

## **ADVAITA AND TRINITY**

### **Reflections on the Vedantic and Christian Experience of God with Reference to Buddhist Non-Dualism\***

In the quest of God, we can no longer exclusively follow either the Western or the Eastern philosophical tradition alone. Human beings all over the world share one fate today, facing the results of a worldwide political, social, ecological and spiritual crisis. The understanding of the Human has changed due to the interpenetration of different cultures. And a changing experience of the Human always changes the understanding of God. These reflections want to ponder possibilities for an understanding of God in this situation of interpenetration and dialogue.

The topic is going to be approached in three steps. The second step again has three sections. First, I am going to reflect on the purpose and goal of this study. Second, I will try to show the meeting point between the Indian Advaitic Concept of reality and the Trinity. Thirdly, I will sum up some basic consequences. In the second section, we will first focus the attention on some aspects of the doctrine of God in Advaita Vedanta. Second, we will stress some important aspects of the mystery of the Trinity in Christian understanding, analysing the goal and the structure of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thirdly, the non-dualistic understanding of the Trinity will be discussed.

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## I. Purpose and Goal

### 1. *Reflection on the ongoing dialogue of Religions*

Both the World Council of Churches as well as the Vatican have stated that any semi-colonial practice of mission is completely out of place today. Thus, a new concept of finding and sharing the truth any religion finds in its own tradition has been worked out and tested successfully. It is based on the Socratic insight that truth can be found only in dialogue. If one partner wants to convince an other, he does well to draw forth the truth out of the other rather than force him to accept a concept which is strange to him.

Such a dialogue is going on today at different levels. There are conferences organized usually by different ecumenical organizations. Here the stress is on the good will of all the participants belonging to different religions and ideologies. One agrees that all share in the responsibility to work for peace, justice and the survival of mankind. But often there remains the doubt whether Christians and Buddhists e.g. have spoken really on the same thing when talking on God, spiritual fulfilment, etc.

The second level is a permanent living together of people coming from different religious backgrounds. This happens in Europe and America within the framework of an industrial society; this happens in new religious communities such as Zen-centres; this happens in India where people work in developmental and social programmes.

A third level is the theological reflection on this on-going dialogue and sharing. It is an experience of those living with different traditions, that a mutual stimulation can take place. In meeting the other, the understanding of our own tradition can be deepened and widened. This is a common phenomenon which need not be stressed for those who are already well aware of it. Applying it systematically, we might gain new criteria and means to interpret a new awareness rooted in Christian faith as well as Hindu and Buddhist faith.

A fourth level is the level of spiritual practice. Methods of meditation are coming from the East to the West and vice versa for a mutual enrichment, widening our consciousness. Spiritual practice is certainly the most important key to understand religion, but practice without reflection is blind. Only when we know what we already do, we can integrate this new practice into our already existing behaviour and knowledge. This integration might bear fruit. Thus, the relationship between practice and reflection is a dialectical one. Any contribution towards a Theology of Religions should be aware of this.

Under a Theology of Religions I understand the reflection on the on-going dialogue of religions. Keeping in mind what already has been said, we can go on to formulate, as a methodological principle, that it is not sufficient to gain criteria for this dialogue only from Christian sources, because we are not aiming at theological clarification for christians only, but we want to find the common responsibility for the future of mankind in mutual exchange with people of other religions—and asking for the notion of God means also reflecting on the possibility of a future for human beings. Thus, we need different traditions as a basis. The same holds true, of course, from a Hindu or Buddhist point of view.

In our case, we have to take into account both the Christian Trinitarian tradition and the non-dualistic (*advaita*) notion of Reality in Indian Advaita Vedanta as well as Buddhism. We should be able to relate them to each other. This causes methodological difficulties, and we are aware of it. But in the adventure of this undertaking, there is a great potentiality for a new awareness, for a new experience of what all these traditions have called "God", "The One", etc.

It is not the similarities in words or ideas which matter, because the specific historical background has to be always taken into consideration. It is rather the intentions and structures of thinking concerning the Trinity and the advaitic understanding of Reality in the East which are of importance.

Our basic hypothesis is that the Trinity and the Eastern *advaitic* notion of Reality interpret each other in this way,

that, for one thing, the universality of Christ can be understood more clearly, and, for another, the theological basis for a common struggle of religions towards peace, justice and spiritual fulfilment will be made manifest.

## 2. *Reflection on deeper Spiritual Experience*

Everywhere in the world, there is a strong evidence for a new awakening of spiritual experience. People feel the insufficiency of their life which is manipulated by impersonal structures and material consumption. They take refuge in interiority and use efficient methods for contemplation such as Yoga and Zen. But very seldom are they aware of the implications given with these spiritual practices. They still go on living their dualistic life and nourishing their Ego only in a more subtle way.

