

THE LIBERATION PHILOSOPHY OF RAM MOHAN ROY

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Introduction

Liberation Theology is a recent phenomenon, Latin American in origin, Christian in form, and therefore defined by its particular history, dogma and symbols. The condition which makes this phenomenon of Christian theology the subject of broader interest is that whereas the insight is Christian, that insight is based on an impulse that is human, involving all people everywhere, both Christians and non-Christians. The thesis of this essay is that by focusing on this common core of human experience, we can arrive at the lineaments of a global philosophy of liberation which includes, yet goes beyond, all confessional formulations. Both poles of particularity and universality must be combined for otherwise the universal remains an abstraction, an empty ideal, until it is concretised as an element in history. The Word must become flesh, and yet, St. John notwithstanding, the flesh is a veil which conceals the Word and therefore cannot be identified with the fulness of grace and truth. Hence the need for creative tension between both poles.

The statement on "The Search Toward Ecumenism in World Philosophy," which defines the collective endeavours of this group, substantiates the need we have expressed above. It says: "In a time in which all the world's cultures are closer together, we are forced more than ever to search for an ideology that will allow room for all. In all ages we have been aware of other cultures, but we have never been forced to interact with so many by virtue of their proximity. Any clash with the wrong culture has dire consequences if we come into conflict due to a failure to understand." (Italics supplied.)

These words remarkably recapitulate the life and times of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He was forced to interact chiefly with three major religions by virtue of their proximity--Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. With the establishment of the British Raj, the Indian giant had to be awakened from its medieval slumber and be reorganized and revitalised to meet the challenges of the new day. But what was to be the mode and method of this national renewal? Representatives of the three faiths competed with one another to impress their particular character upon the life of the nation. Sharp divisions had existed previously between the Hindus and Muslims who were their erstwhile rulers, but now the situation was exacerbated by the entry of a formidable power which, on the heels of its political conquest, was laying plans for India's cultural conquest. One alternative was to find a unifying principle that would "allow room for all." The pioneer in this field was Ram Mohan Roy. He developed his ideas of

ecumenicity, not in some ivory tower, but through lively encounters with all parties. His guiding vision was that of the liberation of India, a task to which all religions could contribute as long as they were not impeded by sectarian accretions but acted out of the energies of a pristine faith. Before we delineate the principle by which Roy endeavoured to bring about a working rapport between the contending cultures, we must first trace the steps that led to his discovery.

Roy: A Biographical Sketch

Roy has been described by Monier Williams as "the first earnest-minded investigator of the science of comparative religion that the world has produced." All his life was a preparation for this task. His birth in the province of Bengal in 1772 marked the end of the Moghul Empire. In every sector of Indian life, the glory that was India had vanished. "In Chinese phrase the signs were many that for the Mughuls in India the Mandate of Heaven was exhausted."¹

The British were 'Heaven's instrument in removing the mandate with the inauguration of Warren Hastings as Governor-General in 1774.

Roy grew up in an orthodox Brahmin family. His father was a Vaishnavite, and prior to marriage, his mother belonged to the rival sect of the Shaktas.

At age nine the lad was sent to Patna for Islamic studies in order to groom him for a career in the courts. The curriculum,

taught in Arabic and Persian, included studies of Euclid and Aristotle; logic; poetry; Sufi philosophy; doctrines of the Mutazilas (free thinkers); Islamic law and jurisprudence; and above all, the study of the Koran and the Prophet whose unequivocal monotheism began a revolution in his mind.

Three years later he was moved to Benares where he received a Sanskrit education. He studied the Smritis, the Puranas and Tantras, but was especially impressed by the wisdom of the Upanishads and of the Vedanta because they incorporated the use of reason.

The new knowledge of Islamic philosophy reinforced by the philosophy of the Vedanta completely alienated the budding scholar from the polytheistic religion represented by the idols on his family's altar. At age 16 he composed a manuscript questioning the validity of idol worship. Soon thereafter, he journeyed to Tibet where he spent two to three years in discussions with Buddhist monks.

By 1790-91 the young pilgrim returned to his ancestral home but religious differences forced him to start a life of his own in Calcutta. There he became a wealthy business man and also developed a scholarly reputation. In 1804, while in government service, Roy published the Tuhfat' ul Muhwahhiddin. In the following synopsis we clearly see the beginnings of his liberation philosophy which, at this stage, had a cutting edge of scepticism because of the prominence given to reason.

He starts by pleading for an objective study of religion based upon the premise that while true religion is rooted in

human nature, much that goes in the name of religion is merely the product of habit. To be able to make the distinction between nature and habit is admittedly difficult, but not to be avoided for that reason.

Most religious leaders, seeking their private glory, appeal to supernaturalism in order to support their invented dogmas. The masses are mesmerised and are piously deceived. Instead of relying upon their own moral sense, these sheep-like creatures abdicate their powers of discrimination in deference to the revelatory claims of their leaders. So blind is their faith that even atrocities against nature are proclaimed as virtuous. Imagining that faith in their leaders is the cause of salvation from their sins, they perpetrate all manner of heinous crimes that are destructive of society, and reinforce this faith by reading legendary accounts of their leaders, past and present. Tales of miraculous happenings legitimise the rule of authoritarianism which the people happily accept because it is believed that God somehow has a hand in it.

Should the voice of reason accidentally be heard, the true believer considers such doubt to be the voice of Satan and is quick to recant for fear of future punishment. The psychology of such belief is that people have been taught so thoroughly while children to accept and believe the folklores of their culture that, by the time they have matured, they are unable to perceive what is palpably nonsensical and absurd.

Superstitions are compounded when these specimens of conditioned behaviour develop pretensions of becoming Mujtahids

(religious expounders) and, in the bargain, concoct new fantasies to bolster their faith. Their converts, with bias drummed into their heads, use these fallacious arguments to support their imagined superiority.

Should someone imprudently question any article of faith, his co-religionists will either attack him with the spear of the tongue (slander) or with the tongue of the spear (kill him), depending on opportunities available.

The influence of the leaders upon their followers is so complete that they can incite them to kill or be killed, even out of devotion to inanimate objects.

To strengthen the articles of faith, the Mujtahids lay aside honesty and fairness and "invent passages in the form of reasonable arguments."

All religious creeds and injunctions have been invented in order to afford their protagonists the exercise of social control. Though there is no way to prove the truth concerning the existence of the soul and a future life, one may excuse belief in these articles of faith because of their beneficial effects upon society, namely, keeping the flock on the straight and narrow way. However, hundreds of useless privations have been added to these two doctrines so that they are presently the cause of more harm than good. This illustrates the genius of religious leaders to make life burdensome by legislating strictures for the sake of communal control.

