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Advaita and Theosis: The Spiritual Encounter be- tween the Spirituality of the Upanishads and the Experi- ence of Being in Christ

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Abstract: This article explores the mystical convergence between advaita and theosis. Five elements of the Upanishadic advaitic tradition are located first: the Divine as mystery, and as the ultimate subject, the divinisation of the human, the immanence of the Divine in cosmos, and the resultant freedom. Then the three-fold dimension of the divine consciousness of Jesus is articulated: being sent by the Father, being in the Father and being one with the Father. John's Gospel shows that Jesus wanted to communicate this threefold experience to us. This is what Church Fathers called theosis, the divinisation of the human; this is a birthing process. Having explained the terms advaita and theosis, the convergence and divergence between the two are explored. The article concludes with the proposal that Hindus and Christians could move on as spiritual co-

pilgrims, who share their deep mystical experiences with one another and get enlightened and enriched by each other.

Keywords: Advaita, Theosis, Divinisation, Mystical experience, Dialogue, Upanishads.

The Upanishads, composed in the light of the mystical experiences of the great sages between 800 and 400 BCE, contain an advaitic experience: deep oneness with the all in the Divine. The great Church Fathers (100-600 CE) described the core of Christian faith in terms of theosis, the divinisation of the human. In this paper I would like to explore the scope of a theological encounter between these two perceptions: advaita and theosis.

The Dynamics of Spirituality

Spirituality is the universal experience of being gripped by the divine Spirit, the experience of being awakened to the dimension of Transcendence: it is the sense of the Holy, the orientation to the Absolute, the ultimate concern. In spirituality, one experiences the Divine as Spirit: as breath, as movement, as vibration. In spirituality, one resonates with the expansion of the Divine into infinite horizons. The Spirit explores the depth of the Divine (I Cor. 2:11).

Often one gets access to spirituality through faith. Spirituality is universal; faith is particular. Spirituality is the unfolding of the Divine in consciousness; faith is related to a concrete revelatory event. Faith finds expression through symbols, which are taken from particular cultures: symbol is the language of faith. Through the mediation of symbols, spirituality evolves as religion.

Religious symbols evolve in four areas: creed, cult, code and community. In each area the believing community appoints authoritative persons: theologians, priests, teachers and leaders. In all these areas there are ambiguities rendered by social, political, economic and psychological factors. There is a constant struggle of the divine Spirit with these factors. This critique of the Spirit finds expression through mystics and prophets. Often mystics are silenced and prophets are killed by the authorities; every religion has a criminal history. Religious symbols in their function are ambivalent: they can open the way to the Divine, they may also block the way.

In this article we focus attention on the encounter of two mystical traditions of the East and that of the West: concretely on the interfacing of advaita and theosis.

The Spirituality of the Upanishads

The Upanishads offer an authentic source of the Indian mystical heritage. They have been composed at different times between 800 and 400 BCE. Though the Upanishads are not given the same revelatory value (sruti) associated with the Vedas, they are held in high esteem in the scriptural corpus of Hinduism for, these contain the recollections (smriti) of the sages who went into the depth of the unity of reality in the Divine. Upanishads uphold the absolute transcendence of the Divine (Brahman) as well as the deep immanence of God (Atman) in the world. The transcendent mystery of the Divine is revealed through its immanence in the world: Atman is Brahman – ayam ātma Brahma – this is a basic insight of the Upanishads.

Five elements can be located in the mystical worldview of the Upanishads:

a. The Divine is Absolute, Incomprehensible, Ineffable Mystery

An abiding sense of the all-pervading, and all-transcending mystery of the Brahman vibrates in all the Upanishads. When speaking of the Divine the sage says:

“There the eye does not reach, nor speech, nor mind: we do not know it nor do we know how to teach it. Indeed it is other than the known, and also beyond the unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancient sages who have spoken about it.” (Kena Up. 1.3-4)

This being the case, the only way to reach out to the divine mystery is the way of negation: *neti...neti...* (not this, not this) (Birth. Up.4.5.15). “That from which words return along with the mind not attaining it - that is the blissful Brahman.” (Tait. Up. 2.9.)