We have to learn and to understand what happens when we allow ourselves to step into a religious experience which claims to overcome dualism. Without this understanding, we hardly can integrate what we are thirsting for. Are these non-dualistic experiences in complete contradiction to our ways of thinking, or may they be a certain fulfilment of our own tradition? What are the implications for our *Weltanschauung* when we end up exclaiming: *aham brahmāsmi* (I am *brahman*) or when we pierce through the shell of our Ego into the Buddha-nature?

We need to reflect on what we do; we need to find clearness in our expression; we need to distinguish and should be in search of criteria for what is called truth. Theological reflection might help to integrate the ways of Eastern meditation into our rational culture of science and technology which cannot be simply rejected in a romantic withdrawal. It might enable us to create a deeper awareness for our human dignity and destination, in order to bring out a value-dimension for our technological age, an idea of wholeness as it were. Our reflection may help to conduct this quest with a sense of theological responsibility. Only then do we know what we do. And only then will our doings be blessed.

## II. Advaita and Trinity

Let me begin with some preliminary remarks. Reflection on God is always a reflection and can never be just a logical exercise without the previous process of a *Widerfahrnis* (encounter or experience). An experience of God is always prior to our notion of God, whatever the significance of both these terms "experience" and "God" may be. What is religious experience? What is the experience of God? These are key questions for our contemporary discussion on God, and I suppose we are not able to give a comprehensive and satisfying answer.

To approach the problem, we first have to make a distinction between experiences which can be objectified because they are independent from space, time and a specific person, and those experiences which can not be objectified because they are at least not independent from the experiencing person. The first kind of experiences may just be a special case and a kind of the latter. If so, the latter category could be considered as the more comprehensive one.

All religious experiences are non-objectifiable, but not all non-objectifiable experiences can be called religious experiences, at least not in our sense here. In quantum-physics, for instance, you find a similar interdependence between the experienced facts of the case and the experiencing person.

I am not able to give a definition of the term "spiritual or religious experience" because this would imply an objective approach. Experience determines itself as such by practice. This holds true for any Hindu as well as Buddhist understanding of experience. That is why I want to try a more poetic circumscription, using the Sanskrit-metaphor *anubhava*, which means "being according to", "being in tune with" or "being along." Getting into an experience is therefore an approach of involvement, becoming according to God in our case, getting in tune with Him. Thus, reflection presupposes re-sonance.

Enabling human beings to merge into this field of resonance—of God, the Universal law, the sound of silence or whatever it is called—is the point of all spiritual ways in many religions.

There is a tremendous variety of spiritual experiences in India. But the common ground of all Indian spirituality could be described with three characteristic marks:

1. They want to achieve inner independence from all things, feelings, thoughts, etc.
2. They develop a feeling for the presence of God in all things and all happenings.
3. There is a deep desire for a genuine comprehensive experience as it is to be prepared especially in various forms of Yoga.

This ground is the basis for reflection on God in India.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. *Advaita*

This spiritual experience is interpreted in different ways, and, indeed, it allows different theological interpretations. But it is always an overcoming of dualistic concepts and behaviour. Thus, dualisms like body-spirit, world-God, I-God, etc., merge into one holistic awareness which might be a new consciousness seen from the level of dualistic discriminations. Therefore paradoxical language is usually applied to speak about this inexpressible experience. Polar symbols such as Yin and Yang may point towards this wholeness, but they never express it really, because the expression is a result of dualism.

The Indian *advaitic* experience points towards the non-duality of the Self or nature of all beings (*ātman*) and the One Reality (*brahman*). The *brahman* is the all-comprehensive One (*ekam*), the One Reality. The experience of this inexpressible non-duality of Being corresponds with a state of consciousness that goes be-

1. The spiritual climate reflected in these characteristics is also the soil of Buddhism: "Because the Buddha emphasized the practical aspects of religious life, avoiding philosophical speculations and theories, as well as unfounded and fanciful beliefs in supernatural phenomena, he did not live in a spiritual vacuum in which nothing existed beyond very foundations of a metaphysical, non-Vedic tradition..." (Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*, Wheaton, III, 1978. p. 198).

yond the usually utilized capacity of mind, namely waking, dream and deep sleep. This state beyond has been called simply the fourth one or *turiya*. Yet, this expression might be misleading. It is not a level of consciousness among others, but the unified awareness or the integration of all possible states of consciousness. Similarly, in Zen, the experience of *satori* cannot be called an experience among other experiences, adding quantitatively something to our mental capacity; but it is precisely the "unifying awareness". Hence, this specific state of consciousness called *turiya* in the Vedantic tradition does not point to a reality beyond or outside the reality which we experience in our daily life, but it is this reality experienced in unified intensity, in integrating light as it were. This intuition is, as far as I can see, the basis for the famous Buddhist saying: *nirvāna is samsāra* (and vice versa).

In the same way, God cannot be conceived of in symbols or terms which indicate that he is different or separated from the reality we have objectifiable experience of in our daily life. But God is also not at all identical with this reality: it is precisely a relation of non-duality.

