The Renaissance of Hinduism

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Its Background, Content, and Implications

THIS paper is based on two interpretations of Hinduism, both by Hindus of recognized standing. Over twenty years ago, in 1924, Professor Govinda Das of the Benares Hindu University wrote a book of some 450 pages, entitled "Hinduism." He frankly recognized that his religion had fared badly in its age-long contact with Islam and more recently with an aggressive culture from the West, a culture with a strong ingredient of Christianity. He wanted to make Hinduism acceptable to those countrymen of his who had been influenced by this culture and who had been at least partly led to feel that Hinduism would have to be discarded if they were to be men of the modern world alive to all its currents and countercurrents. His discussion had real significance; it still has, and we shall make use of several of his statements in what follows.

But there has recently reached this side of the water a full-sized work which its author calls "Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." The book is a contribution to the Pratap Singh Gaekwad Library of Indian Philosophy and Religion, under the editorship of the well known scholar and lecturer, Professor S. Radhakrishnan, and bears the imprint of Benares Hindu University. The author, D. S. Sarma, M. A., signs his preface as from Madras. These are the only biographical notes the volume contains relative to its writer. The volume itself makes it clear that he is the master of "a free and flexible English style, easy, natural and dignified," to use the words of Professor Radhakrishnan in his General Preface. One cannot but be attracted by the sustained energy of the presentation through the more than 650 ample pages, nor fail to be impressed by the extended bibliography, a full acquaintanceship with which is demonstrated by the richness of detail in the text itself.

We are, of course, not bound to be carried by the argument in dealing with a subject filled with thorny problems as this is. That would be too much to expect of one whose viewpoint differs as greatly as mine does from that of Mr. Sarma. I might put one phase of this divergence with a touch of exaggeration by saying that those who are the villains in the plot for our author, namely the Christian missionaries, are the heroes of the play for me. Most of the points made by Mr. Sarma are not new to those who have become more or less familiar with the work and writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabinranath Tagore, Professor Radhakrishnan, and others. The author's method is to present first an introductory section, outlining the history of Hinduism as a background for a far more detailed study of the past century and a half. Then he gives us in chronological order the contributions to the Renaissance of Ram Mohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj, Justice Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati and the Arya Samaj, Annie Besant and the Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and finally Professor Radhakrishnan. It proves to be pretty nearly a full-length portrait of the advance movements in Hindu-

ism since early in the nineteenth century.

Socrates, as we remember, was always insisting that clear definition was essential before any problem could be adequately discussed. So we ask, what is Hinduism, the religion whose renaissance we are asked to investigate? The answer we are compelled to make is that it is difficult if not impossible to provide such a definition. Hinduism is much like the heavy mist which once in a while envelops us who live along the shores of Lake Michigan. You are in the midst of it and yet cannot grasp it. Govinda Das declares that "Hinduism is absolutely indefinite." Continuing, he insists that "It is really an anthropological process to which by a strange irony of fate the name of "religion' has been given . . . It rejects nothing. It is all-comprehensive, all-absorbing, all-tolerant, all-complacent, all-complaint" ("Hinduism," p. 45).

Then, who is a Hindu? Professor Das applies as many as fourteen tests and in each case announces the verdict that it is not valid and does not determine whether the person who fulfils that condition is a Hindu or not. His final conclusion is "that any and every one is a Hindu (1) who does not repudiate that designation; or better still, because most positive, who says he is a Hindu, and (2) accepts any of the many beliefs, and follows any of the many practices that are anywhere regarded as Hindu" (op. cit., p. 57). "As it is, it has infinite grades of possibilities in it. It may in the future enwrap within its tenuous folds even such aggressive religions as Christianity and Islam" (Ibid.). What can we do with anything as intangible and unmanageable as that? Fortunately the Hinduism which is, according to Mr. Sarma, in a process of renewal is not the amorphous thing of Professor Das, description, but a much more definite segment which can be segregated and defined fairly accurately.