The Divine is “ungraspable, unperceivable, indescribable”, (Mund. Up. 1.1.6), “formless eternal silence” (Chand. Up. 3.15), “subtler than the subtlest” (Swet Up. 4.14). If asked what its form is, one should answer: “Its form is formlessness” (Swet. 4.19).

b. The Divine is the Ultimate Subject Of Consciousness

The human mind can grasp something only in so far the latter is objectified. The mind wants to put everything into a definite form. But the Divine is formless, and hence, it is not an object for the mind to grasp. Hence the only way to grasp the Divine is to dive into a deeper level of consciousness. Upanishads invite the seeker to dive from the mind (*manah*) to the introspective intellect (*buddhi*), from the mental level to the intuitive level, from analysis to awareness, from the objectified mode of perception to the experi-

ence of the true subject (Kath. Up. 3:10). This process is a matter of human effort that involves asceticism and renunciation, concentration and meditation. But the attainment of the experience of the Divine as the ultimate Self is a matter of grace.

“The Self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by mental exercises, nor through much hearing. He can be attained only by the one whom the Self chooses. To such a one the Self reveals his true nature” (Kath Up.1.2.23).

“That which is not thought by the mind, but by which the mind thinks, that is Brahman; not what people worship here. That which is not expressed through speech, but by which speech is expressed, that is Brahman; not what people worship here” (Kena Up. 1.5-6)

The Upanishadic sages demand that a true spiritual seeker should not get stuck at any particular image of God. Any categorical experience may be affirmed, but it should constantly transcend towards the Brahman that is ever-beyond. The seeker should constantly ask himself/herself: how can I know the Knower? *Vijnātāram kena vijaneeyāt*.

c. The One Who Knows the Divine Becomes One with the Divine

The true awakening to mystery of the divine subjectivity takes place not in the framework of the dualistic mind but through the unfolding of the intuitive *buddhi*. Only by becoming one with the Divine does one really know the Divine, for the Divine is not so much object of our knowledge, but subject of our consciousness:

“Only in oneness is it to be seen, the stable *atman*, immeasurable, free from blemish is it, beyond space, unborn,

great, unwavering” (Brh. Up, 4,4,20 cfr. Kath.Up.9,13; Svet.Up. 6,13; Mait Up. 6,17).

In the depth of consciousness, one enters into an experience of mystical union with the Divine. “The one who knows the Brahman, verily becomes Brahman!” (brahma-vid brahmaiva bhavati, Mund.Up.3.2.9) “By knowing the Brahman one merges into the Brahman” (Svet.Up.2.7). One has thus transcended the phenomenal level of consciousness (Tait.Up.2.2.1) and entered into the mystical awareness of the divine Self within. In deep oneness with the Self one may exclaim “I am Brahman!” (Aham brahmāsmi, Brih Up. 1.4.9) Here one touches upon a level of experience that is far deeper than the mental level. This experience of mystical union cannot be evaluated in terms of the conceptual framework or philosophical theories of the mind. Hence any attempt to label this experience as monism or self-annihilation, or to judge it as denying the reality of the individual and the world would be off the mark. What is essential is to see how such an inner pilgrimage and the unitive experience improve the quality of a person’s life.

d. The Entire Universe Is Permeated by the Divine Self (Atman)

With the intuitive experience of the Self inside one looks at the world outside. And one perceives “the same Self in all and all in the Self” (Isa. Up.6) It is an ecstatic experience of the universal theophany. The divine light shines through everything (Mund. Up. 2.2.1), the divine life permeates everything (Svet.Up. 1.6), the divine vibration - OM - resonates in everything (Chand.Up.2.23.3). The universe is the divine abode, the body of the Lord (Chand.Up.5.18.2). The entire universe is permeated by the divine Lord (Isa Up.1).

