of the 'one being' (*ekam sat*), and the ultimate reality itself is not conceived as a personal god. But now in the Svetasvatara Upanishad that step is taken. The ultimate reality, the Brahman, is conceived as a personal being, the object of worship and adoration. So it is said, 'those who know beyond this (world) the Supreme Brahman, the great, hidden in all creatures and alone enveloping everything as the Lord (*Isa*), they become immortal'.³⁹ This Lord who is one with the Supreme Brahman is said to be the person (*Purusha*) who fills the whole universe. He is called Bhagavan, the name which is universally used of the personal God in India today, and is named Siva.⁴⁰

This name of Siva is of great interest. In this Upanishad, he is identified with Rudra, the God of storm and thunder of the Vedas, who dwells in the mountains. But it seems that he really goes back beyond the Vedas and was originally a Dravidian God. There is a figure found at Mahanjadaro, the ancient Indian city destroyed by the Aryan invaders, which is seated in lotus posture and seems to represent Siva as *Pasupati*, the Lord of creatures. Siva would then have been one of the gods of the indigenous people, an enemy of the Aryans. He is represented as an outcast, dwelling in the graveyard, covered

with ashes, as the destroyer, wearing snakes about him and accompanied by demons. He is also the God of fertility, having as his emblem the *lingam*, the male organ, which is represented in the inner sanctuary (the *garbha-griha* or 'womb-house', the source of life) in temples of Siva all over India today.

But Siva is also the great ascetic, dwelling on Mount Kailas, absorbed in meditation, and as destroyer he is conceived as the destroyer of sin who renews the world by his grace. Finally, he comes to be revered as the God of love, his name Siva meaning the 'kindly', the 'gracious', and in a famous Tamil Poem, the *Tirumandiram*, it is said: 'the ignorant think that Siva and Love (*anbu*) are two; they do not know that Siva is love.'⁴¹

This is a marvellous example of the evolution of a myth. A myth is a symbolic story in which many elements may combine, elements derived from the world of nature and of human psychology, from history and social and economic conditions. In the course of time these different and often conflicting elements are re-interpreted and given new meanings, until eventually a coherent symbol of spiritual reality is evolved. Thus the God Siva for a Hindu devotee today is a name for the ultimate reality beyond name and form, who is one with the Brahman, the absolute truth and the final good, revealing himself to his devotees as a God of infinite grace and love, and the *lingam* is the sign of the formless deity, God beyond name and form.

In the Svetasvatara Upanishad, we can watch this process of the transformation of an ancient myth into a profound philosophical symbol, still retaining its 'numinous' character but developed into a theological figure as the personal god. The God of the Svetasvatara Upanishad is the great Brahman, who is immanent in all creation, but he is also the

transcendent Lord (*Isa*) who creates and rules the world by his power. He is said to have his hands and feet, his eyes and ears and head in every place, but at the same time, 'he grasps without hands, hastens without feet, sees without eyes, hears without ears'.⁴² He is the *Purusha*, the cosmic person with a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, but he also dwells within the heart of every creature and encompasses the world on every side. He 'possesses the purest power of reaching everywhere and is the imperishable light'.⁴³ He is smaller than the smallest, 'the person not larger than a thumb'.⁴⁴ Yet he is the creator of all, the great Self, always dwelling in the heart of man, the lord of immortality. Finally, he is the 'lord of lords, the god of gods, the master of masters',⁴⁵ the one God of whom there is no place for a second. It would be difficult to find a more impressive expression of the one supreme creator God.

Yet this transcendent God, who creates and rules and encompasses everything, is also said to be immanent in everything and to 'assume all forms'.⁴⁶ He can even be said in a sense to 'become' all things. He is the *dehi*, the dweller in body (*deha*), the 'incarnate self', who assumes various forms in various places. Yet at the same time, he has 'no beginning and no end'; he has many forms yet he envelops everything. How are we to understand this? We must go back to the concept of the spirit, the Atman, who is pure being and pure consciousness. It is he who pervades the whole creation, as the active power of energy, life and consciousness in nature and in man. It is he who gives 'form' to every created thing. But he does not merely 'give' form. He is the active principle of form in everything and is present in every particle of matter. St Thomas Aquinas asks in what sense can God be said to be 'in' all things – and he replies that he is 'in' all things by his power, his presence and his

