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EXPANDING HUMANITY'S VISION OF GOD

THE world today lives in a paradoxical situation, paradoxical with respect to the place of God in it and to his relation with man. Obviously in the lives of most of the people the sacred cosmos, spirituality and God himself, manifested in a form of divine man or in other forms, become a subject in question. Different civilizations from the old times had the acquisition of a rich spiritual knowledge. It was put in the shape of various religions, sacred rites and customs. There is an abundance of spiritual writings of all the confessions and in every spiritual culture exist incarnations of God, saints and prophets. But the sacred cosmos is admitted by the modern man usually as a separate world, which acts according to its own laws and which neither has a connection with his existence, nor has an approach to it. This is very common to the West and the westernised countries of Asia. Such a statement at the first view may seem too categorical, especially if we would have in mind a quantitative and expanding circulation of spirituality in a broader sense, but the same *quantitative* means of expression in humanity shows us something different.

At the junction of the 20th and 21st centuries the rapid change of geo-political, social, economical and cultural situations brings to any man in any continent, except traditional secluded societies, the sense of immense tension. Though the hastening progress of international means of communication, in our century crowned by the Internet, expands without bounds man's possibilities for worldly contacts, man, being unable to change himself as quickly as do technologies, experiences it as an inevitable intrusion into his, until now, stable and clear world. The appearance of inter-phenomena requires change even in his orientation of values and his way of life. Even progressive minds, generating ideas about the open society and the necessity of super new technologies, cannot neglect the speeding change in the relation between man and the eternal truths of existence,—because we can't apply to them any progressive measure of time and space. That is why it is already a global problem; but as every problem this one also has a solution, inherent in itself.

Now, modern man has to spend more and more time in order to satisfy his physical, vital and mental necessities and to do it in a much more refined way than ever before; but a more complicated mechanism of satisfaction does not mean a better or qualitatively improved result. The latter we can see perhaps only in relation to natural development converted into its falsification. Natural food is replaced by biogenetically processed products; traditional garments by synthetic readymade clothes; living art by CD and TV; nature by zoo-substitutes and plastic flowers. In this respect we can think about man's lost capacity to differ from the real thing, from *Ersatz*. But the most important thing is his psycho-physiological state. However comfortable his life may be, however prosperous may be the rationalistic, pragmatic and material world-view and its cult, occidental man experiences inevitable stress, rising from the very depths of his being. Ignoring the natural existence of spiritual necessities, he gives a name to it, i.e. "emptiness", "depression" or "strangeness" and goes to the next-

door psychoanalyst. Sometimes, vaguely understanding the reason of his discontent, he moves one step forward—turns to religion. Unfortunately, very often he goes to the abode of God and doesn't find him there. The question stands: Why? Is it a fault of the so-called incapability of the Church to march in step with time? Or is theology separated from science, culture and social reforms? Perhaps, the man of today needs not the proclaiming of absolute truths, simplified *Kerygma*, formal rendering of sacraments, etc. There is no doubt that Divine manifestation on earth in new forms of being is an indispensable law of the Self-play. That is the origin of spiritual creativeness and bliss. The Bible, Torah, Veda, Avesta, Koran in universal terms do not speak of the eternal truths that are frozen in unchangeable forms, but rather of the ever-changing possibility of Divine expression. Nevertheless, such seeing of the hidden essence of sacred Scriptures requires a very high level of consciousness, insight, intuition and developed perception of the inner life. In this respect there arises one more danger to the human grasp of the image of God, and it depends upon his changing place in the world as well. At the same time man paradoxically looks for the place of God in *his* miserable little world! Very often it is determined by the "absence" of free time. His daily routine, running between the office, shopping center and fitness club does not leave a minute to stop and look around. He is always in a hurry and the more he is, the less time he has. His action doesn't have any hint of sacredness: his meal he prepares for himself, not for God, not to mention the restaurants he visits to save a bit of time. He works for the sake of career and money, but not for the sake of God. He studies and exercises to a pragmatic end, but not because he would like to perceive Divine Wisdom. Every action from body health to family duties is done without any thought about God. That is why in the place of an altar he puts a TV. He thinks that God is a kind of abstraction which requires *extra time*. Only when he finds himself in deep spiritual crisis—and it inevitably comes—man in terrible despair faces *something* or *somebody* whom he calls by God's name. If here his spiritual way begins, born in sleepless night and painful meditation, if he by Divine grace rises above everyday confusion and noise and finds peace in himself, the first and necessary condition for spiritual growth is fulfilled; his dependence upon one or another religion then gets secondary importance.