Thus, we can neither speak of God in terms of identity nor of duality, but we have to refer to the category of non-duality (*advaita*) that transcends both these terms. Strictly speaking, we cannot say anything about God at all, but we speak *out of God*, out of an awareness which makes us to be *according* to the One Reality, thus reflecting *anubhava*, our being in tune with God.

What is non-duality or *advaita*? It is a category which can be applied not only for objectifiable experiences, but also for those which are non-objectifiable, according to our previous discrimination. But, can this category be objectified and explained with the same clarity as we discriminate between identity and non-identity? Again, I do not know an unequivocal answer, but I suppose that only the dynamism of a oneness which is constituted by a polarity may serve as a means for explaining non-duality. I will come back later to this problem when the non-dualistic character of the Trinity will be explained, because the

symbol of the Trinity offers a deep insight into the nature of ontological non-dualism.

Similarly in Buddhism, *advaita* is a category going beyond identity and non-identity. Nagarjuna's philosophy is definitely not a no-reality doctrine,<sup>2</sup> but the denial of any affirmative discrimination which could describe reality. In Buddhism, too, *advaita* is an integrated awareness encompassing and transcending both identity and non-identity.

Concerning Advaita Vedanta, *brahman* is said to be self-sufficient, resting in itself, being without any change. Nothing can be said about it, because any predicate would imply discrimination: it would be this and *not* the opposite. Non-dualism cannot imply discrimination. *Brahman* does not have any attribute. This is obvious from Sankara's understanding of *adhyāropa*. Similarly Nagarjuna denies any predicate of Being. Concerning the One Reality, he cannot speak of an object with characteristics at all.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, there is a symbol, not describing but formulating the "nature" of *brahman*: *saccidānanda*.

*Sat* is Being, the imperishable. It is also truth, the unchangeable. It could be called "Being itself" (Tillich), if this term does not imply that modifications are possible which would have an effect on *brahman*.

*Cit* is pure consciousness or total awareness. It is the self-reflection of *Sat* in itself. *Brahman* is consciousness, it does not have it. Thus, *cit* is not a qualification on *sat*, but it is the self-expressing awareness of the One.

2. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, London, 1955, p. 160.

3. There is a similar discussion in the early Greek philosophy. For Zenon, movement cannot be thought. In Buddhism there is no possibility to attain truth neither by thinking nor not-thinking, because both are still on the level of contradictions. In getting beyond both thinking and not-thinking into *Non-Thinking* — as Nishitani Keiji calls it in Zen categories (talk with the author on December 16, 1981) — we reach the point where reality determines itself directly. This is precisely what Sankara has in mind when he describes the *brahman* beyond any *adhyāropa*, including the difference of substance and non-substance.



*Ānanda* is bliss. It is the ecstasy of Being, which again cannot be understood as qualification on *sat*, but the very nature of the One is bliss in self-awareness.

Therefore the expression *saccidānanda* does not modify *brahman*, it does not add anything to the One, but it speaks out the Being-Awareness-Bliss, which the One Reality is. Yet, is there a certain dynamism implied, when we speak of pure consciousness or awareness? Is there not a certain polarity in the One, when it expresses itself in *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*? If so, how could this dynamism be understood without violating the basic principle, namely: One without a second (*ekam eva advitīyam*)?

Many schools of thinking have come out in India to solve this problem, but still there is no definite answer.

Let us go one step further. *Brahman* manifests itself by its creative power called *māyā*. *Māyā* is the measurable, the quantifiable. It is this which we can have a mathematical theory of. But it is also the principle of dynamism. It is the source of all phenomena.<sup>4</sup> Now, *māyā* is neither different from nor identical with *brahman*. Their relationship is undeterminable (*anirvacanīya*). Usually there is a classification of three stages of "manifestation" of the *brahman* through *māyā*:

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4. Lama Govinda stresses the importance of the concept of *māyā* from a Buddhist point of view, expressing that every form of life, including consciousness and mind, is conditioned: "To the unawakened, *māyā* is illusion, the cause of error and ignorance, because he tries to cling to its momentary forms, to stop their continuous flow, to possess them or to subordinate them to his narrow purposes. To the awakened one it is the creative power of the mind, the only reality we can speak of which we had better term "actuality", because only what "acts" is real in the sense that it affects us and can be experienced. A reality that is not experiential is only an abstract concept, a product of our speculation, a hypothesis, i.e. something without influence or relationship to our actual life. As such it has as little place in Buddhism as the Absolute, which haunts Western philosophy as a substitute for the concept of God, after having been deprived of all positive content and experiential value or relationship." (*op. cit.*, pp. 34f). In this regard, it is very misleading to translate the Vedāntic *brahman* as the "Absolute".

1. *īśvara* the Lord and the creator, a personal God
2. *hiranyagarbha*, the Golden Seed, the First Born of all creation
3. *viraj*, the development of the world in all its material as well as spiritual phenomena.