essence.⁴⁷ By his power, because it is his power alone which gives existence to each thing and preserves it in existence. By his presence, because this power is not exercised at a distance since there is no distance in God, so that he is actually present in every created being. By his essence, because he is not present in part, since there is no part in God, but the very essence of God, in Christian terms, the Holy Trinity, is present in every particle of matter. The divine being, which is also intelligence and consciousness, is therefore present totally in every created thing. It is in this sense that St Paul can say: 'in him we live and move and have our being.'⁴⁸

Can we now see how God, the Supreme Spirit, which is *saccidananda*-being, consciousness and bliss, can be said to 'become' the whole creation? The whole creation exists eternally in God; when God, the infinite being, expresses himself, manifests himself, speaks his word, the whole creation comes into being in that one word. God does not create in time. Creation is an eternal act in God; it is the act by which God himself exists. As Eckhart says, God only speaks one Word, and in that word the whole creation is contained. In God the whole Creation exists eternally in identity with him. As St Thomas again says, the 'ideas' in God, the archetypal forms, which are the principles of all created beings, exist eternally in God and are identical with the divine essence itself.⁴⁹ In God you and I and everyone and everything exist eternally in identity with him. This is our eternal archetypal being. When creation comes into being in time, then each of us assumes his own particular created form, his separate identity, but the divine archetype is present still in each one of us. In this sense the world can be said to be a 'manifestation' of God. It is like a mirror which is held up to the face of God. The created world is a 'reflection' of the uncreated archetypal world. Like an image in a mirror, it has

only a relative existence. Its existence is constituted by this relation to God. It is in this sense that we can say with the Hindu school of Advaita, that God and the world are 'not two' (*advaita*). The created world adds nothing to God and takes nothing from him. Creation makes no change in him; change is in the creature.

This conception of the world as a reflection, an image, of God is entirely acceptable from a Christian point of view. According to the biblical tradition, man is an image of God, and the Greek fathers interpreted this in the sense that man (and with him the whole creation) is like a mirror held up to the light of God. Each human soul is a reflection of that uncreated light. This is the point of the 'spirit' in man; the point where the human being receives the imprint of the Spirit of God. This again is a dynamic point, a point of receptivity, by which we can either open ourselves to the divine light and grow as persons in truth, or turn upon ourselves and become self-centred, obscured by ignorance and sin. The spirit in man is the point of meeting between God and man, of created being with the uncreated light. In every man the uncreated light is always present – this is his eternal, archetypal being – but whether he receives that light into his soul and is transformed by it, or whether he turns away from the light and becomes darkened and obscured, depends on the inner dynamism of the intellect and will, the created spirit in man. In this sense, therefore, we can speak of God taking the 'form' of man.

The uncreated being, which is pure consciousness and bliss, dwells in the heart of every man, shaping both his body and his soul. While remaining ever the same in his pure consciousness and bliss, he enters into the consciousness of man, into the life of plants, into the energies of matter. He is present everywhere in everything, shaping the forms of

matter and life and mind, but remaining in himself ever the same.

This concept of a personal God was further developed in the Bhagavad Gita, which was probably composed at about the same time as the Svetasvatara Upanishad. The Bhagavad Gita forms part of the great epic of the Mahabharata, in which Vishnu rather than Siva is represented as the figure of the supreme God, especially in his 'incarnation' as Krishna. Krishna with Siva is a beautiful example of the evolution of a symbol of God. Unlike Siva, who is essentially a cosmic figure, Krishna seems to have had a basis in history. The Mahabharata itself is the story of a great war, which, like the Trojan War of Homer, must have had a historical origin. But the historical character of Krishna was soon enriched by legend and gradually the figure of a Supreme God emerged, who was like Siva a God of love, and in the Bhagavad Gita is represented as the one Supreme Lord, the creator of all. Nowhere is the utter transcendence of the creator God so clearly expressed as when Krishna says, 'By me whose form is unmanifest, all this world is pervaded; all beings abide in me, but I do not rest in them'. And then lest it should appear that he depends in some way on the world, he continues: 'Yet they do not abide in me; behold my sovereign power! I am the support of all beings but I abide not in them, myself being their cause'.⁵⁰