Despite the power of social conditioning, there is an "innate faculty" in man which is capable of viewing all

religions rationally and justly, and discovering a common core, namely, belief in one God and the brotherhood of mankind.

On the other hand, religion as commonly practised is imperialistic and arrogant, promising reward in heaven to those who think alike, while threatening damnation to those who differ. But whereas such speculations belong to an unknown future, nature treats all men equally, regardless of religious beliefs.

Sectarian religion thrives on the propensity of people for the miraculous. Gaps in knowledge are filled by claims of divine interventions. The deity worshipped is a god of the gaps. But in nature there are no gaps; only the rule of unerring law. Everything in the world is causally connected, though some of the causes are not immediately apparent. Believers in miracles exploit the obscurity of these causes by substituting stories of divine activity.

Rational religion only accepts things as true which are consistent with the laws of nature and which can be personally verified.

When people act religiously, they think they must turn off their critical faculties and let faith take over. Miracles would cease if people should become as vigilant of the causal nexus in the spiritual world as they are in the work-a-day world.

Rational inquiry into religion is often dismissed on the grounds that faith, not reason, is the key to understanding religious mysteries. "How could a matter which has no proof and which is inconsistent with reason be received and admitted by

men of reason?"²

Sometimes it is argued that since God is omnipotent, all things are possible with him, including those things which may confound reason. "But this argument does not prove anything but probability of occurrences of such things while they have to prove real occurrences of miracles of their ancient leaders and the modern mujtahids."³

Inasmuch as the so called super-human powers of their ancient leaders cannot be verified by contemporary followers, much is made of the long line of witnesses who attest through history to the authenticity of what first took place. But tradition is only as good as its bearers. It should therefore come as no surprise that the bearers of tradition closest to us in history are the ones whose credentials are most often questioned. By the opposite token, those most revered are the ones farthest removed from us. But several traditions are in the business of invoking divine origins, and since their claims are often in mutual conflict, it follows that their reports are to be regarded with healthy scepticism.

The supernatural prowess of the prophets are figments of pious imagination. It is slightly incongruous that those who insist that with God all things are possible, make him precariously dependent upon intermediaries. And yet the instrument of God, for one group, is the instrument of the Devil for a counter group.

Attempts are made to explain the discrepancies in precepts of different religions on the analogy that just as rulers modify

the laws of their predecessors to do justice to present exigencies, so also, God establishes different religions in different places and causes one to be superseded by the other in keeping with his divine wisdom. The analogy does not hold because, whereas men are fallible and must therefore constantly revise their plans, God is infinite in wisdom and must therefore do what is best from the beginning.

Hindus consider they are being true to the precepts of God by worshipping idols. Muslims consider they are being true to God by waging war on all idolators. "Are these contradictory precepts or orders consistent with the wisdom and mercy of the great, generous and disinterested Creator, or are these the fabrications of the followers of religion?"⁴

Doctors of religion often quote a saying to make faith sound reasonable. They say, if faith be false, there is nothing lost for the believer; but if faith be true, everything is lost for the disbeliever. Thus they try to make religion into a good wager, but the reasoning is only convincing to those who are already persuaded. It cannot be admitted that even if a belief be false there is no harm in believing it. "Putting faith in the existence of such things which are remote from reason and repugnant to experience, is not in the power of a sensible man." Besides, "in case of having faith in those things, it may become the source of various mischiefs and troubles and immoral practices owing to gross ignorance and want of experience, i.e., bigotry, deceit, etc."⁵

Another argument that is popularised is that we should

obediently follow the faith of our fathers and renounce whatever deviates from it. The argument is fallacious because it is equally applicable to the founders of new religions which have subsequently attracted vast followings, as to "those who after receiving the doctrines of their leaders, have deviated from the old ways of their forefathers."⁶ History shows that shifting religious allegiances has been a common practice. "Besides the fact of God's endowing each individual of mankind with intellectual faculties and senses, implies that he should not, like other animals, follow the examples of his fellow brethren of his race, but should exercise his own intellectual power with the help of acquired knowledge, to discern good from bad, so that his valuable divine gift should not be left useless."⁷

Opponents of Deists discount their validity because they are in the minority. But this makes truth dependent on numbers, which is contradicted by the religious admonition that one must seek the truth against all odds. Going back to the beginnings, the major religions of today were the minor religions of yesterday.

In sum, mankind can be divided into four categories:

Firstly--A class of deceivers who in order to attract people to themselves, wilfully invent doctrines of creeds and faith and put the people to troubles and cause disunion amongst them.

Secondly--A class of deceived people, who, without inquiring into the fact, adhere to others.

Thirdly--A class of people who are deceivers and also

deceived; they are those who having themselves faith in the sayings of another induce others to adhere [sic.] to his doctrines.

Fourthly--Those who by the help of Almighty God are neither deceivers or deceived.⁸

The essay is brought to a close on a ethical note with a quotation from the Sufi philosopher Hafiz: "Be not after the injury of any being and do whatever you please. For in our way there is no sin except it (injuring others)."⁹

This summary of the Tuhfat makes it abundantly clear that quite early in his career Ram Mohan had decided that if religion is to justify itself as a liberating force in society, it must first liberate itself from itself, and the only way this can be accomplished is through fidelity to God-given reason. In the free-thinker's creed, belief in "One Being is the essence of religion, and universal morality is "the only true divine doctrine."

Roy's pursuit of the study of religion took him beyond Islam and the Vedanta to a study of Jainism and Mahayana Buddhism. He also acquainted himself with monotheistic movements which flourished in northern India between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as the Kabir-panthis, Nanak-panthis, Dadu-panthis and the Ramayat sects.

In Serampore, West Bengal, Roy met Baptist Christian missionaries whom he helped to establish schools and translate their scriptures. Christianity captured his imagination. With the mastery of Hebrew and Greek, he studied the Old Testament,

the Talmud, the Targums, and the New Testament. In addition to biblical and rabbinical studies, he investigated the history of dogma, especially the intricacies of the Arian, Sabellian and Pelagian controversies.

