

## The End of Religion.

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।  
तत्रं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥

( *Isopanishad* )

The difference between the means and the end is contingent and not ultimate. The one culminates into, and essentially abides in, the other. Historically, religion is an attitude towards God or a means to have communion with Him. But philosophically, religion and God are one; God is the end of religion. A religious life is to realize God in one's self. It is a complete identity between the devotee and the deity.

The quest of the end is inevitable. God has planted eternity in the heart of man. This spark of the infinite seeks its expansion, and unless it reaches its source it finds no rest. The power that projects itself in the manifold beings of the world also inspires and prompts them to search, know and realize it. So, man is essentially religious and he sincerely feels that there is an ideal state of existence which he has to attain to. But he also discovers, to his great astonishment, that it is hidden in its own brilliance, the dazzling light of which has paralysed his vision. Under this circumstance he collects his faith in the all-sustaining deity, who presides over and is the essence of that ideal state, and bursts forth in a genuine prayer. Prayer is not always a helpless submission, but often a bold inquisitive

BY RAJBALI PANDEY, M. A., D. Litt.

appeal to the deity to reveal its true form to the aspirant.

The real end, however, cannot be revealed to all at once. One cannot see through the dazzling circle of brilliance unless he approaches it with a sincere and pure heart and is taken into confidence by the deity. It is only through deep devotion and constant meditation that he obtains a vision with the help of which he can have a glimpse of the deity. Intellect alone is quite lame unless it dissolves itself into *Yoga* or a communion with God.

The revelation of the end is not in one single instalment. The aspirants are at different stages of evolution. Only that aspect of it is visible to them, which they can understand. In the physical world, all beings are governed by three qualities—intelligence or light, passion or activity and inertia or darkness. Beginning from the lowest rung of evolution, those who are dominated by inertia or darkness live purely on a physical plane in a dormant condition and are susceptible to the darkest forces of nature only. Those in whom passion predominates live on a higher level and can see more active forces of nature. And those whose vision is lit up with intelligence can see the bright forces of nature.

The worship of the bright forces of nature by the intelligent section

of humanity represents a stage in the evolution of religion, which may be styled as Devavāda or the worship of nature-gods. It is free from primitive animism and black magic, which are pseudo-religion and a great impediment in the smooth sailing of the religious instinct. But the worship of nature-gods is also an imperfect approach to the end, because it is concerned only with the external appearance of the deity and its fragmentary realization. The sense of the essential unity is wanting. This approach is desirable, because it is motivated by a religious instinct and an inclination towards the deity. But the method applied here is improper. The relation between the devotee and the deity is mostly commercial and not that of pure love and selfless devotion. Impelled by overwhelming passions people approach gods and, under natural laws divinely ordained, they get the objects they hanker after. But the result falls greatly short of the reality. They obtain the temporal and miss the real. Again, there is one psychological crisis implied in this stage. The worshipper of nature-gods feels himself dependent on them. The entire felicities of life are supposed to be conferred on him by gods in lieu of prayers and sacrifices offered to them, and not as due share of man dispensed by Providence. When this situation is realized by the devotee, he smarts and pushes his claims further.

The next stage in the march of religious life is Vedavāda (Vedism) or ritualism. It means that the letters of the Vedas (holy scriptures) are all-powerful and the guiding force in

the universe. One who employs them properly can fashion his own destiny quite independently of any spiritual help. Through the use of the scriptural utterances the gods can be coerced and compelled to yield results desired by the sacrificers. This is an attempt at self-assertion and independence. But this leads to another extreme. Man begins to cherish an over-confidence in his own egoistic capacity and material resources at his command. He also ceases to believe in the universal reality as the source of all. The Karmakāṇḍīs and materialistic activists tend towards this attitude. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* passes a very destructive remark on egoistic ritualism. "The ignorant who revel in the letter of the Vedas indulge in flowery speech and say there is nought else. These souls are steeped in desires with heavens as their goal. This flowery speech, prescribing manifold ceremonies for securing enjoyment and power, offers rebirth as the fruit of action. In these devotees of pleasure and power, whose hearts are captivated thereby, the understanding of resolute determination in tune with the Divine is not to be found."

(B. G. II. 42-43)

The minds of those who hanker after pleasure and power are always busy in preparing schemes for their acquisition. Consequently, they become absorbed in the bewildering flux of sense-phenomena, which keeps them always restive. Their understanding gets lost in the labyrinth of desires and they become unable to regain their mental poise, which is so necessary for the achievement of the real.

The veil of polytheism, mechanical ritualism and blind activism must be lifted up before one gets into the proper zone of Godhood. One has to go deep down and seek the source of his very being, which is also the source of external pleasure and power. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: "I am the lord and enjoyer of all sacrifices. They who do not know Me fall from the real." (B. G. IX. 23). Mechanical prayer, fasting and ceremonies do not constitute religion. Religion is not even a creed or code. It is an insight into reality.

Now the problem is, how to reach the ultimate end? One would suggest that through the intellectual analysis of the universe man can realize the reality. No doubt this attempt supplies a number of details about Nature and society and thereby enriches the material resources of man. It is also true that these details are quite useful in his worldly affairs. But no amount of worldly wisdom comprising a knowledge of the physical and social sciences can lead the aspirant to his final goal, which is super-physical and beyond the reach of mental speculation. Even the best form of psychic discipline can serve only as a means, which stops short midway in the path of religion.

The real end can be realized through spiritual intuition only. The mental medium between man and God must be set aside. It keeps the sense of duality always alive and separates man from God. At the time of union it outgrows its purpose and is left far behind. The experience of the real through intuition is a mystic experience that surpasses all analytical speculation

concerned with perceptual and conceptual knowledge. The highest and the eternal reality is subtler than even the unmanifest Matter, which is the ultimate reach of mind.

When Godhead is realized in one's life through intuition--the integrality of the whole being--one is convinced of his identity with the supreme reality and through it with the entire universe. He sees the omnipresence of God in all creatures and regards Him the only motive power behind the endless flux of phenomena. Thus the realized soul becomes in tune with the infinite and enjoys eternal peace and joy.

This is the spiritual ascent of man, which frees him from the limitations of the imperfect material world. But it is not an abstraction quite detached from the concrete experiences of life and out of the society in which man is born. With all the purity of soul, sense of Godhead and the power of conviction the realized soul has to descend into his surroundings to revitalize and spiritualize it. The imperfection of the social structure is a challenge to those who have secured spiritual strength and integrity of their being. They have to help the process of God that is being realized in the world and contribute to the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. This is possible only when the realized man discharges all his social obligations in the light of spiritual Knowledge and helps the less developed soul in the quest of the real. The individualistic conception of emancipation is rather selfish and leads to indifference and a misanthropic attitude towards the world.

Really speaking, no individual is perfect unless the whole humanity is perfected. Altruistic religion is the only true religion, which helps not only the cause of the individual but leads the whole

society to perfection. The individual realizes his end in the service of all—

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।  
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥

( Gita )

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