We may proceed by a process of elimination. The Hinduism which has for long centuries been obsessed and bound hand and foot by the caste system is not a part of the renaissance, except as being one of the objects of opposition and even vituperation on the part of its leaders. The connection of Hinduism with this system is the reason for calling it an "anthropological process," or better, a sociological system. That it is a recognized part of Hinduism is made amply evident by the injunctions in the religious law books and by the fact that many who would despair of finding any other criterion by which to test a person's adherence to the faith will frequently cite his membership in a caste and his acquiescence in keeping caste regulations as sure proof that he is a Hindu. One aspect of the system comes in for special condemnation, the treatment of the outcastes, or untouchables, those fifty or more millions of unfortunate creatures who are despised by the bulk of the Hindu community and have not in the history of the last thousand or more years been allowed the privilege of worship in Hindu temples.

The entire group of social reformers are standing strenuously against untouchability and demanding that these outcastes be given the rights which human beings just as human beings should look for from their fellows. No one has done more than Mr. Gandhi to bring the rights of these pitiable people into the consciousness of the Indian community. As long ago as 1931, he gave them the name of Harijan, "men of God," as being the special objects of divine compassion and care. Mr. Sarma is very fair when he says that "it must be confessed that the emphasis which our religious leaders . . . have laid on social service is due to the object lessons provided by the Christian missions" ("Renaissance," p. 639).

But many of the reformers go the full distance and declare themselves to be

opposed to the whole caste system, as a divisive factor, calculated to prevent the progress which they believe lies immediately before the Indian people. For the same reason they are opponents of child-marriages, the enforced widowhood of Indian widows (many of whom are mere children), and the recognized system of temple prostitution, which has for ages been a blot on Hinduism as an organized religion. All this is to the good and argues well for the future. Any discerning person well knows that what is now in the purpose of this group of reformers will take long years to work its slow way into the consciousness of the almost inert masses of Hindus.

It is somewhat difficult for the western mind, which finds itself so in accord with the changes just mentioned, to understand the vigorous stand taken by Mr. Gandhi and others to give special protection to the cow. He speaks of the cow as "a poem on pity" (op. cit., p. 577) and seems to have a deep conviction that the cow, regarded as sacred everywhere in India, should be given honor because it is "endowed with a soul" (Ibid).

Those who share in the program of the renaissance desire it to be known that these and other aspects of social reform are an important part of their task. This attitude, let it be clearly seen, is a repudiation of features of Indian life which have held an uncontested place in the Hinduism of the past. The reformers want no revival here but a complete removal of what they realize as evils, from which Hinduism may well be forever free.

We come even closer to the heart of the Hinduism which is popularly practiced when we enter the realm of worship and devotion. In general it may be said that the Hindu community is divided into two great sects, the Vaishnavas who are worshipers of Vishnu and his various incarnations, and the Shivites, who are devoted to Siva and his consorts and other divinities closely related to him. In literally tens of thousands of temples and shines scattered over the land this worship goes on day after day with unabated intensity. Under the leadership and direction of hosts of proud Brahmin priests, most of them ignorant and many of them of doubtful morals, Hinduism thus seeks to minister to the religious needs of the people. With this most important aspect of their religion the renaissance in which we are here interested has little to do. So far as many of the leaders in the revival are concerned the system is more or less accepted as inevitable, with which they do not believe it wise to interfere. The people, they say, need religious expression and here it is provided for them in forms which are ancient and approved. Not much can be done by trying to break in and change the whole current of religious life which has been running full and free for many centuries. At the same time they themselves are not completely in harmony. Some will have little to do with these forms and ceremonies, feeling a sense of emancipation from what at heart they must be more or less ashamed of. Then there are others for whom the impact of the ancient system is so compelling that they acquiesce and at times even defend their somewhat inconsistent attitude.

One becomes conscious before long that the so-called **Renaissance** is a movement among a comparatively small number of the intelligensia, very earnest and yet at the same time almost snowed under—a most inappropriate figure to use with reference to India—by the weight of the traditional system. To such an extent is this the case that a well-informed missionary of many years standing declared to me that there was no real renaissance of Hinduism.