The complexity of these "stages" is called *saguṇa brahman* the qualified *brahman*, in contrary to the unqualified, the *nirguṇa brahman*. Actually, the *saguṇa* is not a real manifestation which would have an ontological status. It is just an appearance in our consciousness caused by *Māyā*. Hence, the reality of the world is not of ontological but of noetical nature. *Māyā*, which is said to be neither real nor unreal, creates a reflection in our consciousness which lets appear the unchangeable *brahman* as the changing and qualified *saguṇa brahman*.

Thus, in one way, dualism is avoided: you have only the *brahman*-reality. But the price to pay for this theory is that the world of appearances does not have an ontological status and significance.

What really is *māyā*? What is *māyā*'s relationship with *brahman*? The term *anirvacanīya* does not give a sufficient answer to this crucial problem. And further: in denying an ontological status of the *saguṇa brahman*, we avoid ontological dualism indeed, but we create a certain kind of existential dualism, because the historical reality, the world of change, mutation and development is excluded from the movement towards salvation. The non-dualistic experience is achieved by reductionism, not by integration. In this way, God cannot stand for the very symbol of integration of reality. But precisely this would be the demand in the context of a non-dualistic approach.<sup>5</sup>

One most interesting aspect of the Vedāntic philosophy is that the One Reality, the power which manifests itself as it were existentially but not ontologically, the *brahman*, is energy (*prāṇa*). *Prāṇa* is the one basic energy, the only reality, the power which

5. Cf. V. Brück, *Advaita and Trinität. Indische und christliche Gotteserfahrung im Dialog der Religionen* (unpublished Habil-Thesis, University of Rostock, 1980), especially pp. 336ff.

manifests itself truly in very different forms and many kinds of energetic expressions. *Prana* is in everything, but it is at the same time beyond any specific expression. *Prana* is the life-source of the universe. I wonder whether this concept could not express the unity of Being, the wholeness which is beyond any particular experience of human beings, but emerging in any experience. Thus, it is a theophanic event.

The *advaitic* experience is not an experience of a "something". It is the awakening to an awareness of Reality; God is always there, and to experience him (*anubhava* = being according to) means that the cover from the reality is removed. The dualistic mind disappears; the feeling of being a separated Ego vanishes, so that the true nature of reality, the *saccidānanda* reveals itself to us. It is a revelation of what is, not a special knowledge of what has not yet been. Thus, experience of God is not an additive knowledge about a higher reality, but is the awareness of the wholeness of reality. It is the awakening of a stage of consciousness which the discursive mind does not reflect.

This realization of God is a happening which the individual consciousness cannot achieve because any striving for the experience hinders the mind from stepping into total silence which is the basis for the non-dualistic break-through. But intuitive knowledge (*jñāna*) and total loving surrender of the Ego (*bhakti*) can prepare this jump. The stage of mind, which we usually connect with the term meditation, leads into the realization of the *atman/brahman* non-duality. It is a realization of interrelatedness of all Being. Nobody is simply an individuality. Hence, knowing the *atman*, you realize the ontological solidarity of all beings. This is what I call cosmic solidarity.

I want to close this paragraph with some questions which arise immediately :

1. What does it mean to realize *brahman* as the One Reality when we are faced with a world of diversity? What is the value of evolution and progress in history? What is the

relationship between time and the One? Or in other words: What is the ontological status of *māyā*?

2. What is the relationship between a holistic consciousness of meditative awareness and the rational consciousness which functions in distinguishing and setting up dualities?

I do not claim to be able to answer these questions, but in order to find ways for a solution, we may look at an other non-dualistic concept of Reality: the Trinity.

## 2. *Trinity*

Many Christians and even theologians are often not aware of the specific characteristics of the Christian understanding of God, which is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic but Trinitarian. The Trinity has been declared sometimes as a mythological relic which is not any more understandable and important today. This has deprived us of a great chance to bring our specific Christian contribution into the discussion on God today. I hope that, through dialogue with *advaitic* thinking in the East and the questions which we have become aware of precisely in this dialogue, we will be able to rediscover the Trinitarian experience of Reality and its non-dualistic character. This is my whole point. And hereby I envisage a deeper understanding of God which is integrative in the most comprehensive sense of the word.

I am going to draw the attention just on a few characteristic features of the Trinitarian understanding of God without being able to exhaust the well of this beautiful and rich tradition.

The early Church's interest in the Trinity was soteriological. The basic experience is doubtless God's incarnation in Christ and its purpose: God became man that man may become God. The vision of *theopoiēsis* is again and again the underlying power in Athanasius's thinking. And this holds true for all the discussions at that time. The divinisation, as the structure of history of salvation, leads towards the non-dualistic concept of Reality which has been expressed in the god-man-reality, revealed in a

unique way in Christ, but finally the goal of all creation (cf. 1 Co 15 : 20ff).

There is One Reality, which has a Trinitarian structure. This statement comprehends both God and world. In the christian tradition, this has been expressed in the attempt to find Trinitarian structures in our human experience corresponding to the Trinitarian nature of God. But I will try to explain that the Trinity transcends this double approach which could still express an hidden dualism.