“Verily this whole world is Brahman. Everything takes birth from it, moves in it and finally merges with it. Tranquil one should meditate on it” (Chand.Up.3.14 “That from which these beings are born, that through which they live and that into which they finally enter - that is Brahman”(Tait. Up.3.1.1). “He who dwells within the earth (and everything), yet distinct from the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, he is the Self, the inner controller (antaryāmin) the immortal One” (Brih. Up. 3.7.3). “This verily is the Lord of all beings. As the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this Self, are all beings, all gods all worlds, all living beings, all these selves, held together” (Brih.Up-2.5.15).

The Upanishadic sages use a highly poetic language to describe the experience of the universal immanence of the divine Self. They do not identify the finite world with the infinite Brahman; they taste and see the power and presence of the Brahman in every atom and every living cell. They realise that the whole universe is soaked in the divine energy sphere. The divine presence is felt as permeating and enlivening everything like butter in milk (Svet.Up.4.16), like salt in sea-water (Brih.Up.1.4.7), like oil in the seed (Svet. Up.1.15), like the vital sap in the tree (Chand. Up.6.11.1). This is a highly mystical worldview. This cannot be judged with logical categories or evaluated with the dogmatic framework of another religion. Any attempt to label this as pantheism or idolatry would miss the point. What is important is to see how this world view communicates a sense of ecological harmony. When the cosmos is experienced as the dance of the Divine, human persons would live with great respect for everything, animate and inanimate.

e. Inner Freedom Is the Character of the Enlightened Person

The experience of the divine presence within oneself and in everything makes one sensitive to the grace and demands of divine presence in the world. The basic characteristic of one's relation to realities outside would then be inner freedom. "The one who sees all beings in the Atman, and the Atman in all beings, is free from fear" (Isa Up. 6). If the Lord permeates everything, one cannot possessively cling on to anything. Hence the sage exclaims: "renounce and enjoy!" (Isa Up.1). The Upanishadic masters describe greed (kama) as the root cause of all suffering and alienation in life. (Mund. Up. 3.2.1) Through greed one gets fixated on one's ego (ahamkāra) and thereby the way to inner spiritual freedom is blocked (Swet.Up. 4.7). Besides, through greed, one destroys the resources of God-given nature and manipulates other human beings for one's ego-gratification. The way to overcome greed is to develop the attitude of non-possessiveness (aparigraha).

"Two motivations bind a person: that which leads to the auspicious (*srēyah*) and that which brings about the pleasurable (*prēyah*). Each has a distinct purpose to attain. The wise man pondering over them prefers the auspicious to the pleasurable. But the ignorant man chooses the pleasurable for worldly benefits, and thus fails of the true aim of life" (Kath.Up.1.2.1-2).

A man of inner freedom is above the duality of good and evil. The integral mystical vision of life gives rise to a holistic view of nature and society.

"On knowing the Self one becomes a liberated person. His whole life is oriented to the Divine. He has risen above the desire for wealth and worldly benefits. He has risen

above the feeling of having done something good or evil. What he does, does not bind him to this world at all" (Brih. Up. 4.4.22).

The one who perceives the Divine in all, becomes concerned about the integral welfare of the others. Compassion would be the hallmark of such an ethical attitude. When the Creator Lord was asked, about the basic virtues of life, he answered: be self-controlled, (dama) be generous (dat-ta), be compassionate (daya) (Brih.Up.5.2.1-3). The last instruction given by the master to the student as the latter enters upon his family life offers a summary of the ethical teaching of the Upanishads.

"Always speak the truth, incessantly pursue the dharma, continue the self-study. Never swerve away from truth and dharma. Let there be no neglect of your welfare and the prosperity of all beings. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the ancestors and the responsibilities to the life-forces of nature. May your mother and father, your teacher and guest be God for you. May the good dealings you found in me inspire you further. What you give to others, give in faith and humility, with sympathy and generosity. (Tait. Up.1.11.1-4)

Being in Christ

What happens when the Gospel of Jesus encounters the spiritual world of the Upanishads? What happens when faith in Christ meets the mystical experience of the Upanishadic sages? How would an encounter with the spiritual world of the Upanishads deepen the faith experience of a Christian?