Mr. Sarma speaks of the present

period of transition as one of crisis. There have been several such periods in the history of the religion. The earliest was the period when the Upanishads were produced, a period ending about 480 B.C. These writings arose out of philosophical reflection, when men, dissatisfied in their inner lives by the sacrificial system which had become not only the center but the circumference of religious practice, went off into solitude and began to think through the problems of human life and cosmic life and their relation to each other. We shall shortly have more to say about the content of their meditations.

Still another crisis was precipitated by the rise of Buddhism about 500 B.C. For a thousand years this faith was an influential factor in Indian life. For several centuries before and after the Christian era it was the dominant force in the life of the nation, though of course Hinduism was not superseded. About the sixth century A.D. a powerful Hindu revival began to appear and in the course of several centuries a rejuvenated religion makes its appearance. It was a renewal of philosophical thought as well as of popular religion. The sectarianism which has already been mentioned appeared, very different from the practice of the centuries before the rise of Buddhism. Equally significant was the revival of thought. Toward the end of the period we come upon the name of Sankara, the most powerful and constructive mind in the history of Indian philosophy. So effective was this renaissance that Buddhism gradually weakened and finally disappeared from the Indian scene, never to return to the land of its birth.

A different kind of crisis—beginning about 1,000 A.D.—was brought about by the invasion of India by Islamic marauders who in the end set up a powerful empire and completely dominated the land politically for hundreds of years. Millions of Hindus entered the ranks of Islam so that today, long after the power of the Mogul rulers was broken by the coming of the British, we have the largest single group of Moslems under one government in the world.

None, however, of these crises can compare with that through which India has been passing during the last century and a half. In brief it is the crisis caused by contact with the West, not in one feature only but in every aspect of Indian life. We must of necessity confine ourselves to the religious and philosophical, but here the impact has been as profound, if not more so, than at any other point. As Sarma puts it, "This Renaissance began as a result of the impact of Western civilization on our own" (op. cit., p. 630). "Along with the new knowledge came the fierce attacks of the early Christian missions on Hinduism and Hindu society." These missionaries were "educators as well as crusaders . . . They opened schools and colleges where they not only imparted the new secular knowledge but also taught Christianity as the only true religion." The result was "in the minds of the educated classes for a time either a thoroughgoing scepticism or a partial leaning towards Christianity, but ultimately they served only to rouse Hinduism from its sleep" (op. cit., p. 68f).

It might be well here to bring out one of the most frequently mentioned convictions of the present renaissance. It is suggested by the statement that the missionaries "taught Christianity as the only true religion." That idea with its suggestion of exclusiveness is always a red flag to the modern Hindu thinker. Over and over again the declaration is made that all religions are essentially one. Referring to the remarkable mystic and devotee, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sarma declares that he is "the true starting point of the present Hindu Renaissance who, like a true Hindu, . . . held that all religions were

branches of the same tree" (op. cit., p. 228). He goes farther into detail thus: speaking of the final reality, "The saints of southern India call it Siva. The singers of Maharastra call it Krishna. St. Paul calls it Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ calls it his Father. Ramakrishna calls it his mother, Kali or Sita" (op. cit., p. 234). That was more than a generation ago, but the leaders of today make the same assertions. Speaking of Professor Radhakrishnan, Sarma says, "It is but appropriate that the task of defending the religious faith of mankind should have fallen to the lot of a Hindu philosopher, because a Hindu alone looks upon all religions as one in essence, regards them as members of one and the same family or branches on a single tree, this being a truth which he inbibes along with his mother's milk" (op. cit., p. 586).

Our author is quite consistent with what has just been said when he repudiates the evangelizing and convert-making zeal of the missionary. He states what should be the Hindu ideal when he declares that " . . . no true Hindu ever tries to uproot another man's faith nor revile his gods," but one is brought to a sudden stop when Sarma adds, "or boast of the superiority of his own religion," when the whole volume we are dealing with is one long paean of praise to Hinduism as the religion above all others, the one best fitted to meet the needs of men. And I am equally brought to a halt when after reading his condemnation of the proselytizing work of the missionaries I find such a statement as this, "We must, of course, claim the same rights and freely take into our fold to it and want to come back to it, but not only all those who once belonged also those who are born in other faiths, but want to embrace Hinduism. Hinduism has latterally been content to remain only an ethnic religion. But, in future, it should become a creedal religion also, as it once was, when it took into its bosom unnumbered hordes of foreign invaders who came from the north-western passes into India" (op. cit., p. 643). But this is not all: "Only the person who comes in must conform to the rituals, usages and formulas of the sect he chooses. He must be made to fall into line with others of the same persuasion and not merely hang loose on the sect. For Hinduism, in spite of the freedom it allows in religious speculation, is a severely practical religion" (op. cit., p. 644). That might be the manifesto of a rather conservative body among ourselves at a training school for outgoing missionaries. It is somewhat surprising coming as it does from a proponent of freedom and one who believes that all religions are essentially one.

