

BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

GANGA PRASAD UPADHYAYA

**PUBLISHED BY
TRACT VIBHAG
ARYA SAMAJ CHOWK
ALLAHABAD-3**

**FIFTH REVISED EDITION
1979**

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BY

GANGA PRASAD UPADHYAYA, M.A.

Published by
Tract Vibhag
Arya Samaj Chowk, Allahabad-3
(INDIA)

Fifth Revised Edition { Price 30 paisa
1979 { Rs. 25/- Per 100

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It is often said that all religions have a germ of truth. And surely they have. For the Vedas say:

सत्येनोत्तमिताभूमिः

(Rig. X. 85, 1.)

that the world rests upon truth. And if there is any religion absolutely devoid of truth, it has no chance of living even for a moment. Even very frauds and untruths, that appear to be engaging the attention of the world for long periods have some foundation, however slender it may be, of truth, an alloyless truth.

Similarly, it is said that the founders of all religions were great. And surely they were, otherwise it would have been impossible for them to command such a big following.

Then, shall we embrace all religions and follow all these teachers? I shall congratulate a man who does so, as he has achieved a thing which appears to me impracticable. All religions are based upon truth. True. All the world teachers were great. True. But neither are all religions *equally* true, nor all teachers *equally* great. This is the truth, which is often ignored and the result is that the efforts of those who try to bring about conciliation between different warring religions have failed because they have overlooked the root cause of the disease.

One of those causes that help the constant widening of the gulf between different religions of the world, appears

to me the question of *mediation between man and God*. I shall make my meaning clear by concrete examples.

Take, as the first instance, Christianity. It is a religion that commands the largest number of followers. It sways the greatest influence over the world. An overwhelming majority of the sovereigns or rulers of the world are Christians. But what is Christianity? To follow Jesus Christ or to follow his instructions? Some perhaps may say that to follow the one is to follow the other. But the sameness alluded to is not clearly understandable.

From what we learn from the Bible or other sources Jesus Christ was one of the best souls. He tried to help the humanity as far as he could. He was ready to sacrifice not only his comforts but even his life. And in a period so intolerant and oppressive as Jesus', it was but natural that he should be persecuted in the way he was. 'This is all praiseworthy. Who will not be moved by his last words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"? Who will not be affected by his wonderfully intelligible parables? But this is certainly not Christianity. For the teachings and example of the Buddha were no less striking. Ask any Christian missionary what makes a man a true Christian. Not to live like Jesus. Not to be charitable like him. Unless you believe in the virginity of the mother Mary; unless you believe in the peculiar nature of the Divine sonship of Jesus; unless you believe in his resurrection on the third day after crucifixion; unless you believe that his death is an atonement for the sins that were committed, that are being committed, that shall be committed by the

sinful sons of the sinful Adam, the doors of heaven are shut against you. How can you please the father in heaven without pleasing His *only* son ? Take note of the emphasized, 'only' emphasized by the whole Christian world with all the force they can command. Thus instead of Jesus Christ's teaching being a help towards the attainment of God, the conventions of the custodians of Christianity have made his name stand between man and his Maker. It was reasonable to appreciate the teaching of Christ. But his mother's virginity is a subject which is neither capable of observation nor of demonstration and, therefore, not better than superstition. Why should one be condemned as heretic or non-believer if he does not see his way to conform to such a piece of superstition ? And how do you modify or undervalue the greatness of Jesus Christ if you do not believe in a particular method of his birth ? Do his teachings become any the less worthy if his birth is not enveloped in a mystery ? In what sense was Jesus, son of God ? In the sense in which we all are or in some other sense ? If the former, it adds nothing to the greatness of Jesus. If the latter, the mystery needs unravelling before it can be presented before rational beings for belief. Similarly, what on earth does this doctrine of resurrection mean ? Did Jesus Christ die on the cross, or in other words, did his soul leave his body ? If it did, how and why did it come back ? If not *i.e.*, if it was unconscious due to the wounds and if consciousness was revived, such cases though rare are not an impossibility and do not make Jesus Christ in any way superhuman.

Similarly, Jesus Christ's sacrificing his life as atonement for my sin or your sin can mean nothing but that his teachings are of vital importance for the welfare of humanity. If a man will love as Christ loved or if he will be charitable, as Christ was charitable, then he will be a beloved of God. But how can Jesus' blood be an atonement for the lives of those who went before him? His teachings if followed may save man^s from committing sins. That is one thing. But how can sins committed by a man now after so long a time be atoned for by a crucifixion which took place two thousand years ago? To make such pieces of superstition, however licensed they may be canons of a religion, is simply to raise an impenetrable wall between man and God. Christ never preached that people should remember him and forget God. Nor he claimed that he was God or God-incarnate. But the followers of Christ, in their zeal to cling to Christ, have forgotten or rather renounced God and set up Christ in place of God. "Mother of God", "Zounds" or God's wounds and various other pet phrases of the Christian world go a long way to show that the very Christ whose object of life was to establish the kingdom of God on the earth has dethroned God, and usurped the throne for himself. No matter how grand the teachings of Jesus Christ were, the custodians of Christianity attach much less significance to them than to those pieces of superstition which fail to appeal to a rationalistic mind.