The Foundational Experience of Christian Faith

The Logos became flesh in Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to the world. In Christ God has reconciled the world to himself. The old is gone, everything has become new. We live in Christ – these are some of the key expressions (mahavākyas) of Christian faith. When a Christian says these words to a Hindu shaped by the Upanishadic heritage, he will be confronted with the question: have you experienced the power of these words? Has the Gospel really deepened your consciousness, and transformed your life? Experience is the primary source of authenticity in the mainstream Hindu heritage. Hence the insistence on asceticism, meditation, discipline and simplicity of life.

Experience of the Divine is basically the experience of oneness with the Divine. There is a constant insistence in the Upanishads that every form of duality conceived at the mental level has to be transcended by the consciousness of the unity of reality in the Divine. This is an invitation to a deep mystical consciousness. This is a challenge to Christians to awaken the mystical dimension of Christian faith. There is a tendency in us Christians to overemphasise the I-thou relationship with God. God is conceived primarily as Father, Lord, Saviour, King. This personification of the Divine with male symbols is evident in our prayers and liturgy, in our theology and Church structures. The mystical sages of the Upanishads bring our attention to the mystery dimension of the Divine, to the experience of God as the Subject of our being, to the consciousness of being one with the Divine. We are here helped to look deeper into the God-experience of Jesus: Jesus experienced the Divine as the inner source of his being, as that-out-of-which he came forth.

(The following references are from the Gospel according to John)

a. ‘The Father Sent Me’ (3:16, 4:34, 5:36-38, 7:28-29, 10:36, 17:3)

Jesus had an abiding consciousness of being sent by the Father. Here the Father is the one who sends the Son with the redemptive mission. The Son understands his mission as ‘doing the will of the Father’ (4:34, 5:30, 6:38), as ‘completing the work of the Father’ (4:34; 6:29; 9:3). What is perceived here is a certain distinction between the one who sends and the one who is sent. The relation between the Father and the Son is an inter-personal relation.

b. ‘I Am in the Father and the Father Is in Me’ (5:26, 8:28, 14:10; 17:21,23).

Jesus knew that the Father who sent him is with him, in him (8:16,29, 16:32, 14:10). Here the Father is the one who gives life to the Son from within. The Son constantly takes birth from the Father (5:26; 6:57; 8:24; 16:28). The Father is the source and generator of the Son. Between them there is total mutual immanence, intense compenetration (perichoresis). The Son is the expression and unfolding of the Father (14:10; 12:49). There is no Father without the Son, no Son without the Father. The relation between the Father and the Son is an intra-personal relation.

c. ‘The Father and I are One’ (10:30; 17:11,21,22.)

This is the articulation of the deepest experience of Jesus in relation to the Divine. He had the consciousness that his being and life and work have been totally transparent to the divine source, which he called the Father. Father and Son are essentially one. The being of the Father unfolds itself through the being of the Son. The Son is the self-

communication of the Father. There is absolute unity between them. The relation between the Father and the Son is a trans-personal relation, in the sense that it goes far beyond the personalist structures of the human mind. The oneness in the depth of the Divine cannot be expressed in personalist categories. These three aspects of Jesus' consciousness may not be taken as three phases or spheres, but as the three integral dimensions of his God consciousness.

And Jesus wanted to communicate to us this inner experience:

Just as the Father sent me into the world, so do I send you into the world (17:18).

Just as the Father knows me, and I know my own (10:14)

Just as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you (15:9;17:26).

Just as I remain in the love of the Father, so will you remain in my love (15:10).

Just as I draw life from the Father, so will you draw life from me (6:57).

Just as I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, so am I in you and you are in me (17:21;14:20).

Just as the Father and I are one, so may you all be one in us (17-21-22).

The Greek preposition *kathos* (just as) has a great significance here. Jesus wanted all those who believe in him make the same inner journey that he made, and participate in the same inner experience that shaped his consciousness. Our life evolves not so much before Christ as in Christ, not before God as within the inner-trinitarian process of

life. We are called to participate in the filial experience of Christ: we are daughters/sons of God.