Christianity was but one component of Western civilization which now enthralled him. His reading of Western literature served to broaden his rationalistic approach to questions of religion and philosophy. His other great love, politics, concretely expressed his humanistic passion for liberation, especially as it was given heroic form in the First French Revolution and in the War of American Independence. In the narrative of Brajendra Nath Seal:

[Roy] cultivated the literature of empirical philosophy and scientific thought from Bacon to Locke and Newton, as well as the propaganda of free thinking and 'Illumination' in Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Volney, Tom Paine and others among the Coryphaei of Rationalism and Neo-theo-philanthropy. He drank eagerly from the fountain-head of modern freedom and was inspired by the spirit of the Age of Illumination. These studies only confirmed him in his rejection of miracle, dogma and ritual, to which he had already been led by his own reflections on the religions and scriptures of his country as well as by the teachings of the Mutazilas, the Sufis, and the Uttara Mimamsa. In fact, he became sceptically minded as to the claims of all "Sastras" and all historical religions. But the first effects of

the heady wine gradually passed away. Deeper draughts of the Vedanta brought him back to a theistic view of the world and world-history."¹⁰

These "deeper draughts of the Vedanta" led him gradually to a methodological position in which he gave equal weight to reason and experience, insofar as the scriptures were the repositories of genuine experience. He explains his position:

I have often lamented that, in our general researches into theological truth , we are subjected to the conflict of many obstacles. When we look to the traditions of ancient nations, we often find them at variance with each other; and when, discouraged by this circumstance, we appeal to reason as a surer guide, we soon find how incompetent it is, alone, to conduct us to the object of our pursuit. We often find that, instead of facilitating our endeavours or clearing up our perplexities, it only serves to generate a universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend. The best method perhaps is, neither to give ourselves up exclusively to the guidance of one or the other; but by a proper use of the lights furnished by both, endeavour to improve our intellectual and moral faculties, relying on the goodness of the Almighty Power, which alone enables us to attain that which we earnestly and diligently seek for."¹¹

Roy's next task was to make the Hindu scriptures available

to the common people in their native tongues. The practical intent was that once the people who were immersed in polytheistic religion would discover pure faith in their own scriptures, revered but unknown, they would abandon their idolatry and thus become liberated from the popular religiosity which not only held them back spiritually, but hurt and hindered them morally , socially and politically. He declares this purpose of his literary activities in his Introduction to the Mundaka Upanishad:

During the intervals between my controversial engagements with idolaters as well as with advocates of idolatry, I translated ten Upanishads, of which the Vedanta or principal part of the Vedas consists...; I have now taken the opportunity of further leisure to publish a translation of the Mundaka-Upanishad. An attentive perusal of this as well as of the remaining books of the Vedanta will, I trust convince every unprejudiced mind, that they, with great consistency, inculcate the unity of God; instructing men at the same time, in the pure mode of adoring him in spirit. It will also appear evident that the Vedas, although they tolerate idolatry as the last provision for those who are totally incapable of raising their minds to the contemplation of the invisible God of nature, yet repeatedly urge the relinquishment of the rites of idol-worship, and the adoption of a purer system of religion, on the express ground that that the

observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude. These are left to be practised by such persons only as, notwithstanding the constant teaching of spiritual guides, cannot be brought to see perspicuously the majesty of God through the works of nature.

The public will, I hope, be assured that nothing but the natural inclination of the ignorant towards the worship of objects resembling their own nature, and to the external forms of rites palpable to their grosser senses, joined to the self-interested motives of their pretended guides, has rendered the generality of the Hindoo community (in defiance of their sacred books) devoted to idol-worship,--the source of prejudice and superstition and of the total destruction of moral principle, as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder, and human sacrifice. Should my labours prove in any degree the means of diminishing the extent of those evils, I shall ever deem myself most amply rewarded.¹²

Roy also translated the Upanishads in English for the benefit of the European community. They, too, needed to be liberated from false ideas of Hinduism. Their knowledge of this ancient faith was for the most part limited to popular scriptures which accommodated spirituality for the common man. Europeans assumed that the religion they witnessed in the streets was the be all and end all of Hinduism. Such rank heathenism armed the British with moral justification for their political philosophy of 'trusteeship.' The Lord God himself had

delivered these benighted creatures into their hands to bring them light. Thus, the Indian became the white man's burden.

Roy felt the haughty Englishmen needed to be freed from their moralism, and to this end he introduced them to the primary scriptures of the Hindus. He expresses the hope in his Preface to the Katha Upanishad that the intelligent reader will rise from a perusal of his English translation with the conviction "that the ancient Indians were not unacquainted with metaphysical subjects; that allegorical language or description was very frequently employed to represent the attributes of the Creator, which were sometimes designated as independent existences; and that, however suitable this method might be to the refined understandings of men of learning, it had the most mischievous effect when literature and philosophy decayed, producing all those absurdities and idolatrous notions which have checked, or rather destroyed, every mark of reason, and darkened every beam of understanding."¹³

Next, what were those philosophical notions which Roy derived from the Upanishads in respect to God, man and the world which constituted the a priori of his liberation movement?

The Vedanta, according to Roy, teaches that the Supreme Being is "the Soul of the universe, and bears the same relation to all material extensions that a human soul does to the individual body with which it is connected."¹⁴ The nature of the above relation is fully explicated in a key passage found in the Brahmanical Magazine.

First, on the relation of the world to God, Ram Mohan

interprets the Vedanta as teaching that the world is material and is the effect of maya

The term maya implies, primarily, the power of creation, and secondarily, its effect, which is the Universe. The Vedanta, by comparing the world with a misconceived notion of a snake, when a rope really exists, means that the world, like the supposed snake, has no independent existence, that it receives its existence from the Supreme Being. In like manner the Vedanta compares the world with a dream: as all the objects seen in a dream depend on the motion of the mind, so the existence of the world is dependent upon the being of God.¹⁵

This is to say that the world is truly an illusion. But due to ignorance, the jiva (self) perceives the world as a superimposition upon Brahman and thinks this mayic world is real. Thus, matter is opposed to intelligence (Chit) in a dualistic relationship. Only when the intuition of Oneness dawns does the jiva realize the world is only a dependent entity.

