

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE TRUE RELIGION

by

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(Spoken on Christmas Eve in 1974)

The Gospel According to John lays particular emphasis upon certain essentials of the principles of religion. It is not enough if we read the gospels as a story or as a biography of a saint or a sage. We have not only to read the implications of the majestic pronouncements in these gospels, but oftentimes we have also to read between the lines because these are enunciations of truths which are eternal, transcending time.

The necessity for the birth of God in man, as we generally call it - or, as I would say, the birth of heaven on Earth - arose on account of a defect that was perceived in the existing religion of those days, which was the religion of Jehovah, if we would like to call it so. If it had been a practicable and adequate religion, satisfying the needs of the soul of man, there would not have been a need for the birth of God in man, or the birth of Christ. There was a lacuna in the very concept of the principle of religion and the way to God. In the Old Testament, God remained a remote Father in the heavens, removed from the dust of the Earth, incapable of access, and religion became feeble and incapable of consoling the heart of the crying individual on Earth. God had to be born in man.

Oftentimes it is said that Christ is the son of God, and sometimes he is called the son of Man. Why is Christ called the son of Man? Whose son is he? Generally in this context the word 'man' begins with a capital 'M' - son of Man, not man. And he is also known as the son of God. How can both these be possible? How to reconcile these two principles? How can one be the son of God and also the son of Man? Yet it is said that Christ was both. This means that in the religion of Christ, or the religion which the Christ came to teach mankind, there was a reconciliation of God and man, a coming together of heaven and Earth.

Unless and until God is born on the surface of the Earth, until God is born in man, in the hearts of people, there is no cognizance of the redeeming factor of religion. Even religious people felt that they had not been redeemed. So Christ came to redeem man through the principle of a strange religion that he taught - which the existing religion resented vehemently; and the consequences that followed are well known to everyone. The fact behind all these enigmas and difficulties in understanding true religion is that man can never conceive himself as anything other than man, however religious he may be in his outward conduct and even in his inner longings. To us, religion has always been an external affair - a church-going, a bell-ringing or a waving of lights, a reading of the gospels, an observance of a vigil, and so on - which tradition continues even till this day.

And we know the fate of religion today, towards the end of this twentieth century. We have been crying for God for ages and ages, and God has not come to us. We have been taking the name of religions hundreds and hundreds of times, and religion does not seem to be saving us. Religion itself seems to be at stake, and it is being threatened from all quarters of the world. How can this be possible? How to explain this mystery? If religion is the way to God, can it be threatened? And yet, it is being threatened.

This is because, as I mentioned to you, religion has no practical connection with human life, unfortunate though

this may appear to be. Whatever we speak and whatever actions we perform seem to be external to our inner nature. We are one thing within, and another thing outside. We may be deeply religious people, but that religion has nothing to do with our practical lives. This was the defect of that ancient religion that functioned before the birth of the son of Man in Bethlehem, and for the rectification of which this divine birth became necessary.

We celebrate Christmas, adore the Lord Jesus Christ as the baby, the divine child, the master of wisdom, the savior of mankind, the Protector of humanity, and so on. But we are miserable beings yet, a fact which cannot be gainsaid. We are sorrow-stricken, we are grieved at our hearts, and we are insecure in our lives. Unhappy to the core is each and every person in the world, for different reasons. Why should this be so? We have celebrations of the birth of Sri Krishna, called Krishna Janmashthami; we have Ramanavami, the birth of Sri Rama; we have the birth of the Bhagavad Gita. Tonight we are celebrating the birth of the Divine Child, Jesus the Christ. Are we going to be better persons tomorrow morning? Or are we going to continue to be the same persons that we were yesterday? If tomorrow morning we are the same persons that we were yesterday, Christmas has not done us any good. We have merely sat and sat and thought and thought and sung and sung, to no purpose – and Christ was not born on this Earth for no purpose.

It was a tremendous purpose of God that made his manifestation or incarnation necessary. Christ came for the sake of the Father in heaven, as he mentioned oftentimes. He said that he did not preach his law, but preached the law of the Father in Heaven. He came to the Earth to implant the law of God in this world, so that God may be a living being of the world and not merely a distant concept of a theoretical religion of academies or temples.

Now we are coming to brass tacks, practical affairs, hard truths staring at our faces, which are difficult to confront and more difficult to digest. What I would like to point out to you

all is that the observance of this holy occasion of the birth of the Divine Child is the observance of the fact of the incarnation of God in the world, which is not merely a historical fact, but is also a spiritual reality. It is an act of consciousness which God Himself is. We are likely to imagine the descent of God as something like the coming down of a rocket from distant space, or the landing of an airplane. Not so is the incarnation of God. It is the purpose of the Gospel of John, as I mentioned to you in the beginning, to emphasize this inner aspect of the religion of Christ.

But we should not take the word 'inner' to mean something that is different from the outer. Then again we are in a defective state of religious consciousness. Wherever we put our fingers, we are committing a mistake. Whether we are in the office, whether we are in the church or in the temple, whether we are performing this act or that act, we are prone to commit errors of different types. And it is this inclination to commit errors everywhere that has kept us bound to the Earth. This is the original sin, the metaphysical evil that is spoken of: the incapacity of the mind to conceive God in His true nature, and in His true relation to the Earth and to our bodily individualities.

To reiterate what has been said in these few minutes, the birth of Christ is the birth of God in our hearts, the birth of God in man or mankind or humanity as a whole, the resurgence of spirituality on the Earth plane, the coming down of the very heaven to the Earth on which we are seated, wherein God and man shake hands with each other.

There is a very beautiful terminology in the colophon of the Bhagavad Gita, if any of you are conversant with it, where each chapter of the Gita concludes by saying that this is the conversation between God and man – *Srikrishnarjuna samvada*. All great men think alike, and all great masters taught the same religion and the same gospel. Whether it is Christ or Buddha or Krishna, it makes no difference because they are only tongues of the same fire of religion, rays of the same sun of the Eternal. When this concept of religion rises

in our hearts, we can be said to be celebrating the true Christmas because if at all there was anything worthwhile in the life of Christ, it was spirituality; it was God-awareness. His life was saturated with God-being; and our adoration of the Christ, or the incarnation of God, is nothing but an attempt of our own souls to participate in that process of the divine incarnation. This is the soul's interpretation of the birth of the Divine Eternal through the religious consciousness which is the true Christianity: different from the religion of the church, but the religion of the Christ; different from the religion of the temple, but the religion of God and Krishna.

This, in my opinion, is the urgent need of the hour - an awakening of ourselves to the consciousness of the true religion, the lack of which has landed man in this mess and catastrophe which we see today. God bless us with this wisdom, with this awakening, with this light, so that we may become strong in our own selves and spiritually built up in our personality; that we may radiate this consciousness, this power and aura, this energy, around us; that mankind be blessed forever. God bless you.