Theosis: The Divinisation of the Human

The early Fathers of the Church found in the process of the divinisation of the human (theosis) the core of Christian faith experience:

“God became man so that man may become God!” (Deus homo factus est, ut homo fieret Deus, Augustine, PL.38,1997).

“Through his immense love the Word of God became what we are, so that we may become perfectly what he is” (Iraeneus PG. 7,1120).

“When our consciousness is completely purified and through contemplation elevated above the material realm, it will be divinised by God.”(Origen, Comm. on John 32,27).

“With Jesus human and divine nature begin to be woven together so that by fellowship with divinity human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all those who believe and go on to undertake the life which Jesus taught.”(Origen, Contra Celsum, 3,28).

“We have not only become Christians, but Christ himself. Stand firm in awe and rejoice: we have become Christ.” (Augustine, Commentary on John's Gospel, 21,8)

“The Word became man, so that we humans may become Divine..Theosis means the re-forming of the Image of God according to which we have been created by the Word.” (Athanasius, De Incarnatione 3,101).

“In the Spirit the Word divinises us.” (Athanasius, PG.25, 192; 26,589). “Christ takes shape in us through the Holy Spirit who reinstates the divinity in us.” (Cyril of Alexandria, PG.75,1088).

“Theosis is participation through grace in the nature of God.”
(John of Damascus, *Expositio Fidei*, 88,18).

“Through theosis we are brought into the energy-field of God.” (Gregorios Palamas, *Holy Hesychasts*).

Divinisation means the reinstatement of the image of God fully in us. What humanity had lost through the Fall has been reinstated through the salvific event of Jesus Christ. What hides our true nature is being removed by the light of the risen Christ in us. In the power and presence of the Spirit we recognize who we truly are.

The Spirit makes us realize that we are no more slaves but daughters and sons of God, participating in the divine nature through Christ. The Fathers of the Church do not equate human soul with the preexistent divine Son, but they emphasize that through the Incarnation of the divine Word the Divine that is dormant in us is awakened in Jesus; through Christ we have been graced with the realisation that we participate in the new humanity that is one with the divinity of Christ. We are grafted onto the tree of Christ (Rom. 11:17). So we put on the new Man (Col. 3:10), and become a new creation (II.Cor. 5:17). We live in Christ.

Faith in Christ means, therefore, participation in the divinisation process that takes place in and through the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit continuously transforms our life and makes us participate in the divine life. Everyone who is united with the Lord is “one Spirit with him” (1 Cor.6:17). We are called to “be partakers of the divine nature” (1.Pet.1:4), “to be transformed into the image (of God in Christ) that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory” (II Cor.3:18). In faith we find ourselves in a process in which “we get fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself” (Eph. 4:13), a process through which “we are filled with the fullness of

God” (Eph.3:19). And this process in the Spirit leads to the final state in which “God will be all in all” (1 Cor.15:28). For the early Fathers and the mystics of the Church the experience of divinisation (theosis) has been a foundational element of Christian spirituality. We do not participate in the divine essence, but in the divine nature.

This is a birthing process: God gave birth to us; we give birth to God. Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine use the imagery of the birth of God in the soul. We are all called to become not only children of God but also mothers of God. “What once happened in a bodily way in the virgin, Mary continues to happen in every human soul that is totally open to God: to become mother of God.”(Gregory of Nyssa, *Comm. on Mathew*, 12,50) “When God works in the soul, the soul receives the Word and becomes pregnant in the Spirit. Thus the soul becomes like a mother giving birth to God.”(Origen, *Comm. on Song of Songs*). Reflecting on what happened in Bethlehem Augustine preached: “Christ is born; may he be born in our hearts. Mary bore him in her womb; may we bear him in our hearts. The virgin became pregnant through the Spirit; may our souls be pregnant through faith in Christ. Our souls must bring forth God into the world.” (Quoted in Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart*, Munich 1985, 142).