Secondly, on the relation of the soul to God, Ram Mohan states that according to the Vedanta:

God is mere spirit, whose particular influences being shed upon certain material objects are called souls in the same manner as the reflections of the sun are seen on water placed in various vessels. As these reflections of the sun seem to be moved by the motion of the water of these vessels without effecting any

motion in the sun, so souls, being, as it were, the reflections of the Supreme Spirit on matter, seem to be affected by the circumstances that influence matter, without God being affected by such circumstances. As some reflections are bright from the purity of the water on which they are cast, while others seem obscure owing to its foulness, so some souls are more pure from the purity of the matter with which they are connected, while others are dull owing to the dullness of matter. As the reflections of the sun, though without light proper to themselves, appear splendid from their connection with the illuminating sun, so the soul, though not true intellect, seems intellectual and acts as if it were a real spirit from its actual relation to the Universal Intellect: and as from the particular relations of the sun to the water placed in different pots, various reflections appear resembling the same sun in nature and differing from it in qualities; and again as these cease to appear on the removal of the water, so through the peculiar relation of various material objects to one Supreme Spirit numerous souls arise and seem as performing good and evil works, and also receiving their consequences; and as soon as that relation ceases, they, at that very minute cease to appear distinctly from their original.¹⁶

Here, too, separateness is an illusion and constitutes bondage. In truth, the individual atman is none other than the

universal Brahman, and it is the destiny of the soul to realize its oneness with God.

Synthetic Philosophy

The biographical sketch has shown that three major religions occupied Roy's intellectual landscape--Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. He concluded that the fundamental teachings of the Vedanta, the Koran and the Bible are: (1) the unity of God; (2) the worship of God in spirit and in truth; (3) the immortality of the soul; (4) and the moral life as the pure expression of the spiritual life. At the level of their roots, he saw the three traditions united in this universal faith; but in their historic development he sees each branch developing its historic individuality in response to its environment, and as a consequence, each religion emerging with certain strengths and weaknesses. Islam was singular for its strict monotheism and human equality. The forte of Christianity lay in the moral precepts of Jesus. Hinduism was strong in its unitive grasp of Reality.

Thus, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are universal at their roots, but particular in their fruits. There is one Theism which is individually and historically expressed as Hindu theism, Islamic theism and Christian theism. Therefore each religion is in full possession of the truth and not just a part of it. The partitive aspects apply to the surface features which are conditioned by time and place. Each religion should maintain

its historic character, at the same time proximity to other religious branches should be productive of community, both as a result of mutual understanding and as a result of being drawn toward each other through progressive realization of the one Spirit. Thus synthesis and not eclecticism was the dynamic principle of Roy's Universal religion. We have only made mention of the three major traditions because these constituted the historic partners he strove to unite within the theistic fraternity, but no tradition need be excluded as long as it affirmed belief in some universal principle that was ultimately real, had ultimate value, and was humanistically committed to the service of mankind. Buddhists and Jainas would therefore be included in the fraternity, as would any others who, though not taking the name of God, lived by Nature's law.¹⁷ This, then is Roy's answer to the problem posed in the Introduction, namely, that of finding the basis for a philosophy of liberation in some deep movement of the human spirit with which all persons could identify, and yet allowing room for pluralistic expressions of that singular impulse. In the creation of the Brahmo Samaj (Divine Society) Roy's unitive vision took historic form.

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

Roy and his associates founded the Brahmo Samaj on August 20, 1828, in Calcutta, to serve as the social vehicle for affirming the unity of all religions. The Trust Deed of the property, dated January 8, 1830, in part states that the

building and land is to be used for public meetings, open to "all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious, and devout manner."¹⁸ No image, statue, painting, portrait "or the likeness of anything" is to be admitted within the building; and neither is any sacrifice permitted, or the killing of any creature, "either for religious purposes or for food." No object used in worship which is sacred to any religious group "shall be reviled, or slightly or contemptuously spoken of, or alluded to, either in preaching, praying, or in the hymns, or other mode of worship." All aspects of worship should be such as have "a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds."

Thus, notwithstanding the Hindu form of the Brahmo Samaj, the Trust Deed clearly declares its universal charter. The Brahmo Samaj was not intended to become a new religion, but was to serve as a spiritual fraternity open to people of all traditions. Its fundamental aim was to establish the social solidarity of all religions, and thereby to bring them into closer communion, both in spirit and in thought. Seal describes the Samaj as "the centre of universal convergence." He states:

By the declaration in the Trust Deed, the Brahmo Samaj was to be only a meeting house and congregation for the worship of the one Universal God. The worshippers might

belong each to his own religious fold, Saivite or Vaishnavite, Smarta or Vedantist,--in theory, he might be Christian or Moslem, Jew or Jaina,--anybody could join in the prayers, and no one was expected to depart from his own religious tradition, Sampradaya, or church. The ruling idea was that a man might be Hindu, Moslem, Christian, Jew, Jaina, or Buddhist, and yet join in communion with brethren of other faiths in order that such common worship and prayer might strengthen their perception of the religious traditions to move, more surely and more truly, towards the centre of universal convergence.¹⁹

In affirming the unity of God, the Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj also affirmed the unity of man. It was on this assumption that mankind is one that Roy undertook the prodigious task of liberating his fellow men from all forms of evil and injustice.

ROY; PIONEER OF INDIAN LIBERATION

The term praxis is new within the lexicon of liberation theology. It denotes the unity of action and reflection and is, to that extent, a necessary antidote to the rationalistic bias bequeathed to modern man through Descartes. We are now discovering that we must do our thinking from the standpoint of action, and hence "the primacy of the practical," as philosopher John Macquarrie has it. Gustavo Gutierrez, Latin American theologian, defines theology as "critical reflection on praxis."

Roy certainly did not know the word, but his life and labours are the finest commentary on its meaning. For this pioneer of Indian liberation, theology was less the quest for right thinking (orthodoxy), as the fusion of thought and deed (orthopraxy). Genuine theology was not merely a cognitive or descriptive exercise, but a way of finding meaning through the act of giving bread to those who die of hunger. And in nineteenth-century India, there were so many hungers--religious moral, social, political, and educational.

Religious and Moral Reform.

During his campaign against idolatry, Ram Mohan states that though he was a Brahmin, "being thoroughly convinced of the lamentable errors" of his countrymen, he has been "stimulated to employ every means in my power to improve their minds, and lead them to the knowledge of a purer system of morality."²⁰

Roy's polemic was not merely theological but practical. It was not just a question of polytheism versus monotheism, but of degradation versus dignity. He wished to restore to his people the dignity of their fathers, now lost, and therefore they had become the objects of the white man's derision. He says:

Living constantly amongst Hindoos of different sects and professions, I have had ample opportunity of observing the superstitious puerilities into which they have been thrown by their self-interested guides, who, in defiance of the law as well as of common sense, have succeeded but too well in conducting them to the temple of idolatry; and while they hid from their view the

true substance of morality, have infused into their simple hearts a weak attachment to its mere shadow.