The Renaissance which Mr. Sarma is interpreting is that of philosophical or Vedantic Hinduism. Its earliest literary expression is to be found in the Upanishads, formless writings of very unequal length, which contain the most contradictory utterances. In these writings, however, there emerges the more and more dominant thought that there is but one reality in the universe, called Braham, the Absolute, which includes within itself all that is, which in fact IS all that is. This, of course, includes you and me and every creature in the universe. We are actually Braham now, as much so as we ever shall be, the only difficulty being that we do not realize it. To come to that realization is the great aim of the Vedantist, the realization that he is Brahman, that he is all there is of Brahman and that Brahman is all there is of himself, that is, there is already complete identity, only we must come to realize it. We are unfortunately subject to illusion, or Maya, a kind of cosmic force, the force of ignorance. Such is the system in brief which received its final form in the mind of the ablest of Indian philosophers, Sankara, who lived and taught in the tenth century of our era. It is this

philosophy which is the basis of the present renaissance, the philosophy which all the leaders profess. May I say that it is also the basic philosophy of many in the West, of Aldous Huxley, in "The Perennial Philosophy," and of Gerald Heard in a forthcoming book entitled "Vedanta for the Western World," written by him in conjunction with Aldous Huxley and John van Droten.

It is also the philosophy of Professor Radhakrishnan. Sarma devotes the last long section of his book to this exponent of the renaissance, the chief ornament and the leading interpreter of the new Hinduism. In somewhat extravagant language he eulogizes Professor Radhakrishnan in these words: "There seems to be no doubt that his name will go down into history as that of the greatest religious philosopher of modern times." It is not an easy undertaking to give a definite account of the various positions of this able and versatile leader in the newer Hinduism. We must remember that the Vedanta received its classic form many centuries ago and also that the impact of western culture and Christianity has been felt by the old philosophy, which has naturally sought to reinterpret itself in the new light.

What kind of being is Braham, the Absolute? The answer of classic Vedanta is that this being is attributeless, that no positive statement can be made about him. When any question is asked whose aim is to elicit some positive declaration, the answer is "Neti, Neti, not that, not that." When the question is asked, Is Brahman personal? the reply comes back at once, "Oh, no, not that, not that." Is Brahman evil? The ready response is of course in the negative, but if the question is changed, Is Brahman good? the same answer is forthcoming, "Not that, not that." Then it is explained that this being is far beyond the finite world and has no relation to the distinction between right and wrong. These belong to the human, finite realm and must be laid aside as having no relevance when it comes to the Absolute. No wonder that Albert Schweitzer in his little volume, "Christianity and the Religions of the World" (1923), should take Hinduism to task for not being essentially ethical. If ethical distinctions have no significance for the Absolute in the essence of his being we can realize how far removed even this renewed Hinduism is from one of the most insistent demands of the Old and New Testaments and the movements which have stemmed from that tradition. No Hindu can say that "the law of right and wrong is as much part and parcel of the structure of the universe as the law of gravitation," words used by A. E. Taylor in his recent volume, "Does God Exist?" Again, how can they think of the Absolute as being personal when the term itself, Brahman, is a neuter noun, and when they feel compelled to assert that he, or it, is beyond the category of personality.