For Meister Eckhart we are all called to be virgins (fully open to the divine Spirit) and mothers (bringing forth God into this world). “I give birth to the one who gave birth to me.” (Sermon, *Ave gratia plena*). This perspective of the Fathers and mystics of the Church helps us to perceive what is happening deep within us: the divinisation of the human. Creation is experiencing the birth pangs of the divine Spirit, and this birthing takes place through human persons. Our consciousness is being transformed by the Spirit and elevat-

ed to a divine consciousness just as it came to a full blossoming in the consciousness of Jesus. We are being reborn in Christ, and we give birth to Christ in all the spheres of the Christification process. It is in this process of christophany that we discover our true identity.

What would be the concrete effect of theosis in human life? The person being reborn in God will be highly sensitive to the sufferings and agonies of people as well as of creation. The dealings of that person will be characterised by mercy. One who lives from a divine centre of life will be a merciful person. The face of God manifest in Jesus has been the merciful face of God. By being inserted to the birthing of the Spirit one experiences the birth pangs of the new creation. In the lives of the poor and on the faces of the broken humans one discovers the healing presence of the God who creates everything new. In their wounds, and in the woundedness of the mother earth, one discovers the wounded God. At the same time one experiences the regenerative power of resurrection too in this broken world. This world of ours is God's world, the body of the divine Spirit.

Christians Encountering the Upanishadic Vedanta

The inner experience of Jesus, and the Christian heritage of the mystical experience that evolved out of it, help us to look deeper into ourselves and discover our true identity within the inner-divine process. The 'Spirit that searches the depth of God' (I Cor. 2:11) enables us to realise that we are being reborn in the Spirit and that we give birth to the Word in the world. Those who drink from the divine fountain unfolded in Jesus will be impregnated by the Divine Spirit and hence will give birth to the new creation. (Jn.7:37-39). God gives birth to himself in and through us.

Our true self-identify consists of total transparency to the divine power and presence.

At the level of this mystical experience Christians meet the sages and seekers of the Upanishadic heritage. The Upanishads give witness to the experience of the sages who discovered their true identity within the inner-divine dynamics of sat-chit-ānanda (Being-consciousness-bliss). They felt that they were being constantly transformed by the self-outpouring stream of divine life, and enlightened by the self-manifesting beam of divine light. They were led from the objectifying activity of the mind to the contemplative pursuits of the buddhi. Their consciousness was deepened and enlightened by the divine light. They could perceive the entire reality with its diversity in its ultimate depth of divine unity. Prajnānam Brahma, consciousness is divinised (Ait. Up. 3.1.3) - they could exclaim. Here the subject-object polarity is transcended. Here one discovers and realizes one's true nature as one with the divine nature. "Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati" (the one who experiences the Divine becomes Divine) - this is the ultimate mystical experience in the spiritual heritage of the Upanishads. "Everyone united with the Lord becomes one Spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). This is the deepest mystical experience in the spiritual heritage of the Church. There is a certain convergence in these two streams of mystical introspection: one deepens the other, one enlightens the other.

Without unnecessarily polarising them or unduly ignoring the specific differences, the question may be asked from each side: what does the other evoke in me? With this question, the Christian believer reads the Upanishads from within her own spiritual depth, and the Hindu seeker reads the New Testament from within the inner cave. The Christian feels the movements of the Spirit that awakens the mystic

in him/her and the Hindu experiences the movements of the same Spirit that alerts the prophet within him/her. The Christian is moved to the perception that no integral spirituality can be genuine without contemplative pursuits and the ascetical elements demanded by them. The Hindu is led to the realisation that no liberative spirituality is possible without a genuine concern for human welfare and the resulting commitment to justice. The Christian is then helped to see the power and presence of the Divine in nature and thus draw the ecological consequences of the life of faith. The Hindu is helped to discern the liberative presence of God in the events of history and thus become sensitive to the challenges of social life. The Christian thus learns to look at nature as the body of the divine Spirit and to deal with it with greater respect and concern. The Hindu is motivated to look at a human person as the temple of the Spirit and meet them with the concerns of equality and justice.