It would be a mistake to say, as is done in some schools of Hindu thought, that this personal creator God is inferior to the Supreme. Again and again it is shown that Krishna as God is identical with Brahman and Atman. Thus it is said that 'he who knows Brahman (Brahmavid) abides in Brahman (or 'is established in Brahman' – *Brahmani sthita*), his reason (*buddhi*) steady, his delusion gone.'⁵¹ And again: 'He whose spirit (*atman*) is unattached to things without and who finds joy in

the spirit having his spirit joined by Yoga to Brahman, enjoys imperishable happiness.'⁵² And then a little later, Krishna identifies himself with this Brahman, this Atman. 'He who knows me, who accept sacrifice, and self-discipline, the great Lord of all worlds, and the friend of all beings, attains peace.'⁵³ Surely it is clear that Brahman, Atman and the 'Great Lord' (*Mahesvara*) are one and the same. They are three names for the same one reality looked at from a different point of view. What the Gita establishes beyond doubt is that that which is known in the Upanishads as Brahman and Atman is also Purusha, the personal God. This is made very clear when it is said: 'There are two spirits (*Purushas*) in this universe, the perishable, and the imperishable' – that is, the world of matter and the world of mind. 'But there is another Supreme spirit (*Purusha*) who is the highest self (*Paramatman*), the changeless Lord, who enters and supports the three worlds.'⁵⁴ Here we can see clearly once again the structure of the three worlds – the world of matter, the perishable; the world of mind, or consciousness, the imperishable; and above them both the world of Spirit which pervades the three worlds and manifests himself in all, and hence the words *Brahman*, *Atman* and *Purusha* can all be used on occasion of each of the three worlds. But the spirit himself is beyond both mind and matter, beyond the perishable and the imperishable, and is therefore known as *Parabrahman*, *Paramatman*, *Purushottaman* – the supreme Brahman, the Supreme Self, the Supreme Person.

IV

THE DOCTRINE OF NON-DUALITY

These explanations are necessary, because it is often said that the doctrine of the Vedanta is 'monist' or 'pantheist' or 'polytheist', but none of these terms (all of which are of Greek and not of Indian origin) is accurate. There are monist and pantheist and polytheistic interpretations of the Veda, but the Vedic doctrine itself, the doctrine of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, is none of these things. It is a doctrine of supreme wisdom, coming down from remote antiquity in the form of a divine revelation, expressed originally in myth and symbol, and developed through profound meditation, so as to give a unique insight into ultimate reality, that is, the ultimate nature of man and the universe.

Though it has come down to us through the Hindu tradition, it belongs not only to India but to all mankind. In fact, there is evidence that this tradition has been known from the earliest times. It is found among primitive people in Africa, Australia, Asia and America, who have received it as an inheritance from their ancestors and have preserved it in their myths and symbols, their rites and ceremonies, their dance and song. It has been called the Cosmic Revelation, the revelation of ultimate Truth, given to all mankind through the Cosmos, that is, through the creation. Of this St Paul says: 'Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and divinity has been clearly perceived in the things that are made.'⁵⁵ In the Hebrew tradition it is preserved in the story of the Covenant with Noah, who is represented as the Father of all mankind.

From the beginning of history, as far as one can tell, man has recognized behind all the phenomena of nature and consciousness a hidden power. Or rather, the phenomena of nature and his own consciousness were all seen to be 'enveloped' in a cosmic whole. As his power of discrimination developed, he was able to distinguish the powers of nature, of earth and sky, of water and fire, the powers of the 'gods', from his own powers of speech and action, of thinking and feeling, and to know himself as a conscious being. But the sense of the whole remained, the consciousness that the gods of earth and sky were also in his heart and mind, and that in myth and ritual, in prayer and sacrifice, he could experience his oneness with the whole creation.