To show one example of Trinitarian thinking, I want to go into Augustine. Augustine reflects on the unchangeable unity of the one absolute God and finds in it the basis on which he builds his doctrine of the Trinity in the line of the Cappadocian Fathers. God is the absolute simple being, the Being itself without any differences or parts. That is why he calls God *essentia*, viz. *summa essentia*, which he conceives in neo-platonic terms as pure consciousness. God is pure being and not at all involved in his actions, he does not change :

Ut sic intelligamus Deum, si possumus, quantum possumus :  
sine qualitate bonum, sine quantitate magnum, sine indigenta  
creatorem, sine loco ubique totum, sine tempore sempiternum,  
sine ulla mutatione mutabilia facientem, nihil patientem.

(*De Trin.* 5. 1. 2) <sup>6</sup>

Nothing shall limit the notion of God, and therefore no differentiation is possible. Augustine makes a distinction between the effects of the accidentless *essentia* inwards and outwards. This is the place for his doctrine of the Trinity. But since there is one God, he hastens to add that any work of the Trinity is a work of the whole Trinity :

opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt <sup>7</sup>

6. "Let us understand God, if possible, as far as possible, as good without quality, great without quantity, creator without any need, whole without space, eternal without time, making changing things without undergoing any change, in no way passively affected."

7. "The external activities of the Trinity are undivided."

When we attribute certain actions to certain persons of the Trinity, we follow only our limited capability of understanding. Such differentiation is meaningless for God.

It follows that :

1. the Trinity is one God, neither the Father is God, nor an abstract *essentia* beyond the Trinity
2. it is a differentiated unity, not because of different actions outwards, but because of inner relationships (*relationes*).

Inner relationships mean that it is Being in movement, that this Being is energy. Augustine tries to find analogies to show the nature of these intimate relationships. In this regard, the human soul and its experiences is most important to him :

Father	Son	Spirit
<i>esse</i> Being	<i>nosse</i> Cognition	<i>velle</i> Will (Love)
1. <i>aeternitas</i>	<i>veritas</i>	<i>voluntas-caritas</i> ( <i>beatitudo</i> )
2. <i>memoria</i>	<i>intelligentia</i>	<i>voluntas</i>
3. <i>mens</i>	<i>notitia</i>	<i>amor</i>
4. <i>amans</i>	<i>quod amatur</i>	<i>amor</i>

Explanation :

The eternity of the *Father*, who is Being itself, is seen in *memoria* as store of past experience. Spirit (*mens*) is intelligibility and as such the “where from” of all psychic life. In the same way, the Father is loving subject (*amans*) and thus the cause of inner divine relationship of love.

The *Son* is the self-reflection of Being and as such truth. This corresponds to *intelligentia* in the human mental process because it is the reflecting representation of all that happens, and the ability to think a notion (*notitia*), which makes possible our self-awareness. At the same time, the Son is the “object” of the Father’s love.

The *Spirit* is the intentional movement between Father and Son, the energetic field, which describes the activity of Father and Son in the realm of the human spirit. Thus, it is the primordial communion of love (*amor*) and thus the aim of God's activity, i. e. the bliss (*beatitudo*) of the self-sufficient inner divine life.

The climax of Augustine's theology is the vision of a new man who is not any more separated from God, and therefore, sees God eternally (*visio beatifica*). This becomes real in unification with Christ. The Word has become flesh, and therefore we can conceive of Christ and imitate Him. In imitating Christ, we will be transformed and transfigured into the beatific vision. God is the One, but, as dynamic unity, he draws us unto Himself. Here again we see the soteriological point. The purpose of this ongoing process is the eschatological fulfilment, in which human beings will share in the inner trinitarian life and love, namely in the beatific vision:

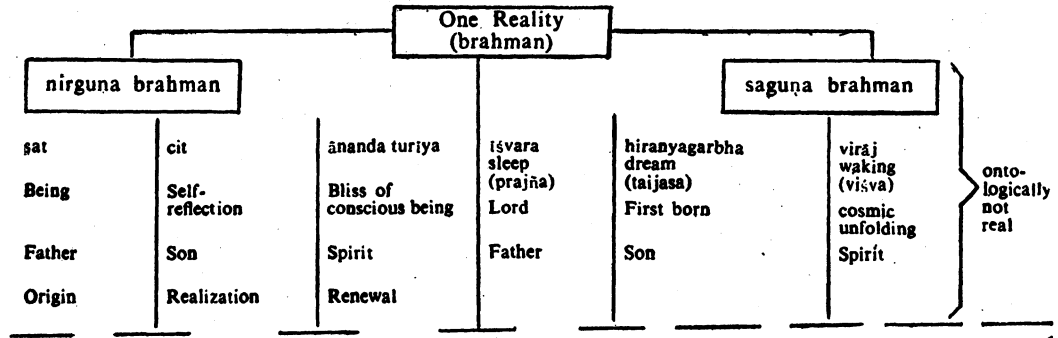
Christus unus amans seipsum.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. *Non-dualistic Interpretation of the Trinity*