Spiritual Co-Pilgrims

Here it is not a question of one teaching the other on the path of spiritual progress, nor is it a matter one interpreting the Scripture of the other in the light of one's revelatory experience. Rather, the Hindu and the Christian understand him/herself as a co-pilgrim with the other. On the way of this common pilgrimage, they read the Scriptures of the other, open themselves to be challenged, criticised, enriched and guided by the other. It is, in fact, a process rediscovering one's spiritual identity in an encounter with the other. It is through the thou that I become I. The mystical and prophetic streams are the dialectical elements of spiritual integration. In every religion, both are at work manifestly or implicitly. There are, for instance, mystical streams in Christian Scriptures and traditions; but to a great

extent, these are not fertilising Christian theology or the day-to-day life of Christians. In the highly structured patterns of community organisation and the dogmatic framework of theological thinking in the Church, the mystical elements have often been marginalised, if not suppressed. In today's world, there is a global quest for mystical experiences. Many Christians unable to find mystical wellsprings within their community and heritage seek them at the feet of Eastern masters or in the New Age Movements. This is a phenomenon which Christianity has to take seriously and listen to what the Spirit is telling the Church today. Church has to discern the unseen work of grace in the hearts of all human persons. The Upanishads open to Christians infinite horizons of searching the mystery of the Divine. If one's mind is attuned to the relentless quest of the Upanishads, one cannot be fixated on the particular forms of God's revelation, nor can one be dogmatic about the concrete formulations in theology. Such openness of the mind does not mean relativising faith in Christ but seeing it in relation to the universal process of the divine self-manifestation. Church will then be understood not primarily in terms of the visible structures and closed traditions but as the Spirit-determined community, the pilgrim-community that is ever on the move "to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of the love of God revealed in Christ" (Eph.3:19).

At a depth of the Upanishads and the New Testament, there is a mystical experience of oneness with the Divine. The Christian experience of union with the Divine has been later interpreted in terms of theosis; the Upanishadic experience of merging with the Divine has been taken up in *advaita*. They are ways of understanding at the mind-level the deep mystical oneness-experience that one has at the heart-

level. The Church Fathers who advocated theosis made a consistent distinction between the divine essence and divine nature; humans participate not in the divine essence but are raised to divine nature. "...that you should share the divine nature..." (II. Pet. 1:4). Gregory Palamas makes the distinction between the non-participable divine essence and the participable stream of divine energies. In some advaita schools of thought; however, there is a tendency to speak of humans merging into the divine essence (sat), for ultimately reality is non-dual (a-dvaita). Reflecting on theosis Thomas Aquinas said: "the one who knows God, becomes God-like" (*quisque Deum intelligit, deiformis fit*, ST. 1.12.5.ad 3); the Upanishadic sage would say: "the one who knows God becomes God" (*brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*, Mund. Up. 3.2.9). These are attempts to interpret the deep mystical experience that in fact eludes every mental perception and verbal articulation. "There the mind does not reach, nor the words" (Kena Up. 1.3) "If you know God, it is not God" (Augustine, PL.8.663). It is important that one goes beyond the mind and reach out to the intuitive faculty of the buddhi / nous to enter the cave of the heart, wherein the merging / union / oneness of the human with the Divine takes place. This is an unending spiritual pursuit. One could find here converging lines between Christian spirituality and Upanishadic experience, between theosis and advaita. At the heart level, East and West meet. This is what Abhishiktananda through his deep entry to the Upanishadic wisdom discovered.

In this spiritual pursuit, the Christian theologian meets the Hindu Vedantin as a spiritual co-pilgrim; the interpretation of the spiritual dynamics of the New Testament is deepened by the mystical insights of the Upanishads. The anthropocentric world-view of Christianity is balanced by

the cosmic world-view of the Upanishadic sages, and the social initiatives are integrated with ecological concerns. The prayer of Jesus was that all may be one: that all human persons irrespective of the differences in religious affiliations and cultural patterns may experience their deep oneness in the triune divine reality. On the way to grasp the mystical meaning of the divinisation that takes place deep within us, the Upanishads throw a lot of light. There is, therefore, tremendous scope for Christian theology to be spiritually fertilised by the Upanishads.

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