It is this sense of a cosmic unity which lies behind the Vedic tradition, and in the Upanishads the source of this cosmic unity receives a name. It is called Brahman and Atman, and gradually through deep meditation the nature of this Brahman and this Atman was revealed. It is known not by argument or reasoning, not by any activity of the sense or the rational mind, but by an immediate experience of the spirit, the Atman, in man. It is this experience of the spirit which the Upanishads seek to communicate and to interpret in words, as far as it can be expressed in words. It is known as *Saccidananda*, Being or Reality, experienced in pure consciousness, communicating perfect bliss. But such a state of conscious being is a state of personal consciousness. It is misleading to speak of Brahman or Atman as 'impersonal'. A person is a conscious being, a being possessing itself in conscious awareness, and Brahman is therefore the supreme Person, the *Purushottaman*. Every human being is a person just in so far as he participates in this supreme consciousness.

Each of us is conscious in so far as we share in this universal

consciousness. The new-born child has a spark of this consciousness in it, which grows as it learns to share through language and gesture in the consciousness of its mother and father, its family and environment. Growth in consciousness is growth in this shared experience of the family, the tribe, the nation, the race. But this consciousness can grow beyond the boundaries of time and space, and enter into a transcendent consciousness, a consciousness transcending the limits of matter and mind, of the categories of sense and reason, and become aware of the universal consciousness which embraces the whole creation. This is the sole source of consciousness in man and the universe. 'There is no other seer but he,' says the Upanishad, 'no other hearer but he, no other perceiver but he, no other knower but he, this Self, the Ruler within, the immortal'.⁵⁶ All our seeing, and hearing and perceiving and knowing, is an effect of and a participation in the consciousness of that one, universal Being.

What characterizes this consciousness in the Vedic tradition is its non-duality. Of this it is said: 'Where there is duality, one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one perceives another, one knows another, but when everything has become the Self, by what and whom should one smell and see and hear and speak to and perceive and know another? By what should one know that by which all this is known? How should one know the knower?'⁵⁷ This is the classical statement of the doctrine of non-duality (*advaita*) and it takes us to the heart of the problem. How should one know the knower? The rational mind can only work through the senses and discover an 'object' of thought. Even the most abstract thought is conditioned by this distinction between subject and object. But how can we know the subject, the I, without turning it into an object? The moment I speak of myself, of an I, I have

turned it into an object. This is the limitation of the rational mind. It remains imprisoned in the categories of an objective world. How to escape from the prison of the rational mind?

In all religious traditions, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian, it has been recognized that there is a knowledge above reason, a knowledge which is not derived from the senses and is not determined by the categories of rational thought. It is a knowledge not of an object but of the subject, the I which knows, not the I which is known. In Hindu tradition this has always been regarded as the ultimate form of knowledge, the knowledge of the Self. It must be recognized that this is not a theory which would be a product of the rational mind, but an experience. The mind, turning back on itself, knows itself intuitively. It is an experience in which being and knowing are one – that is why it is called *saccidananda*, because being (*sat*) is experienced in a pure act of knowing (*cit*) in the bliss (*ananda*) of oneness, of non-duality. The knower, the known and the act of knowing are all one. Yet when we have said this, we have already begun to interpret the experience by means of rational categories, while the experience itself is beyond reason. Yet the attempt has to be made, because this experience has often been misinterpreted. It has often been interpreted to mean that the knowledge derived from sense and reason is an illusion (*maya*), and that the world of ordinary experience is therefore unreal. But this is not so. The knowledge of sense and reason itself derives from this universal consciousness. It is the one being who sees and hears and knows in us. Every particular form of human consciousness is a reflection of the one consciousness.

How, then, shall we describe this knowledge of non-duality, this knowledge of the Self? We must say that the one Self, the universal consciousness, is present in all our

experience, but its action is limited by the faculties of sense and reason. What we experience is the one reality, reflected through the senses and the rational mind. But when in meditation we transcend the categories of space and time and of the rational mind, we experience this one reality in itself. The finite, changing temporal world of our experience is known in its infinite, changeless ground. All the multiplicity of creation is known in the simple unity of its origin.