But modern thought and Christianity have made a deep impress on Professor Radhakrishnan and the other exponents of philosophical Hinduism. They never call themselves pantheists and constantly speak of the divine as God just as if he were a personal being. But they are still Vedantists and cannot help it. To put it in Sarma's words, "We call it (the Absolute) nothing, because it is nothing which we created beings can conceive with our finite minds, not because it is nothing absolutely" (op. cit., p. 599). "Although the Absolute is beyond all conceptions of personality and impersonality, we attribute personality to it, as that is the highest category we know of. Personality of God is thus only a symbol. It represents what may be called a poetic view of the Absolute, not a scientific view. It represents God as he is to us, not what he is in him-

self" (Ibid).

Long before the days of Sankara but after the period of the Rigveda the belief in transmigration had taken firm hold on the Indian mind, not only that of the priests and the thinkers but of the masses of the common people. As Professor Das puts it, "This is the famous doctrine of transmigration on which all our philosophy of life is based" (Hinduism, p. 214). He also says, "This law of Karma, as a man sows so he reaps, is the keystone of the arch over which has been built up, through the course of ages, the vast edifice of Hinduism" (op. cit., p. 217). There are implications in this doctrine which make it hard for the man who has been influenced by the Christian West to accept. One is that if we in this incarnation are what we are because of what we were or have been in an infinitely long succession of lives, the nerve of moral endeavor is all but severed. It has actually worked out that way in countless lives and weighs heavily on the life of India today. Even friendly critics will admit that India lacks character. Has Karma anything to do with that?

The leaders of the modern renaissance realize this and are doing their best to curb the force of the old tradition. It is difficult if not impossible to break away completely from the accepted doctrine. "The doctrine of rebirth, says Radhakrishnan, is more reasonable than the denial of rebirth" (Ren, p. 605). "The objection to the theory of rebirth that we do not possess any memory may be necessary for a retributive theory of the universe, but not for moral continuity. Death may destroy memory of our deeds, but not their effect on us" (Ibid). But Sarma seeks to meet the objection more directly: "But as a matter of fact men ARE able in certain circumstances to remember their past lives. We not only read of such cases in our sacred books, but also hear of them in actual life even today" (Ibid). This comes perilously near the fantastic. It might have been wise to give some typical illustrations.

It is a question whether the substitution of the idea of continuity in place of retribution eases the tension appreciably, especially when we are talking about a moral universe. Ethical continuity should have a place for punishment as well as reward if it is to have any meaning at all. To go a step farther, however, the awkwardness of the law of Karma is evidenced by the movement away from its severity which is clearly stated. Freedom, some freedom at any rate, is so evidently a necessity to their thought that we find several most significant declarations. In commenting on the insistence of Justice Renade, an exceedingly enlightened Hindu of the middle nineteenth century, that Hindus must not acquiesce in the backward moral and social conditions everywhere prevalent, Sarma remarks, "We should not exaggerate the operations of the Law of Karma, but should always remember that the law can be controlled and even overcome by the properly trained will, especially when that will is made subservient to a higher will than ours" (op. cit., p. 156). This is almost a case of throwing out the baby with the bath. Radhakrishnan cautiously takes about the same stand, "Thus man is a free agent . . . But his freedom is to a certain extent limited by his connection with his own past . . . It is continuous growth through deaths and births" (op. cit., p. 604).

One might expect, with such an assertion, limited as it is, of human freedom, that a place might be found for repentance and forgiveness, not to mention some form of atonement or reconciliation, but they are conspicuous by their absence. In fact, man is essentially divine and in no need of regeneration. His salvation is not so much one of moral renewal as attainment of eman-

cipation of mind through a changed attitude and meditation. The concession to freedom has not proceeded far enough for a genuine sense of sinfulness to develop—the old law of Karma still holds fast with a deathlike grip. The prospect for the individual in the far-off future is not cheering, to say the least. With all the assertions of the dignity of human personality, its final state is not that of conscious existence but of absorption in the Divine. That is what salvation means. "Though liberation means the attainment of the universality of spirit, the liberated self has to retain its individuality as the center of action as long as the cosmic process lasts. At last when all are saved, the cosmic process comes to an end, and the Absolute will probably actualize some other of the many possibilities inherent in itself" (op. cit., p. 608f).