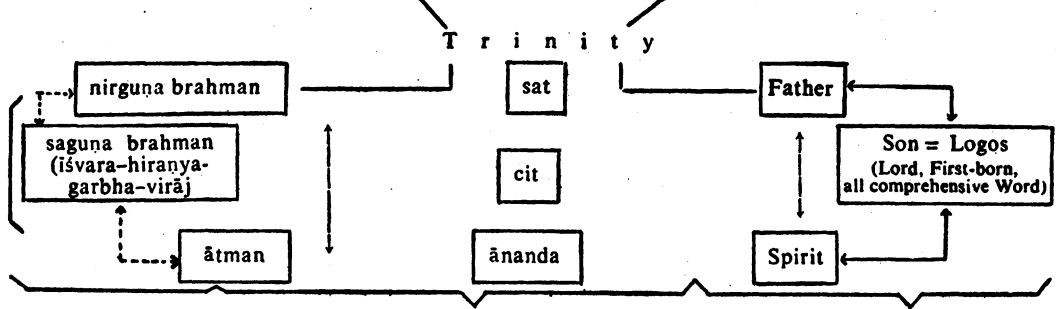
To show the structural similarity and difference between Advaita Vedanta and the Christian understanding of the Trinity, in expressing the *advaitic* intuition, I will put both these doctrines together in the graph found on the following page:

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8. "The one Christ loving himself."



[immanent-----economical]



(no realization in history)	Self-realization of God as Realization in the Self or the Spirit Unity in Pluriformity = Wholeness	Human nature of Christ (incarnation) Realization in history and Integration of the particular
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How far could the *advaitic* interpretation of the Trinity be more radically *advaitic* than the Indian non-dualism?

First we have to go back to Augustine. We can see how much his ideas are related to what we have called the *advaitic* experience. Augustine's concept of the One in three aspects, which are not attributes, but relational impulses somehow, in which any single aspect comprehends the whole, is parallel to the Indian *saccidānanda*:

sat	cit	ānanda
esse	nosse	velle

The *cit*-aspect of *brahman* incorporates the same point as Augustine's attempt to find analogies expressing his theological reflection on the Trinity: Consciousness is one and identical in itself in reflecting a pluriformity of contents.

But there are also important differences between Augustine and the Advaita Vedānta. Sankara for instance does not know of a concept of the soul as we find it in Augustine. Further, for Sankara, the *brahman* is a motionless being. His dynamic principle (*māyā*) cannot be fully integrated into this Absolute (a deficiency which is solved in Buddhism, as we have seen).<sup>9</sup>

For Augustine, the one God is a dynamical One, which is life in itself, but in such a way, that it does not suffer any change or accidental determination. The dynamic element is the essence of the Godhead, which manifests itself in mutually dependent relations. What Sankara separates—not completely—in order to think the notion of *brahman* purely, Augustine unites in order to think the fulness of God (*pūrna*), a fulness which is integrated and non-dual. Thus, the Trinitarian experience could possibly prepare the way for an even more radical non-dualistic concept than found in the classical Advaita Vedānta.

The Trinity has a similar function as the Indian Advaitic view: the mediation between absolute and relative, eternity and history, God's "*per se*" and "*pro nobis*". This can be seen in the necessary unity of economical and immanent Trinity and

9. Cf. Govinda, *op. cit.*, pp. 6f.

in the attempt to think at the same time God's unity as well as his self-differentiation.

The *advaitic* character of the One Reality has been recognized in recent philosophy especially by Hegel, who says, in his *Dialectical Logic*, that infinity is not a numerical quantity of the finite, but a quality which is realized in the finite. It is the same with his dialectics of Being and Nothing, which consists in permanent interpenetration of both these polarities in "Becoming".

And this is, as I understand, the meaning of saying, that God is in three Modes of Being (*Seinsweisen* according to K. Barth) or Relations, in which God realizes himself permanently. This process has been called an endless *perichōrēsis* (John of Damascus). Hence, these three Modes of Being presuppose the unity of God on the one hand, but, because this unity is nowhere unless in the dynamic process of the Trinity, the three Modes constitute the unity in an ungoing process: the history of the theo-cosmic unity, the creative dance of Being: *perichōrēsis*.

In India, we find a certain acosmism because *māyā* is not integrated into the One; its ontological status is not clear. A similar acosmism prevails in Christianity always, when the Trinity is not understood as this sacred dance of Being, as *perichōrēsis*, the non-dualistic mystery. This acosmism causes further dualities which we are suffering from in our world. It has such consequences as devaluation of history and of social concerns, a split into the spiritual and the material, which stands against the basic non-dualistic intuition.

The doctrine of the Trinity stresses that the world, i.e. all deeds of God in creation, salvation and new creation, is real, is a multiplicity, because God in Himself is differentiated. God Himself is the principle of differentiation (*māyā*). He is in this differentiation and remains the same God who is unchangeable, precisely because he is in this differentiation of Becoming.