21

Idolatry was degrading because it was the "source of prejudice and superstition and the total destruction of moral principle, as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder, and human sacrifice."²² In the place of idol worship, Roy sought to return the people to the religion of their ancient scriptures which taught that "the sole regulator of the Universe is but one, who is omnipresent, far surpassing our powers of comprehension; above external sense; and whose worship is the chief duty of mankind and the sole cause of eternal beatitude; and that all that bear figure and appellations are inventions." ²³

In 1815 Ram Mohan organized some prominent members of Calcutta's elite families into the Atmiya Sabha (Friendly Society). The India Gazette (May 18, 1819) reported on its meetings:

We learn with great satisfaction that the meritorious exertions of Ram Mohun Roy have already produced a most powerful effect on the Hindoos in Calcutta and its vicinity. An intelligent Correspondent has assured us, that an assembly of the followers of the Vedantic doctrines took place.... The meeting was attended by some of the members of many of the families most eminent for wealth or learning amongst the Hindoo inhabitants....There is no question that the leaven of

religious reformation is now strongly fermenting, and that liberality of sentiment on general subjects, is making most rapid progress amongst the natives of all classes.

At the meeting in question, it is said, the absurdity of the prevailing rules respecting the intercourse of the several castes with each other, and of the restrictions on diet, etc., was freely discussed, and generally admitted--the necessity of an infant widow passing her life in a stage of celibacy--the practice of polygamy and of suffering widows to burn with the corpse of their husbands, were condemned,--as well as all the superstitious ceremonies in use amongst idolaters. Select passages from the Oppunishuds of the Veds, in support of the pure Theistical system of worship were read and explained; and hymns or songs were sung, expressive of the faith of the audience in the doctrines there taught.²⁴

Roy's religious and moral reforms were also fought on a second front--with the Baptist missionaries at Serampore who launched their attack through the pages of the Friend of India. The occasion was Roy's publication of The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness. Having made a close study of the Bible in its original sources, and from his knowledge of comparative religions, Roy reached the conclusion that the natural "law which teaches that man should do unto others as he would be done by, though partially taught "in every system of

religion, " is "principally inculcated by Christianity."²⁵ He therefore decided to excise this universal moral core of religion from its doctrinal context and to present it to his countrymen for their own edification. He explains his rationale for limiting himself to the moral teachings of Jesus. "I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding."²⁶

Ironically, the publication failed to produce "peace and happiness" but instead called forth a volley of theological thunder from Dr. Joshua Marshman, editor of the Friend. The brunt of the attack was that Roy had unscripturally separated the moral teachings of Jesus from "the grand design of the gospel." The reference was to the doctrines of Christ's atonement, his divinity, and miracles.

Roy responded through three Appeals to the Christian public in defence of the Precepts of Jesus. Against the charge that the moral sayings of Jesus, independent of dogmas, are insufficient for salvation, he retorts that the editor has limited his meaning of the word "moral" to civil matters, whereas the intended meaning is inclusive of religious conduct. In reply to the objection that he presumed to speak, independently of the Divine Teacher, Roy quotes the central teaching of Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great

commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets."²⁷ Against the argument that the Precepts are insufficient to ensure salvation which can only be obtained by belief in Christ's substitutionary death, Roy invokes the Parable of the Prodigal Son and questions the ethical veracity of the notion of vicarious sacrifice. He acknowledges the uniqueness of the person of Jesus but finds that an insufficient basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. He consents to the inspiration of the scriptures, but denies their inerrancy on the grounds of their historic character.

Roy's controversy with the Baptists should not suggest that he failed to win the support of other Christians. Certainly he enjoyed the full backing of the Unitarians, both in India and abroad in England and America; but he was also held in the highest esteem by trinitarian Christians such as the Church of England, and the Presbyterians who collaborated with him in his educational ventures.

On March 15, 1823, Roy published a tract entitled Humble Suggestions which was intended to counsel his countrymen against indulging in the same opprobrious abuse as was meted out to them by the Christians. Its contemporary significance lies in the ethical guidelines it supplies for co-existence in a religiously pluralistic society. We summarise its main features.

Those who profess Vedic faith in the unity of God and who live by the Golden Rule should be cordial towards "such of their own countrymen as maintain the same faith and practice, even

although they have not all studied the Vedas for themselves, but have professed a belief in God only through an acquaintance with their general design."²⁸ These include the followers of Guru Nanak, Dadu and Kabir who should be welcomed as brothers.

Among Europeans, one should not hesitate to fraternise with Unitarians "merely because they consider Jesus Christ as the Messenger of God and their Spiritual Teacher; for oneness in the object of worship and the sameness of religious practice should produce attachment between worshippers."²⁹

In respect to Protestant Trinitarians, "we should act towards them in the same manner as we act towards those of our countrymen who, without forming an external image, meditate upon Rama and other supposed incarnations, and believe in their unity."³⁰

In regard to Roman Catholics it is fitting that we treat them in the same manner as we treat those who believe Rama, etc., to be incarnations of God, and form external images of them. "For the religious principle of the two last-mentioned sects are one and the same with those of the two similar sects among Hindoos, although they are clothed in a different garb."³¹

When Protestants and Roman Catholics try to convert us who are believers in the one and true God, "even we should feel no resentment towards them, but rather compassion, on account of their blindness to the errors into which they themselves have fallen; since it is almost impossible, as everyday's experience teaches us, for men, when possessed of wealth and power, to

perceive their own defects."³²

Social Reform.

Roy's social reform was the practical side of his religious reform. Most noteworthy in this area were his efforts to alleviate the disabilities and sufferings incident upon the practice of caste and sexism.

In respect to caste, he first attacked the institution through his many publications. Through his translations of the Upanishads he demonstrates that these early Hindu scriptures which affirm the unity of God and the unity of man are void of such "exceptionable practices" as those of caste. The theme of human brotherhood, first introduced in the Tuhfat, is made prominent in his Precepts wherein he states:

This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God, who has equally subjected all living creatures, without distinctions of caste, rank or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain and death, has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature.³³

In addition to his publications, Roy sought to obliterate the distinctions of caste through equal education for children of all social groups, and also by promoting inter-caste marriage. The editor of the Modern Review comments that had Roy's espousal of the Shaivite form of marriage prevailed, "widow-marriage, inter-caste and inter-racial marriage, and

post-puberty marriage would all have been considered valid according to Hindu usage."³⁴

His crowning effort toward the emancipation of caste through the spiritual uplift of the people was the founding of the Brahmo Samaj. And finally, by crossing the forbidden waters for his journey to England, Roy showed that he could rise above the unreasonableness of caste restrictions which impeded intercourse with other members of the human family. True, he died in England wearing the sacred thread of the Brahmin, but the practical fact of the matter was that, bereft of Brahmanic status, Roy would have become socially immobile and would have incurred the loss of property rights.