I cannot but refer in passing to a reference to a very famous Christian woman of a generation ago, the Pandita Ramabai, who was a Brahmin, was left a girl widow and who devoted her life to a mission of service to that multitude of unfortunates. This reference provides an illustration of the application of the Law of Karma made by Mr. Sarma, who says, "We are led to conclude that Pandita Ramabai, like Mrs. Besant, was one of those rare souls who, born in one religion and driven by their past Karma into another, felt instinctively at home there and find in it perfect satisfaction for all spiritual needs as well as full scope for the play of their ambitious personalities" (op. cit., p. 134). I wish Mr. Sarma had not felt it necessary to give that ungenerous "dig" at what he looks upon as unworthy ambition, in an otherwise perfectly orthodox statement of the working of the Law of Karma.

We have time for only one other of the aspects of Hinduism and its Renaissance. Is Hinduism, as seen by the philosophical leaders of today, a pessimistic religion or is it not? There can be little doubt that orthodox Hinduism of the past, that which has come down to us from the classic seers and teachers of ages long gone by, was very far from being optimistic. We have just been discussing rebirth, or transmigration and Karma. What is presented is an almost endless succession of lives of the individual soul. All the sorrow, pain, disappointment, loss, suffering, and frustration which is our lot came to us because of what we have been in an indefinitely long past. We can better our lot very little by what we may do in this existence, so the prospect ahead is as hopeless as our present miserable condition. Life is hardly worth living, our only hope is Moksa, or salvation, which is interpreted in terms of breaking the power of the law of Karma so that when we die we shall not be reborn again, but enter a state of Nirvana, an unconscious state of absorption in the Absolute. There is little hope, except for the few who by long meditation and discipline may be able in this life or the next or the next to realize their oneness with Brahman. But as for the nine hundred and ninety-nine ordinary people out of a thousand the only possibility is to mitigate the action of Karma so that they will have a little happier lot in another life. This is to be achieved by faithfulness in keeping caste regulations, and in the performance of all the offices of worship in the home and temple. But with all this, the mitigation which can be hoped for is so slight that life loses all its buoyance and does not seem worth living. Herein lies the pessimism of typical Hinduism.

How can any man with his eyes open to a teaching and a culture with an attitude almost the opposite of this continue to be in such bondage? Well, he cannot, and these modern Hindu cannot either. The famous Swami Vivekananda, who toured this country after the

World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, gives a very different color to Hinduism: "It is a religion of strength based on the inherent divinity of the human soul, and not a religion of weakness, teaching that man is a born sinner, that the nation wants. All weakness should be rejected as poison. Vedanta teaches strength" (op. cit., p. 282f). A number of the modern leaders have been going back to the Rigveda, the earliest of the Hindu scriptures, which came out of a time before the benumbing doctrine of rebirth and Karma were known, when optimism was in the air and when the individual man could look forward to a conscious immortality in company with the gods. That was the golden age and to at least some of the attitudes of that happy time Indians are likely to return. What brought about the sag in hope and optimism? Some would say that it was caused by the oppression which India has been compelled to experience under foreign governments, which means Islamic and British rulers. An oppressive climate and the natural calamities which are never far distant have had their part to play. But we wonder whether enough account has been taken of the very Law of Karma itself, which would seem to an onlooker to be responsible for much of the depressing atmosphere in which most Hindus live.

We have been compelled to limit this paper to the religious and philosophical aspects of the present renaissance. Even there the discussion has necessarily been confined to a few points which have seemed significant to an understanding of the movement. I feel sure, however, that Mr. Sarma's summary of what the Renaissance has accomplished will be useful to secure perspective in evaluating the situation. His words are, "To sum up, the present Renaissance has raised the status of India in the eyes of the world, it has reasserted the faith of Hinduism that all religions are true, it has enabled us to view Hinduism apart from its old mythological and ritualistic forms, it has initiated a large number of beneficient social reforms, it has made us pay more attention to life on earth and the well-being of society, it has reinterpreted Hinduism in the light of modern scientific thought, it has fostered a feeling of unity in Hindu society and it has strengthened the bonds between Hinduism and Buddhism" (op. cit.., p. 64f).