And now we can try to answer the question raised above: The ontological status of *māyā* is clarified by the means of Trinitarian thinking: God is One, the *brahman*, being in *māyā* the One. *Māyā*, the principle of differentiation, is what it is,

being the expression of the "Location" of the being of the One God. Māyā is, as it were, the "how" of God, the limitless plenteousness, fulness and love. Therefore, God is to be seen in a Trinitarian structure. He is self-moving in *perichōrēsis*. His "what" is unity, namely the integration of His self-movement, which we experience as integration of our life, our world.

It is very interesting to compare this Trinitarian dynamism with Buddhism which is also a philosophy of Becoming, an extremely dynamic concept of reality. Nagārjuna<sup>10</sup> differentiates like Sankara between *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika*. The *pāramārthika*-view means that nothing can be affirmed, but all is dependent existence. This is expressed with the term *śūnya*, which again should not be mistaken as a negatively substantial terms. Emptiness has to be emptied, too, in order to establish perfect non-substantiality (*anitya*). Relationship is—like in Trinitarian thinking—the last category to mark that nothing is unconditioned.<sup>11</sup>

The Trinity is a non-substantial concept, it is the symbol of a dynamic event which integrates the on-going self-negation expressed in the *kenōsis*. God empties himself in self-negation. The central symbol of the cross is the pre-condition to understand the relations of the Father and of the Spirit to the Son. The Spirit as negation of negation or emptied emptiness in Buddhist terms, is precisely fulness because it is twice emptied of form. The Father does not remain a self-affirmative entity behind the Trinitarian process, but he is an integrated moment in the Trinitarian *dynamis*. Some Christian theologians felt the desire to establish a "Godhead" beyond the Trinitarian dynamism. This would be a substantialization which—interestingly enough—has always been rejected by the mainstream of Christian theology.

If the idea of *pratītyasamutpada* is understood as a theory of non-substantiality which is realized in the direct experience of a reality as such (*tathata*),<sup>12</sup> it could reflect the same basic intention as the Trinity: Reality is the dynamism of relationship.

10. G. C. Nayak, "The Mādhyamika attack on essentialism: A critical appraisal," in *Philosophy East and West* 29, 4 (Oct. 1979), pp. 477-490.

11. Govinda, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

12. Nayak, *op. cit.*, pp. 481f.

To experience the eternally same unity in the movement of the self-realization of God, in other words, to experience the faithfulness of God, is to realize the *advaitic* structure of the Trinity.

The non-dualistic concept of Reality, which seems to me a proper interpretation of the Trinity, effects all different possibilities of experience and its reflection. God, the wholeness of Reality, appears as the basic energy in its self-movement. He is the One in All. The following table will give some examples with, at the end, the Indian counterpart where significantly the aspect of realization in multiplicity is missing :

	FATHER	SON	SPIRIT	
Different possibilities of the experience of the One Reality	Origin of Being	Being, Realization	Return of Being, Renewal of the existing from the origin	
	beyond all transcendence	through all immanent transcendence	in all immanence	
	One Simplicity	Many Multiplicity	Unity of Multiplicity, Realization of the One in the Many, way back to the Father through the Son	
	Possibility	Reality	Making possible new reality, resp, realization of the possible	
	<i>Creatio ex nihilo</i>	<i>Creatio in participatione</i>	<i>actus participationis</i>	
	principles of the universe	principle of history	principle of individuality	
	Origin beyond time	eternal presence	presence of the origin in realization	
	"where from"	"in what"	"where to"	
	source	wisdom	life-love	
	freedom	tie	becoming free	
	undisposability	going into disposability	free disposal	
		<i>nirguṇa brahman</i>	—————	<i>ātman</i>
		<i>sat</i>	<i>cit</i>	<i>ānanda</i>

←—————→  
Aspects of the Trinitarian self-movement of God

### III. Some Basic Consequences

One of the main problems of our reflection on God is that we cannot any more express the "being" of God in substantial categories only. The development of thinking during the last few centuries has ended in an atheism which is precisely a denial of the unmoved *substantia* which had been the first metaphysical determination of God. Hegel's insistence on God as the *Subject* leads into a new awareness, into a new understanding of the relationship between God and man. And the post-Hegelian history expounds this subjectivity clearly enough. We may not have understood really what Hegel meant when he denominated God as the *Subject*. But the three consequences of our non-dualistic reflection, which I am going to mention now, seem to point at least into this direction.

#### 1. *Overcoming of Dualism*

Theoretically we are usually aware that a metaphysical dualism cannot help any more to explain Reality, be it in its natural, social, political, ecological or religious dimensions. But, in practice, it seems to be very difficult to overcome dualistic ways of behaviour, because often we are not enough aware of the sources of those dualistic structures. The newly emerging meditative consciousness all over the world might be a key for the solution of this dilemma.