Roy is best known in his social reform for his fight against the inhuman practice of sati. The term first referred to a widow who was deemed virtuous because she allowed herself to be burnt on the funeral pile of her husband; but later referred to the act of self-immolation itself.

The Raja's anti-sati activities were precipitated by the fiery death of his sister-in-law in 1812. He attacked the practice through literary works and newspaper publications which served to arouse unprecedented public arousal and discussion. As a result, he was sought by the British government to help them in their dilemma of wanting to end sati on humane grounds, and yet avoid the charge of violating the religious rights of the people. Roy convincingly demonstrated to Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, that the custom the government had pledged to protect in the name of religious liberty was "nowhere

enjoined as a duty; and that a life of piety and self-abnegation was considered more virtuous."³⁵ Roy's counsel prevailed. In 1829, Bentinck cut the Gordian knot by enacting Regulation XVII which legislated the abolition of sati.

Educational Reform.

Ram Mohan was a pioneer in the spread of western education which proved to be the most liberating catalyst in stimulating the Indian mind and shaping new attitudes towards all aspects of life. He was the first Indian to realise that in order for India to be delivered from medieval darkness and to take her place among the enlightened nations of the world, she needed the same knowledge that made Europe great. In his effort to promote western education in Bengal, he collaborated with the missionaries; with non-official groups; and with the government.

Roy welcomed the missionaries into the field of education because he sympathised with their philosophy of combining instruction in religion and morality with the school curriculum. He assisted the Baptists, the Unitarians and Presbyterians by donating land and assisting with funds. He was instrumental in getting the Presbyterian Board to send the eminent educator, Alexander Duff, to India, and met him upon his arrival. As historian Tara Chand sees it, the meeting of these two great minds was fraught with exciting possibilities:

The representative of the West, zealous for the conversion of the pagans of India through English education, met the outstanding Indian of the time, the harbinger of a new age, who believed with equal ardour

that the spread of modern knowledge was necessary to restore the vanished greatness of his motherland. Although the purpose of the two were poles apart--the first stood for the destruction of the values India had cherished during thousands of years, and the other desired to purify and perpetuate the ancient faith by removing the dust and corruption of the ages--the two agreed to co-operate for their immediate objective, namely, the advancement of Western learning.³⁶

Roy also co-operated with non-official groups such as public spirited Bengalees and broad-minded English philanthropists. In 1816-17 he built a school at Suripara, Calcutta, and in 1822 started the Anglo-Hindu School. The Calcutta Gazette (February 28, 1829) commended Roy's liberality in founding the latter institution with the following editorial:

As the founder of the institution, he takes an active interest in its proceedings; and we know that he is not more desirous of anything than of its success, as a means of effecting the moral and intellectual regeneration of the Hindus...³⁷

Roy also carried out his educational reforms in concert with the government. In the early years the British government did nothing by way of education. It is a myth that the British introduced English education to produce a cadre of clerks to keep the state machinery running. English education was introduced in India, not by the British government but in spite of it.

At long last, in 1823, the government decided to establish the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. The goal of this institution was to instruct upper class Hindu students in the literature and science of the West through the medium of Sanskrit; but as a first step, the curriculum was to be confined to the sacred literature of the Hindus taught in the Sanskrit language.

Roy opposed the above plans, siding with the Anglicists versus the Orientalists. The reformer demanded English as the medium of instruction in higher learning, and desired India's new educational system to boast a modern curriculum offering subjects such as science, technology, mathematics, Chemistry, Anatomy, and other useful knowledge. On December 11, 1823, he despatched a letter to Lord Amherst making known his protest against the establishment of the Sanskrit College. He argued that such an institution would resemble those that existed in Europe prior to the scientific era of Lord Bacon. Amherst refused to budge. But as the English Party gained strength in the Committee of Public Instruction, Roy's plea was finally heard with the help of Alexander Duff and Thomas Babington Macaulay, and on March 7, 1835, the Committee voted to earmark all funds for English education. Thus, it took twelve years of doing battle until the decisive action of a new Governor-General discomfited the policy of the Orientalist Party, and the Committee accepted the educational charter first laid down by Ram Mohan Roy.

Political Reform.

Roy was a pioneer of Indian freedom. Historians call him "

prophet of the new age." He drew a blue-print for political agitation along constitutional lines which, fifty years later, helped to bring to birth the Indian National Congress. His political views have a modern ring and "in essential features represent the high-water mark of Indian political thought of the nineteenth-century."³⁸

The Raja's political ideals were rooted in his religious view of man as "eternally free." This revelation of the Upanishads was at odds with the caste-ridden beliefs and practices of the prevailing religion of India. Political reform therefore went hand in hand with religious reform. The intimate connection between religion and politics is clear from the following letter:

The present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and sub-divisions among them, has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any different enterprise....It is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.³⁹

In spite of the degrading effects of centuries, Roy was a firm believer in the power of the people to rise again! In terms of their native capacities, the Indians were not one whit

inferior to the Europeans. He debunks the myth of "Asiatic effeminacy" and points out that almost all of the great personalities of antiquity were Asians.

The spiritual grounds for his conviction of racial equality, and indeed, the unity of the human race, was his belief in the essential oneness of the individual with the universal Brahman (Reality). Ignorance impedes this liberating consciousness of metaphysical Oneness, but perfectibility is a human birthright.

Traditionally, perfection was conceived as an individual enterprise involving renunciation, but Roy insisted that the spiritual cultivation of the individual can take place in and through society. The ascetical ideal of renunciation is maintained, but it is not renunciation of action, but renunciation in action. Thus, the quietism of the East is synthesised with the activism of the West, and the result is a liberation ethic of disinterested performance of duty. This ethical stance is identical with that of the Gita. In the spirit of the Gita, Roy emphasizes that in order to realise moksha (liberation), one must not only practise upasana (duties of meditation and worship), but nishkama karma (disinterested social duties).

In the performance of nishkama karma, the actor is completely free of utilitarian motives. Happy in the possession of his true Self, he works for the welfare of the world and thereby attains his own liberation.

Janaka, the philosopher-king, was a household example of self-realization through selfless activity. The Gita cites his

reputation and adds: "Thou shouldst do works also with a view to the maintenance of the world." The operative word used here is lokasamgraha or world-maintenance. It points to the fragile web of life of which we are all a part, and signifies that without social action on the part of the individual, there can be no welfare in the world.