Then take the case of Islam. It is good that the followers of this religion claim for it the name 'Islam' rather than 'Mohamedanism' because the latter savours 'man-worship.'

But there too you come across the same difficulty. If you go deep into the doctrines of Islam or study the lives and beliefs of the "faithful" one thing will be quite clear, and that is, that God and everything pertaining to God stand dwarfed by the personality of Mohammad. He is a co-sharer with God in the devotion of man. If one prays God without acknowledging the mediation of Mohammad he does a sin which is impossible to be forgiven and his prayers become fruitless. The word "Islam" means "faith" and the Moslems are "the faithful." But "faith" in what? Does it mean 'faith' in the abstract? Certainly not. A 'faith' in idolworship is not Islam, nor so many idolators "Moslems." Now does it mean faith in one God? Essentially not, otherwise every Christian, who claims for himself monotheism, would be as true a Moslem. Where is the difference between Christian monotheism and Mohammedan monotheism? I think that neither of the two believes in more than one God. But why are they two and not one? Simply because "Islam"—the Islam that the recognized Moslems claim for themselves—is much more than "the faith in one God". I may believe that God is one. I may believe that He is the only creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. I may believe that He is merciful, just and so on. But I cannot be a Moslem unless I believe that Mohammad was His prophet. Not only that. In the ordinary sense of the term, every sensible man would believe that Mohammad was a Prophet, which means that he was a world-teacher, just as hundreds of others were or can be. He deserves our praise and our gratitude too for contributing his mite towards bettering

his own people in the way he thought proper or possible. But this much belief is too meagre. The great fire that burns in the hell for heretics and unbelievers cannot excuse you if your faith has gone to that limit only. You must believe in the essential canons of Islam. What are they? Not only that God is one and one only, and that Mohammad was one of his prophets, but also that Mohammad is *His last prophet*. This means, in the terms of the Mohammedans, that the law given by God to Mohammad cancels all the laws that he sent to man before him and that no other prophet will come after Mohammad. Unless you believe that finality reached in him, you cannot be a Moslem and your faith not Islam. But this is not all. You must go much further. You must believe that even when Mohammad died long ago, it is through his recommendations only that you can be excused for your sins. A line often sung in the streets of India by Mohammedan vulgars represents the true mentality of the whole Islamic world and it is this :—

कहता था खुदा दिल में न घबराये मुहम्मद
बखशूंगा उसी को जिसको फरमायेगा मुहम्मद

God said : "O Mohammad, be not afraid in your heart. I shall forgive only him who is recommended by Mohammad." It is not the idea of masses only. It is an essential canon of Islam. It is the bed-rock on which the whole Islamic fabric stands. You may have belief in the God whom Mohammad himself worships. You may follow the moral instructions that Mohammad advised you to follow. What of that? If you are slow to believe in the all perfection of

Mohammad as the prophet of God, you are nowhere, a kafir, an unbeliever ?, one whose place is nowhere but in the great hell of burning fire and what not. Such a belief to my mind is nothing but to create a thick wall between God and man. As soon as you lay stress on such a point, you simply transfer the attention of man from God to the prophet, and the very purpose for which Mohammad might have exerted so much is foiled. The very foundation of Islam totters down. The whole magnificence of Mohammad's work disappears. Instead of unifying the world it begets schisms, and the result is not peace but hatred, not belief but unbelief, not godliness but ungodliness, not spirituality but just the opposite. Did Mohammad teach such a thing ? If he did, he loses all credit. If he did not, then the barrier set up by his followers is against his teachings and must go. In fact the Islam, as it is preached today, instead of bringing man nearer to God, puts him farther and farther. Mohammad might have meant otherwise. But who can say that as long as his followers emphasize a point which cannot appeal to reason ? To believe that Mohammad was a great teacher is one thing. To believe that he was a mediator between man and God is quite another. And it is the latter sense in which he is held by those who boast of calling themselves his followers. The very fact that Mohammad called his followers Moslems and not Mohammedans, shows that at heart he wished to keep himself aloof. But either in weaker moments he could not afford to forget himself, or his followers, in order to exploit his name, persuaded themselves to believe that his

mediation is necessary to attain God. In either case a great wrong has been done, which cannot be so easily set right. The love of power has very often actuated even learned persons to foster superstition. They think that if a particular wrong belief finds currency in masses, they can easily control them. The political exploitation goes on from day to day, and it is mostly this that has darkened the face of religion. Sometimes a religious reformer himself becomes a political leader, and then a very grave injustice is done. The actions of several leaders of Islam as well as of other religions are a glaring illustration of this fact. This has made man unjust. While one party hoists the name too high, another party withholds even due meed from him.