But we must not suppose that the multiplicity and variety of the world is lost in this vision of the unity, as though it had no ultimate reality. On the contrary, as has been said: 'Everything that is here is there, and everything that is there is here.' There is not a particle of matter in the universe, not a grain of sand, a leaf, a flower, not a single animal or human being, which has not its eternal being in that One, and which is not known in the unitive vision of the One. What we see is the reflection of all the beauty of creation through the mirror of our senses and our imagination, extended in space and time. But there in the vision of the One all the multiplicity of creation is contained, not in the imperfection of its becoming but in the unity of its being. Of this the great Sankaracharya, the doctor of advaita Vedanta, has said: 'The knower of Brahman enjoys all desires, all delights procurable by delightful objects without exception. Does he enjoy all desirable things alternately as we do? No, he enjoys all desirable things simultaneously, as amassed together in a single moment, through a single perception, which is eternal . . . which is non-different from the essence of Brahman, which we have described as truth, knowledge, infinity (*satyam, jnanam, anantam*).'⁵⁸ It is a defect of our minds that we have to go from point to point, from one thing to another, in an ever-changing world. If we had perfect knowledge, we should know the whole in all its parts and all

the changing phenomena of nature in an unchanging vision of perfect unity.

But the question remains, What becomes of the individual self in this knowledge of the one Self? Does it simply disappear? Here again it is easy to misinterpret the experience of non-duality. There is no doubt that the individual loses all sense of separation from the One and experiences a total unity, but that does not mean that the individual no longer exists. Just as every element in nature is a unique reflection of the one Reality, so every human being is a unique centre of consciousness in the universal consciousness. Just as no element in nature is lost in the ultimate reality, so no individual centre of consciousness loses its unique character. It participates in the universal consciousness; it knows itself in the unity of the one Being; it discovers itself as a person in the one Person. A person is not a closed but an open centre of consciousness. It is relationship. Every person grows as he opens himself to the totality of personal being, which is found in the supreme Person, the *Purushottaman*. This is what is found in the Christian doctrine of the mystical Body of Christ. This Body embraces all humanity in the unity of the One Person of Christ, and in the final state, as St Augustine says, there is only 'one Christ, loving himself.'⁵⁹

This opening of the individual consciousness on the universal consciousness is a movement of self-transcendence. Every growth in human consciousness is a movement of self-transcendence. The individual self grows by contact with other selves, transcending the limits of its own consciousness by contact with another form of consciousness. Human nature, it has been said, is constituted by its capacity for self-transcendence.⁶⁰ The final stage in human growth is reached when the human consciousness goes beyond its natural limits, beyond the categories of time and space, and encounters the

supreme consciousness, the consciousness of the One. This is what is described in religious language as 'grace'. As it was said in the Katha Upanishad: 'He whom the Atman chooses, he knows the Atman'.⁶¹ The Atman is the Supreme consciousness, the one Self which is the source of all consciousness in man and in animal. In the human consciousness there is an innate capacity for freedom, the power to choose according to the dictates of reason. When the human consciousness, working through sense and reason, reaches the limit of its capacity, it is drawn by 'grace', by the power of the Spirit, the supreme consciousness working in it, to transcend its personal limitations and to participate in the divine consciousness, the consciousness of the supreme Self. This is what in Hindu tradition is called the 'fourth' state, the state beyond the physical, the vital and the mental, the passing beyond into the state of *ananda*, of bliss consciousness.⁶²

V

THE SUPREME SECRET

At this point the Gita introduces another aspect of the divine nature – the dynamism of love. The culmination of the revelation of Gita is the revelation of divine love. 'I am supremely dear to the wise,' says Krishna, 'and he is dear to me.' So far we have seen that man can love God and find supreme happiness in that love or devotion (*bhakti*). But now it is seen that God returns that love. This comes to a head in the last book of the Gita where Krishna speaks his 'supreme word', the 'most secret' of all, when he says, 'Give me thy mind, give me thy heart and thy sacrifice, and thy adoration. I give thee my promise, thou shalt in truth

come to me, because thou art dear to me.'⁶³ This opens up a new horizon, it reveals a movement of love in the divine being.