The results attained have induced a feeling of confidence. Speaking of Hinduism, Sarma declares, "We have no longer any fear that it might be overpowered by Christianity or Western civilization. It has outlived the Christian propaganda of modern times as it outlived the Muslim oppression of the middle ages and the Buddhist schism of ancient days. It is now able to meet any of these world religions on equal terms as their friend and ally in a common cause" (op. cit., p. 70).

In conclusion I feel that I might propose an analogy. The further I study this modern Renaissance the more I am forced to the conclusion that we are dealing with a tendency which is very old, an attitude with which Christianity has at least once before been compelled to deal. I refer to the Gnostic movement in the second Christian century. This has recently been re-emphasized by Dr. C. H. Dodd in his commentary (1947) on "The Johannine Epistles" in the Moffatt N. T. Commentary. He says, "At the beginning of the Christian era there was a movement or tendency within paganism towards a purer, more reasonable and more inward piety. Its representatives often patronized traditional cults, particularly those known as 'mysteries,' and they invented or developed others, but its underlying assumption was that all religions came to much the same thing, if they are rationally understood. Its exponents offered ways of rationalizing most of the

current rituals and myths. The movement covered a wide range. Near the bottom of the scale it was little more than a way of making superstition respectable for the minor intelligensia. Near the top, it took form in a high religion of mystical communion with the Divine ("The Johannine Epistles," p. xvi). To continue, "In general, we may recognize in it the traits of a type of religion which recurs in many periods; laying stress upon 'enlightenment'; usually individualistic and esoteric in temper; jealous of its 'spirituality' and distainful of the material world, and of history" (op. cit., p. xvii).

We are reminded by Dr. Dodd that these "believers in a generalized religion, expressing itself in various mythologies and cults, readily welcomed one more cult, one more mythology, which could be added to the ingredients of the theosophical hodge-podge. They prepared to adopt Christianity as they had already tried to adopt Judaism. On the other side, enthusiastic but ill-informed converts to Christianity were eager to reinterpret the faith 'in terms of modern thought,' as we say" (Ibid). Dr. Dodd speaks of "the best type of Gnostic piety (in the widest sense), with its intense spirituality and its claim to mystical experience — above all to that 'knowldege' of God which is the way of salvation and deification" (op. cit., p. xix). To quote once again and finally, "Augustine, himself trained in a philosophy which was the fine flowering of the Hellenistic spirit, puts his finger upon the point when he said that most of the statements made in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel were already familiar to him from the writings of the Neo-Platonists; but one thing he could not find there: 'The word was made flesh' ("Confessions," vii, 9). It was there that the issue was joined between two rival philosophies of life" (op. cit., p. xii).

These quotations, written with a second and not a twentieth century situation in mind and with no thought of the modern Hindu Renaissance, are almost uncanny in their appositeness and relevancy. In each case noble men exhibit a beautiful spirit and devote themselves unselfishly and heroically to the common good. The present leaders of the renaissance have to their credit a series of reforms, either accomplished or in process, which merit the approval of all forward-looking men. So far as spirituality is concerned they often put to shame the meager attainments of men and women in the Christian ranks. And yet when all is said the future would not seem to be theirs. It would seem to some of us that only another faith, Christianity, can give the answer to the deep questioning of the human soul which these devoted men feel. They give ample evidence, as we have seen, that the old Hinduism does not satisfy, so they give themselves to reinterpretation, influenced by the impact of a culture and a religion which they feel bound not to accept but which are exerting their influence more and more at each stage in the Renaissance.

The crucial point is where it was in the first and second centuries, at the time of the threatened disintegration of Christianity and its ultimate disappearance under the influence of an all-absorbing Gnosticism with its strong Docetic tinge. We find the author of I John using the most vigorous language to warn his readers of the danger. He says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God: for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God" (I John 4:1-3a, R.S.V.). That is the crucial question. Are we able to say that we know God as he is,

even though we cannot know everything about him? The modern Vedanta Hindu says NO; we cannot know him as he is in the very essence of his character and nature. The Christian says YES; he has made himself manifest in a living human being, Jesus Christ, in whom we see the lineaments of a God of holiness and love, of God as he is essentially. This can only be accepted as a venture of faith, but it is the vital nerve center of the Christian religion.