Let us take Christianity and its ethical aspect in relation to a believer. Every honest Christian makes an effort to perform his religious duties in a proper way and observe the Ten Commandments of God. If it were to be done, today Europe would be in a different situation. Indeed, we should try to understand what exactly in Christianity remains so unconvincing, incomprehensible and alien to the occidental man, that even punishment of God is not taken seriously by him. We can't blame only man's sinful nature. 2000 years of experience of Christianity proves the impossibility of keeping rigid orders in balance with real life. It seems, for the rational and empirical Western mind, that it ought to be able to hold the Ten Commandments, because it has an implanted consciousness governed by law. But "to be righteous in the eyes of the law" does not necessarily mean to be righteous in the eyes of God

per se. Here lies the main problem. The Command "Do not kill" points at exterior action. Nevertheless, if man won't perceive the inner moral imperative, the brutality of action and punishment will lose every sense. Only intuitive, direct experience, taking place firstly in the human psyche, or heart, only subtle inner apprehension will give him a chance to come to the point and harmonise the exterior and interior sides of the ethical whole. If he clearly understands the reason and origin of the wrong impulses to kill, tries to overcome them, then those impulses don't have any base for expressing themselves in an obvious form. That is why first of all we should say "don't be angry, don't envy," or "don't deceive yourself"; we should not think that these are lesser evils. When a man learns how to differ and yet harmonise his feelings, he begins to perceive even more subtle forms of them, *e.g.*, compassion, equality, divine love, etc. At last he learns to discern the essence of humanness from the caused action and relative nature of good and evil. That must be the only way to the higher oneness, *conjunctio oppositorum*. Then, ascending to the highest level of knowledge, the human being can reveal the secret of the impulses to kill, try to overcome them; then those impulses don't have any base for expressing themselves. That is why first of all we should say "don't be angry, don't envy," or "don't deceive yourself". The Trinity and the Sacraments are inaccessible to the ordinary mind. It is said that the shortest way to God lies through the heart. The "heart" we must understand as a kernel of the human being, the *psyche per se*, the center of human microcosm, identical to the Divine. Only identification with one's kernel can brighten the intellect to give power to the knowledge of the essence of things, to harmonise life. We are made in the image of God, St. Augustine of Hippo says. C. G. Jung in that respect has noticed that destruction of the God-image is followed by the annulment of the human personality.

It can hardly be said that such an approach is the conscious position of every Christian. Our present condition impelled Jung to define the end-result as "a true *antimimon pneuma*, a false spirit of arrogance, woolly-mindedness, criminal amorality, and doctrinaire fanaticism, a purveyor of shoddy spiritual goods, spurious art, philosophical stuttering, and Utopian humbug, fit only to be fed wholesale to the mass man of today."¹ Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The West has acquired the religious mind rather than possessed it by nature..."² A man of any religion engaged in exterior ethical action finds himself in the same situation.

In human history there has always been a dialogue between the exterior forms of spiritual expression and its inner content. In my opinion it is, as never before, an urgent problem of today needing attention. The Chinese Confucian school, Hindu Brahmans, orthodox followers of Islam or Judaism attach great importance to the scholastic knowledge of sacred writings and rites. At the same time the existing doctrines of Zen Buddhism, Tantra, Vaishnava-Sahajiyā, Bāuls, Sufi and Kabbalah, alchemists and gnostics of the Middle Ages and contemplative Christian Orders emphasised the inner broadening of spiritual truths and the highest benefit it brings. In spite of the fact that there has been cast on them the shadow of heresy, all of them

from time immemorial could catch the very core of something that is common and general to all religions. When a Baul sings: "Hindu-Muslim—there is no difference, nor are there differences in caste" and "from one seed is the whole creation sprung",³ isn't that song worthy of being listened to? It would be good to give up pride and to try to understand *what that song is about*, to understand what exactly escapes from the eyes of *vaidhi-bhakta*. Maybe there is a way to reconcile the antithesis of Islamic and Hindu worlds. Dalai Lama XIV treats the practice of Buddhism as a whole complex of religious customs suitable for Tibetans which is also a primarily universal method to perfect oneself. So isn't it a stimulus to distinguish between the Eastern tradition and approach and having a universal spiritual origin, common to the West as well? Sri Aurobindo speaks about the many-field systems of consciousness; the concept surpasses every religious determination and points to the possibility of seeking methodically after the highest level of knowledge, irrespective of race, nationality and creed. Wouldn't that be the most real guarantee for expanding humanity's vision of God? If we can understand that the basic spiritual truth lies in the ineffable, infinite and universal Divine, that God, man and the universe are one inseparable reality *par excellence*, then why don't we try to find the power to realise it *here and now*? Our earth would symbolise a universal archetypal basis, a pedicle—an original inspiration, and a flower—with its various forms of spiritual and religious activity in humanity. The way we understand the beauty and divine aroma of a lotus—its indivisible and spontaneous beauty and perfection—in the same way we should conceive the various fields of spiritual activities. Only the integral (not levelling!) point of view can guarantee the progress and expansion of human spirituality. The deepening global processes make an almost inevitable alternative to it. The barriers of misunderstanding gradually break down. At the same time the universal or global integration determines the infinite development of spiritual expression. Nevertheless, the first condition must be the direction towards inner growth, of a unique action of man becoming the Divine Man. From that standpoint the way of occidental man can be equated with the path of Thomas Merton. It is not necessary to go to a contemplative monastery. The aim of modern theology must be to create suitable conditions for the secular man. He must have a possibility not only to meditate upon eternal truths, but to open as well to their inner suggestion and transcendental power. He needs help to find an intimate individual relationship with the Divine. Man must fulfil his destiny and its inherent spiritual possibilities. Only then will every act of his be a conscious act, of seeking the Divine; then expanding humanity's vision of God will become a manifested universal reality.

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References

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