Roy was the Janaka of the nineteenth-century. He elevated work for the world, especially political activity, to the realm of dharma (religion). He demonstrated that one does not have to become a yogi and retreat to the forest to achieve liberation. Work in the world is worship. The business of religion is to free people to become themselves and to help create the family of man on earth.

In addition to the ideal of nishkama karma, the practical ethics of the Raja incorporated the Golden Rule of the Bible which teaches that "man should do unto others as he would wish to be done by." This is not mere pragmatism; it is natural and spiritual law. As the common core of universal moral experience, "it is taught in every system of religion," and is "principally inculcated by Christianity."

Shifting from practical ethics to social polity, Roy held that it is the duty of civil administration to secure for the citizenry their natural rights and freedoms. These included the fundamental rights of life and property and the freedoms of speech, opinion, conscience, and association. Together they constituted "happiness", and therefore Roy more commonly referred to "happiness" as the goal of organized society.

Happiness comprised a balance between individual rights and the common good. Obviously, the formulation of such socio-political concepts as the "natural rights of man" were Western. Among Western social and political theorists, Bentham, in particular, had a formative influence upon Roy's liberalism and rational critique of social and political problems. But while the formulae were foreign, the spirit of the principles were akin to Hindu dharma, thus making it possible for Roy to insert "his humanitarian religion as a motive power for the organisation of social polity."⁴⁰

Thus Roy's liberation philosophy invested his sense of being Indian with a sense of dignity and worth. Indians deserved all the benefits of political freedom because they were children of God and were in no wise inferior to the British. The only area in which Europeans were superior to Indians was in respect to technological advancement and democratic institutions.⁴¹

To help bridge this gap, Roy welcomed the British presence. He believed that England had a cultural and humanitarian mission to perform in India. But while he speaks of the British in providential terms, he clearly saw both the light and dark sides of the British character and worked sedulously for the triumph of the one over the other. Ultimately, his vision was that of a free India. His co-worker, Rev. William Adam states:

He saw--a man of his acute mind and local knowledge could not but see--the selfish, cruel and almost insane errors of the English in governing India, but he also saw that their system of Government and policy had

redeeming qualities not to be found in the native governments. Without seeking to destroy, therefore, his object was to reform and improve the system of foreign government to which his native country had become subject; and without stimulating his countrymen to discontent or disaffection, his endeavour was by teaching them a pure religion and promoting among them an enlightened education to qualify them for the enjoyment of the more extensive civil and political franchise than they yet possessed...he joined with some noble-minded, far-seeing Englishmen who have expressed the opinion that the wisest and the most honourable course, the justest and most humane, which England can pursue towards India is by education and by a gradual development of the principle of civil and political liberty in the public institutions she establishes and sanctions, to prepare natives ultimately to take the government of their own country into their own hands. To co-operate in bringing about such a result was one of Ram Mohun's unceasing aims....^{41a}

In keeping with his ecumenism in world philosophy, freedom for Roy transcended national boundaries and reached out to oppressed people everywhere. Illustrations abound. He had visions of an independent India carrying the torch of freedom to all countries of Asia. When he received the news of the overthrow of the Spanish tyranny by its South American colonies, he celebrated the event with a banquet. He was impressed by the

American War of Independence and thought that the freedoms enjoyed in the United States were even greater than those of England. He was deeply anguished when he heard that the Neapolitans, after forcing a constitution from their despotic king, were thrown back into servitude by the intervention of Austrian troops. He was thrilled by the news of the establishment of constitutional government in Spain and gave a public dinner in the Town Hall to celebrate the event. He was pleased to hear of the victory of the liberal party in the Portugese Civil War. When he received the report of the famous "Three Days" (July 27-29, 1830) in connection with the French Revolution, "so great was his enthusiasm that he could think and talk of nothing else!" An outspoken advocate of Catholic emancipation, through his writings he publicly criticised the British for their autocratic treatment of the Irish Catholics. British politics engrossed him most of all.

Clearly, Ram Mohan Roy was "the first great modern International Ambassador."⁴² His internationalism proceeded from his philosophy that life is essentially one and that people of different nations are all consciously or unconsciously working towards the realization of that identity. This belief presupposed a living faith in the unity of ultimate Reality.

THE CHALLENGE OF ROY'S LIBERATION PHILOSOPHY TO CHRISTIANITY

The object of this essay has been to find "an ideology that

will allow room for all." We have made the case that the liberation philosophy of Ram Mohan Roy approximates this ideal. The challenge that it presents to Christianity is that of living inclusively in a pluralistic world.

The focus of Roy's challenge was in the area of Christology. His contribution was twofold: through critique and through reconstruction. We turn first to his critique.

Recapitulating the earlier narrative, Roy found in the Sermon on the Mount a rich repository of universal ethical teachings. With great enthusiasm, he proceeded to disseminate these teachings through his publication of the Precepts of Jesus. He had extracted these passages from other matters in the New Testament in the hope that "these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding."⁴³

The publication precipitated an avalanche of theological thunder from the Baptist Press on the grounds that by separating the ethical teachings from the doctrinal teachings of the New Testament, Roy was perverting "the grand design of the gospel" and was frustrating the grace of God in the salvation of men. Joshua Marshman dubbed the Precepts the product of a "heathen" who presumed to write "independently of the Divine Teacher."

Since the time of Roy, Indians have generally been inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, and with equal consistency they have been criticized by their Christian neighbours for injuring the truth of the gospel by separating faith from ethics. Even

Mahatama Gandhi has been criticized on this count.⁴⁴

It is clear that Christians from Roy's time to the present era are afraid that giving prominence to ethics will supplant their religion of redemption by a religion of meritocracy, and that whereas all other religions belong to the latter category, Christianity is unique by virtue of its message of the cross. The presence of moral teachings in the Bible have been understood as placed there more to show non-Christians what they cannot achieve, rather than as exhortations to perfection.

Roy's response to his critics is instructive. He first asks by what definition could one who has avowed belief in "One God" and in "the Precepts of Jesus," be called a "heathen"? He concedes that the editor (Joshua Marshman) cannot be accused of being the first Christian to employ this unchristian phrase since numerous Christian sects use it liberally to stigmatize one another. "Very different conduct is inculcated in the Precepts of Jesus to John, when complaining of one who performed cures in the name of Jesus, Yet refused to follow the Apostles:--he gave a rebuke, saying, 'he that is not against us is on our part.'"