There is always a danger that the divine being or absolute reality should be conceived in static terms. It is infinite, eternal, unchanging, beyond the flux of time and the divisions of space, beyond all imagination and all thought. It is truth, knowledge, infinity – *satyam, jnanam, anantam*.⁶⁴ It is being, knowledge and bliss – *saccidananda* – and this concept of bliss may suggest a movement in the divine being, but it has often been interpreted simply as the bliss of pure consciousness, and again therefore can be conceived as a static mode of existence. But when the concept of love is introduced into the divine nature, then *ananda* can be interpreted as the bliss of love.

But how is this to be understood? In the Hindu tradition, the divine nature has always been conceived as 'without duality' (*advaita*): it is *ekam eva advitya*, 'one only without a second'. What then is the relation of the world to this one reality? Is it a pure illusion without any ultimate reality, or is it, as we have suggested, a reflection, an image of reality, the eternal, infinite, unchanging One mirrored in the temporal, finite, changing world? But if this is so, then all that is reflected here in this world, all the movements which take place in space and time, must exist in some way in that eternal One. This would apply also to human relationships. The love which exists between man and woman, parents and children, friend and friend, is an image, a reflection of the love which is in God, and has therefore an eternal aspect. Sex itself is a reflection of divine love and has therefore always been considered 'holy'. It is a means by which the human being realizes something of the mystery of divine love. We have therefore to consider that there is a dynamism of love in God.

All the energy in nature, of light and heat and sound and magnetism and electricity is a reflection of the energy – the *Sakti* – which exists eternally in God. All the power of life in nature, of the living cell and organism, of plant and animal, is a reflection of the life which is in God. And so also all the love in human nature, all powers of affection and devotion, all the joy of intimacy and self-surrender are manifestations of a love which is hidden in the depths of the godhead.

Let us think of it again in terms of consciousness. We can experience love in our bodies in the intimacy of sexual union. We can experience love in our souls, in an emotional experience of melting one into another, in an imaginative experience of ecstatic love, in an experience of habitual affection which transforms one's character. All these are partial experiences of divine love. But beyond these is the capacity to experience love in depth, to go beyond sense and feeling and affection, and to discover the power of an infinite love, transcending our human capacity and awakening us to the presence of the divine being in us. This is mystical love, the point at which the human and the divine meet.

In the light of this experience of love which is that of the mystics of all ages, we can begin to see how there can be love in the divine nature itself, or rather how the divine nature can itself be love. The divine nature is reality itself, total reality, in which all being is contained and from which all being at every level of existence comes. This being, this reality, is pure consciousness, being totally transparent to itself, reflecting itself not only in the world of space and time and human consciousness, but also in its own very being, a pure reflection of being on itself, possessing itself, in perfect consciousness, knowing itself in a perfect unity of being and knowing 'without duality'. But this divine being, this absolute reality, is also love; it is a communion, a self-giving in love. By

knowledge we reflect ourselves and reflect the whole creation in the mirror of ourselves. But in love, we give ourselves, communicate ourselves to another, transcend ourselves in self-surrender. So also in the divine being, in the absolute reality, there is a movement of love, a self-giving, a self-surrender. God gives himself to man, communicates his own spirit, his inner self to man, but this in turn reflects a movement of self-giving, of self-surrender in the godhead; the movement of self-knowing, of self-reflection, of self-consciousness in God, is accompanied by another movement of self-giving, of self-surrender, of ecstatic love.

Let us return again to the concept of the three worlds. The physical world, it is now recognized, is a field of energies, a 'web' of interdependent relationships, in which every object is related to every other object, and the whole is present in every part. In the same way in the psychological world every person is a centre, and each participates according to its capacity in the universal consciousness, which embraces all these centres. This universal consciousness has been compared to a point which is the centre of a circle from which radii go out in all directions. All the radii are contained in this point and are related to it and each exists only in relation to it. Another illustration is that of the sun, which sends out its rays in all directions. Every created thing is a ray of this light which is diversified into all the colours of the rainbow according to the nature of the object into which it is received but remains in itself ever the same pure white light. These are only images, but they help us to see how the world both physical and psychological comes from the supreme being and reflects it according to the diversity of natures in it, while the supreme being remains ever the same, containing within itself all the multiplicity of creatures in their principles or 'ideas' in the simple unity of its being. It is in this sense that the

supreme being can be said to be 'without duality'. There is nothing in all creation which is not contained within it, no form, no energy, no life, no consciousness, not dispersed in space and time but gathered into the timeless moment and the spaceless point of its own infinite and eternal being.