Take the case of Rama and Krishna. They were *Maha Purush* or great men. Their teachings are ennobling. Their examples are inspiring. But where do they stand in the religion of the Hindus? It is a libel to call them *great men*. For the Hindu, they were neither prophet nor sons of God, but God himself, His incarnation, His own selves. There is no question of mediatorship between man and God, as what other God do you seek when Rama and Krishna were themselves the God? The whole Hinduism is divided into several sects according to the particular incarnation they believe in. The devotion is transferred from God to his so called incarnation and mind wholly and safely absorbed in one thought cannot rise higher to that Being who is the creator of Rama Krishna also. Ordinarily it is alleged, that a crude mind not being able to realize the abstruse existence of God, finds in the perso-

nalities of Rama and Krishna a sort of ladder to the attainment of God Himself. That might surely have been true if Rama and Krishna were held as great teachers rather than God Himself. Two things are by no means the same. Though at one place they appear to meet, yet the lines go on diverging till there is a wide gulf. There is all the difference between a person being held as a teacher and the same person being held as God. Had we believed that Krishna was a great teacher, we should have looked to his teachings rather than to his personality. Personality too has some influence. But one great drawback is that every person is a mixture of weaknesses and strong points. Even the great teachers of the world had certain weaknesses or human limitations. Now it often occurs that the followers, according to their taste and insight cling to those attitudes which those teachers themselves would have liked their devotees to denounce. It is said for example that great Krishna used to dance with the damsels of Brindavan. How far this is true is a mystery. Whatever history we get of those times is so distorted that it is difficult to see the whole thing in a right perspective. This action of Krishna has been variously explained and philosophised. Some say that the dance had a spiritual significance. Others say that it is more than an allegory and conveys nothing like physical or actual dance. Whichever views be correct, but we are concerned with the practical effect it produces on the mass mind. There is no need of theorizing. Simply go to Mathura and its neighbouring places and see how the event is interpreted. There you will find no deeper meaning, no

allegorical sense. People indulging in grossest jubilations and still thinking that it is all devotion to Lord Krishna, While the instructions ascribed to Lord Krishna are not only ignored but totally unknown. Why all this ? Simply because people do not know how to take lesson from the examples of great personages, and they more follow them in their weak points than in their strong points. Masses are habituated to go too straight ahead of themselves and often the glittering successes or still more glittering sacrifices of great man make people blind against their failings. This leads to blind following and woful downfall of the great causes.

Essences are not found naked in nature. They are enveloped in gross things and for everybody it is not possible to extract those essences. People generally confound essences and their gross covers. Most often the latter are taken for the former and while the kernel is thrown away, people break their heads on the shell. This is being done everywhere and almost every day. What are religious wars due to ? In essence they may not differ much, and even if they differ, there are more chances of reconciliation. But who sees essence ? People are shell seekers. The essence lies buried deep, and they cannot reach it. What is not essence floats on the surface and gives birth to the most undesirable conditions of life.

Look at different religions of the world, great or small. They all claim that they are meant to help the man towards attaining God. They all claim that they are meant to teach the highest morality. They all claim that they are

meant to be conducive to worldly prosperity and ex-worldly bliss. If all these claims were genuine, there was little ground for conflict. Concentric circles never intersect. Similarly, those religions, whose sole aim is the attainment of God, should not come into clash with each other. If God were the only object in view, then certainly there should have been no clash whatever. In fact, God is the most obscure of objects. If we search the interiors of our brains we find very few signs of genuine God-seeking. We are rather exploiters of God's name. Religion is made a hand-maid to serve our baser ends. True religion should remove all obstacles that stand between man and God. But the barriers that are set up by different religions of the world, are almost impassable. The result is that instead of making the intrinsic or extrinsic life of mankind peaceful, religions have made it miserable. The realisation of the Fatherhood of God is a true step towards the realisation of the brotherhood of all men. But do the present religions help such realisation? If we mean by these religions, the influence which they shed upon masses, if we calculate from the beliefs and disbeliefs which the followers of different religions hold, if we count upon the actuals ritual which pass for religion, if we look at the religions quite apart from the philosophizations of the selected few, then we are utterly disappointed. There are so many distracting forces let loose by the custodians of these religions that wise people have grown sick of them. They have come to regard religion a humbug, rather, worse than a humbug. They have begun to look upon God as something paralled to or

rival of arch devil. This has shaken the belief in God. This has encouraged atheism and agnosticism. This has made life absolutely chaotic.