Secondly against the objection that the moral sayings of Jesus, independent of dogmas are insufficient for salvation, Roy points out that Christians define the word "moral" in a reductive way in order to make room for their dogmas. Correctly, the word is religiously inclusive. In the equation of Jesus, duties toward man are tantamount to duties toward God. On the judgement day, the Son of Man shall say to the sheep: "Come, ye

blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came to me."

Then the righteous shall ask their Lord, when did they do all these thnigs for him, and he shall answer them saying: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." 45

In reply to the charge that it was presumption on his part, "independently of the Divine Teacher," to think himself qualified to know what sort of instruction is advantageous for the happiness of mankind, Roy pleads the support of Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."⁴⁶ Roy then adds his commentary.

The Saviour meant of course by the words Law and Prophets all of the commandments ordained by divine authority and the Religion revealed to the Prophets and observed by them, as is evident from Jesus' declaring those commandments to afford perfect means of acquiring eternal life, and directing men to follow them accordingly. Had any other doctrine been requisite to teach men the road to peace and happiness, Jesus could not have pronounced to the Lawyer, 'This do and

thou shalt live.' It was characteristic of the office of Christ to teach men, that forms and ceremonies were useless tokens of respect for God, compared with the essential proof of obedience and love towards him evidenced by practice of beneficence towards their fellow-creatures. The compiler [Roy], finding these commandments given as including all the revealed law, and the whole system of religion adopted by the Prophets and re-established and fulfilled by Jesus himself, as the means to acquire Peace and Happiness, was desirous of giving more full publicity in this country to them, and to the subsidiary moral doctrines that are introduced by the Saviour in detail.⁴⁷

On the question of the deity of Christ, Roy accepts Jesus' special status as Messiah, and acknowledges he possessed unique attributes and powers, but he contended that these were all derived from God. Jesus himself testified: "The Father is greater than I." Roy explains:

It would have been idle to have informed them of a truth, of which, as Jews, they would never have entertained the smallest question, that in his mere corporeal nature Jesus was inferior to his Maker; and that it must therefore have been his spiritual nature of which he here avowed the inferiority to that of God.⁴⁸

On the question of the atonement, Roy thinks that the notion of a substitutionary salvation is unethical and that Jesus'

mission in the world was not to save men by dying in their place, but offering them precepts, by obedience to which, through repentance and divine succour, they could receive peace and happiness.

Throughout his many debates, the historico-critical method guided his exegesis along the principles of contextualism. Contrary to his opponents who found Christian meaning in all the pages of the Bible, Roy argued that a text always spoke with a specific voice for a particular time and place. The prophets addressed their own people with a message relevant to their situation, and were not indulging in universalistic proclamations for other people in other times. He also felt that priority should be given to the teachings of Jesus versus those of St. Paul who often doctrinally inflates the original message.

With becoming sympathy Roy acknowledges that the views held by the missionaries, though no higher than the polytheistic faith of the Greeks and the Hindus, is not attributable to inferior judgment, but to early religious conditioning. Knowing fully the abiding effects of childhood impressions, he insists that the "unbiased judgment of the person who has searched the Scriptures only for a twelve-month with an anxious desire to discover the truth they contain, ought as far as authority goes in such matters, to outweigh the opinions of any number who have not thought at all for themselves, or who have studied after prejudice had laid hold on their minds."⁴⁹

A constricted religious point of view is not merely the consequence of conditioning, but of isolating the ingredients of

faith (experience, revelation, scriptures) from the scrutiny of intellectual disciplines. Through the tools of intellect, religion can be viewed as the bearer of the culture in which it has grown. For example, the cosmology, psychology, and anthropology of the Bible made perfect sense to denizens of the first century, but for that very reason it cannot be literally reproduced for modern believers. It is therefore not sufficient for Christians to have faith; they must also use their intellect. But reason should not simply serve as the handmaiden of faith, but should be autonomous in order to correct the aberrations of faith.

Roy's concern for the need to balance the claims of faith with the demands of intellect proceed from his fundamental belief in the unity of all knowledge, including the unity of values and science. We have seen that in his bid for western education he was acting upon the ideal of an integrated curriculum in which the humanities and the sciences could have free interplay. He felt acutely that the imperialistic pretensions of Christians were due to ignorance of the cultural composition of their own religion, and ignorance of the cultures of the Hindus and Muslims. In this respect there was no difference between the presumptions and practices of the white man's rule and the white man's religion. It was therefore Roy's mission of reconstruction to remove this veil of ignorance so that Christians may shed some of their arrogance and thereby discover values in the religions of the natives.

The heart of his reconstruction was his understanding of

Christology as orthopraxis. Roy would allow Christians their feeling of absoluteness about their faith. He felt no discomfort about the total allegiance of believers to Christ as their personal Saviour. However, he wanted these very cherished feelings reciprocated. Total commitment to one's personal Saviour need no be compromised by the admission that others have similar sentiments toward their own Saviours. This is because faith, like love, must necessarily immerse the individual in a world of subjectivity. The euphoria of absoluteness comes naturally to one in such a state, for the Word meets him in incarnate form. The danger of this is for the individual to objectify his subjectivity, and to reduce spirituality to his personal experience of it.

Since subjectivity is the real stuff of religious experience, Roy wanted Christians to remain Christians, Muslims to remain Muslims, and for Hindus to remain Hindus. Roy's ecumenism did not envision any Super Church. The Brahmo Samaj was instituted to make room for all: to provide the environment for mutual understanding, and the opportunity both to shed elements of faith which divide, and the cultivation of those qualities which unite. Members of the Samaj therefore paid homage to Jesus as a liberating agent through whom God had disclosed himself, but this disclosure was not deemed exclusive. Roy assumed that the exclusivistic tendencies in the New Testament reflect the polemical situation of the infant church in which attitudes became hardened, whereas the original message of Jesus was inclusive. Through the vitality of his moral life,

Jesus teaches mankind an open path to God, and his death upon the cross is vicarious in that it demonstrates his compassion for the whole world.

Thus, morality is the perfection of faith in action, and praxis is the badge of that religion which is not content to talk about the world but change it. All this is summed up in the words of Hafiz, the Sufi poet, with which Roy concluded his Tuhfat in 1803:

Be not after the injury of any being and do whatever
you please. For in our way there is no sin except
(injuring others)

FOOTNOTES

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27. St. Matthew 22. 37-40.
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45. Works, Part V, pp. 25,26.
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