In a non-dualistic Trinitarian understanding of the One Reality, we might be able to overcome the dualism of matter and spirit. This again has consequences. The philosophy and practice of Dialectical Materialism, for instance, is penetrated by its basic question concerning the primacy of matter or of spirit. F. Engels made it the corner-stone of the Marxist ideology. This question, however, is meaningless in our approach, because both matter and spirit are realizations of the One in the cosmic *perichōrēsis* of the Divine Reality. The concept of *prāṇa* as the one basic energy could be an auxiliary construction pointing towards the unity of reality which natural sciences seem to be in search for: *prāṇa* is in its manifestations, but it is neither of them.

Now we are touching one of the main problems of the approach I am discussing here. We participate in the *perichōrēsis* of Reality, we realize the non-dualistic wholeness in a supra-discursive meditative consciousness. This consciousness is passive awareness, a self-reflection of Being. It is the experience of God an objective as well as subjective sense of this genitive: it is the unity of the experience which we have and the experience which God "has" in His Trinitarian self-realization. This is *anubhava*, our part in the cosmic dance.

However we try to circumscribe this holistic awareness, it cannot be expressed in logical terms, because logic has its basis in the principle of contradiction.

Now the problem is: what is the relationship between meditative awareness and reason? If our whole argumentation is to make sense, it must be a non-dualistic relation. But how is this imaginable? And how could there be a reconciliation of distinguishing reason and integrating meditation? These questions are of the most urgent importance in our reflection on the possibilities of human consciousness in quest of God. I am not able to give a satisfying answer, of course, and, if an answer could be found, it would have to include all the aspects of human ambiguities in our today's fragile world. Unless we collectively venture to jump into holistic awareness and yet reconcile this with our ability to take reasonable decisions, we will fail the *kairos* of our situation.

An other aspect of the duality is the relationship between social and individual interests. When we realize that everybody is an *ātman* participating in the One as a realization of the self-unfolding divine mystery, we will realize an ontological solidarity. In realizing the Whole, we realize ourselves and vice versa. We can go through the individual differentiation and integrate it into a social harmony which is nothing but an expression of the non-duality in the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity. The contradiction between the individual and the social could be integrated into a process of personalization. The mature person would be the integrated individual, being aware of the interrelatedness of its

being. Much more has to be said at this point, and this is only to indicate a possible direction of our thinking.

## 2. *Personality of Reality*

Asking for the meaning of the person we also ask for the meaning of the personal God. There is much discussion between those who want to surrender themselves to a personal God and those who come out of an impersonal spiritual experience. Both these standpoints claim to be the "higher" one, and the fruitless discussion neither brings clarification nor leads to the real spiritual practice. Thus, any clarifying contribution in this discussion might be of importance.

What is the person? I cannot go into a detailed analysis here but would like to apply our non-dualistic conception just to sketch an outline at this point.

The person is the centre for integration. Being this centre, it is an energetic field in which all energies and experiences of the reality get their meaning and order. The person is the structuring principle of the one basic energy, *prana*.

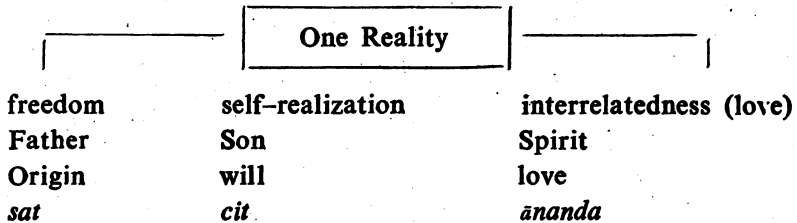
We can try to understand it by means of a simile. Take reality as a limitless amount of lines, points and segmental chains of such lines and points. By means of the unifying and ordering power of the personal, this unordered plenteousness turns into the structure of an ordered crystal. Or take an other analogy: Reality is like a net which hangs in central knots. Each person is such a knot.

Thus, there is personality from the most primitive forms of organization of matter until it reaches the integrated structure of the human brain. The whole reality is a manifestation of this principle of personality. The Trinity as the integrating wholeness of its self-movement is the most powerful expression of personality. Reality becomes more and more personalized as much as it participates and gets integrated in the Trinitarian process of *perichōrēsis*.

### 3. *Unity of Freedom and Love*

K. Barth's famous saying: God is the one who loves in freedom, expresses clearly the problem to combine freedom and love (involvement) together with the notion of God. Only if we are able to do so, shall we answer the soteriological problem. This means, in our non-dualistic approach, that, only when the One Reality is freedom and love, there is hope for fulfilment of the human destination.

Again, I will try to apply the Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* in order to demonstrate the non-dualistic nature of freedom and love:



If we compare this diagram with those given above, we can easily interpret it. It means that the freedom of the One Reality is its self-realization in love. If God is the continuity of freedom in realizing love, we can go on to formulate, that the Trinity is the continuity of freedom in its eternal self-realization in interrelatedness. This is the *perichōrētic unity* of Being. This is the Trinitarian dance, in which creation *is* salvation and salvation *is* creation. This is the process of continuous new creation in the Spirit.

*Madras*

*Michael von Brück*