Then what is the remedy ? The first and by far the foremost thing is that all mediator-ship between man and God should be abolished. If God is the Father and we His sons, what is the necessity of any mediation between Him and His children ? If God loves us as our mother, or much more, let us go direct to his lap. Let us feel that we are with Him and He with us. All worships that are done through a third party, whether it be a man or any other object should go. God should appear to us as God and as none else. Let no man recognize any human being, historical or mythical, either God's substitute, or agent or deputy. It is this agent-ship or deputyship that is at the bottom of all troubles. This attaches conventional value to different personages, and leads to those vested interests, which are responsible for much bad blood. If there is a great teacher let him be so. Respect him. Honour him. Revere him. But do not follow him blindly. He may be right in most points. But the very limitations, that a man is subject to, make him liable to make mistakes. The husk should be carefully removed before the rice is worth eating. And if that great teacher shoots beyond limits, and claims for himself divinity in addition to teachership, remember the proverb that all is not gold that glitters. If he is a real teacher welcome him, but the true signs of a teacher ought to be present; that is, he should be disinterested and frank. He should come to us not a jot more than he is. He should

come to us as a brother, elder brother of course, with better experience and deeper insight. But he should not play with our ignorance.

The history of different religions says that the founders of these religions came to the world with miracles in their hands. They call them signs, signs to show that they are God-sent. They claim for themselves peculiar methods of birth and death. The appearance of certain stars is made so herald their advent. Earthquakes, storms or famines are alleged to come in their company. Strange prophecies are put into the mouths of prophets to tell the world that they are coming. Old books are unearthed and passages in them discovered to prove that they come in fulfilment of an old promise. How many *Mehdies* have appeared in Mohamedan countries from time to time, simply because in Mohemedan scriptures there is a vague hint that the *Mehdi* would appear at a certain time. How many boasters have appeared near Sambhal in the district of Moradabad with a pose that they are the promised *Nishkalank Avavar* or spotless incarnation of *Vishnu*, because there is a reference to such a promise in some Hindu scripture. Such persons play upon the credulity of masses and instead of improving their condition make them still more credulous. Superstition is a disease which dies very hard. It may be of a temporary value. But value is more or less illusory. In the end superstition always results in an evil. Unfortunately we find that most religions have thriven on the soil of superstition. They are thriven even now upon that very soil. Religious founders found superstition the shortest cut to their eminence. Masses gathered round

them to see their miracles. And strange devices were thought out to keep that following intact. Hundreds of tricks were played to prove the genuineness of those miracles. Books were tampered with, stories were manufactured with ingenuity worthy of a better cause. This was done to keep the world in thralldom. And the most abject thralldom it has proved. Never did tyrants bring so much misery to their slaves. Never did bayonets crush any part of humanity to such an extent. Of all thralldoms the most mischievous is the mental thralldom; the most vicious is one that takes the form of religion. All other thralldoms die out sooner. But the tenacity and longevity of religious thralldom are proverbially notorious and notoriously unfortunate. It is the ground of religion, therefore, that the fight for freedom should be first fought. Of all the tyrants the most formidable are those who claim divinity for themselves. They bring with them a sanction which is not possible for masses to shake off easily. They do not come to men as wise persons, whose wisdom might be judged and scrutinized. They come as God's messengers with fiats that admit of no scrutiny. They bring slavery to their followers and not wisdom. They inflict blind following and credulity. They crush reasoning and develop blind faith. In short, they make men sheep and not thinking beings. They make themselves shepherds rather than teachers. A real teacher will open the eyes of his disciples instead of closing them. He will care little for their faith in him. He will rather care for their faith in truth. The end in view is not that the teacher himself should be revered, but that truth should be revered. And the teacher is revered to the extent that

he brings about reverence for truth. This we do not find in religious leaders. They do not say, "Go to truth." or "Go to God." They say, "Come to us". तन मन धन गुमाई जी के अर्पण "Surrender your body, mind and wealth to the preceptor" is their demand. "Surrender your reasoning power, as it is defective" is the usual demand of the custodians of religions. And the followers, realizing their own weakness, forget to detect the ordinary fallacy that if human reasoning is really so defective that it cannot be relied upon in matters religious, then what guarantee is there that the preceptor, who himself is human, should be free from limitations ? Is it not parallel to the notorious trader's advertisement, "Why go elsewhere to be cheated ? Come in here !"

The only way of emancipating man is to abolish this divine deputyship or man-godship. May we pray in the words of the Ishopanishat :—

तत त्वं पूषन्न पावृणु सत्य धर्माय दृष्टये

○ God, remove this curtain that we may see the truth.

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