But the question arises, does the individual soul or consciousness survive in this ultimate state of being? Of this it must be said that every individual soul is a centre of consciousness which is open to every other and to the universal consciousness itself. In its final fulfilment it participates in the consciousness of the supreme being and reflects the other centres of consciousness in itself, but it does not cease to be a unique centre of consciousness. The very purpose of creation was that the One should be able to communicate himself to the many, that finite and temporal beings should come to participate in the infinite and eternal being and consciousness of the One and experience the bliss – *Saccidananda* – of the Supreme. And this bliss is a bliss of love. Love seeks to communicate itself, and the purpose of love would not be satisfied if there were no one to share that love.

But does this mean that there is duality in the godhead? It is here that the concept of relationship and 'co-inherence' which was developed in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity comes into play. Though there is no duality in the godhead, there is relationship – relationship of knowledge and love. By knowledge we receive the form of another being into ourselves, we become that other being, by a mutual 'co-inherence'. This is seen above all in personal relationship. By love we communicate ourselves to other persons and they communicate themselves to us. There is a mutual self-giving which is enjoyed in sexual union, but this takes place at a deeper level of consciousness, where there is a complete in-dwelling, I in you and you in me. In human life this

communion is never fully realized but in the divine life this is realized in its fullness. This is what is revealed in St John's Gospel when Jesus says, 'I am in the Father and the Father in me'.⁶⁵ This is not a simple identity – he does not say, 'I am the Father' – but a relationship of knowledge and love. But at the same time, there is perfect co-inherence. The Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father in such a way that they have but one nature which is totally in each without any duality. There is no difference between the Father and the Son except that of relationship. Their nature or essence is one 'without duality', without any difference whatsoever.

It would seem that this doctrine helps us to see how there can be knowledge and love in the godhead, that is, in ultimate reality, while it remains for ever 'without duality'. But it also shows how created beings can come to share in this non-dual mode of being and consciousness.

Jesus goes on to pray for his disciples: 'that they may be one, as thou in me and I in thee, that they may be one in us.'⁶⁶ By the gift of the Spirit which manifests the non-dual nature of the godhead, the human consciousness is raised to participation in the divine consciousness. The Spirit is the feminine or receptive aspect of the godhead as the Son is the masculine or expressive aspect. The Father knows himself in the Son and communicates himself in the Spirit. The Spirit is the receptive power in the godhead, which receives the impress of the Son, the Word and the love which flows from the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father and returns it to them. But this love is not different from the non-dual being of the godhead. It is an aspect of that being which is identical in essence with it. It is this spirit which is communicated to our human spirit, so that we participate in that love, which is the very being of the godhead. As St Paul says, 'the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we

The Marriage of East and West

are children of God.'⁶⁷ By the Spirit, therefore, we are given that receptive power which enables us to participate in the inner nature of the godhead. We participate in the Son's own knowledge of the Father, and the love which flows from the Father to the Son and over the whole creation.

This concept of 'co-inherence', of the mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father through the Spirit of love, helps us to understand not only the nature of the godhead, but also the nature of human relationships within the godhead. When human nature is taken up by the Spirit into the knowledge and love of the Father and the Son, the human consciousness is opened up to the divine mode of consciousness. Each human consciousness is expanded so as to embrace all other spheres of consciousness, both of gods or angels and of men. There is a mutual interpenetration at every level. Every being becomes transparent to every other being; each one mirrors the other and the whole. This was beautifully expressed by Plotinus, when he said, 'all is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant, every being is lucid to every other in breadth and depth; light runs through light and each of them contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all, and infinite the glory'.⁶⁸ This is the vision of ultimate reality which is given us in the perennial philosophy. It is common to Greece and to India, China and Arabia, and is found in the Christian doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, where each creature participates through the indwelling presence of the Spirit in the inner life of the godhead and each reflects the glory in the other, 'being changed from glory into glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.'⁶⁹

