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Box 08, Folder 12 - (Indian Twilight?) "Hinduism" (E.M.S.) (Final)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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On the other hand, the Oriental point of view is that the Creation of the material world was, and is, a great mistake. It did not come into existence, as Christians believe, as the deliberate act of a self-conscious Supreme Being. For, to the Buddhist, God is not a Person; He is a force, an impersonal force which works through all things. As Hindubhen's mother said in that interview, (see letter) "Oh no, we never pray to God.....God is a part of ourselves."

Optimistic or Pessimistic

So for the Oriental, the general outlook is on the pessimistic side, since "every form of consciousness is an evil". How different from the Judas-Christian idea of Creation as described in the Old Testament, where we read that God looked upon His Creation and saw that "it was good". This is reflected in the Book of Job where it describes how "the morning stars shouted for joy at their first creation".

It is true that, because of man's free will and the wrong use he made of it, sin came into this created world. But, it is equally true that this Fall of Man led to the coming down of God on earth (in the second Person of the Holy Trinity). He came to put things right as He alone could by His teaching, and by His Redemptive suffering in which He took upon Himself the sins (Karma) of the whole of humanity.

Joy at the Heart of Creation

This coming of Christ to earth was recognized from the very beginning as an event of great joy. So much so, that on the night of the First Christmas the barriers between Heaven and Earth were let down for a moment as the angels sang, "Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you who is Christ the Lord.".....Suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the Heavenly Host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth peace to men of good will."

This joy lies at the heart of Christianity. As Christ said to His disciples, "Your joy no man shall take from you." All down the centuries this saying has been proven again and again, hundreds of times, as Christian martyrs have gone cheerfully to their deaths, singing hymns of joy in a manner entirely incomprehensible to their tormentors.

This joy in fact has something cosmic about it. It springs from the very heart of Being. It is a reflection of, or an emanation from, that eternal and infinite joy which forms the everlasting life of the Three Persons of the Eternal Holy Trinity and radiates thence out in the created world. Nothing can quench that joy and the love from which it springs. In fact, the whole purpose of Creation is that God, in His generosity, has created us and destined us - unworthy as we are - to share in His everlasting life of perfect joy; to share it with Him and the S^Aints in the Society of the Blessed Heaven.

How different indeed is the Oriental point of view which, even at its best, is tinged with a sober melancholy.

To quote once again from the interview with Mrs. Hindubhen's mother (pp).

Question: "Then you do not think that God loves us as a father loves his children?"

Answer: "No", she replied again, "we must cease to feel any love, to God or anyone else, before we attain to perfection. Love is a form of desire; it is a limitation we must learn to outgrow along with all other emotions."

Question: "But," I broke in, "is not the love for great and noble persons a stimulus for us to become greater and nobler ourselves?"

Answer: "Most certainly", she replied, "the love of such persons helps us for awhile - at the beginning of the Path. But we must give it up before we reach the end. Love is like the carriage which brings us to the door of the Palace, but we must leave the carriage outside before we can enter through its portals. We must cease to feel any emotions before we are ready to enter into Nirvana. While on earth, she went on, it is true that love brings us our greatest joy but it is equally true that it is the cause of our deepest sorrows. For love must end in separation as surely as the night follows the day. The more you love anyone the greater is the dread of the separation which inevitably follows, and the more terrible is that separation when it comes."

Question: "But do you not expect to meet your friends again in the future after death?"

Answer: "There is practically no chance of that," she answered sadly. "Once death has intervened; the paths of our lives are so infinitely varied that there is no likelihood of our meeting again."

The note of sadness in the lady's voice, as she announced this melancholy dogma, seemed to me the more pathetic when I recalled what I had been told about her previous history. Her husband, to whom she had been devotedly attached, had died some eight years before; and since his death she had divided her time between the practice of her religion and the care of her two daughters (the "Gazelles") for whom she did her utmost to procure the best education. I was struck by the expression on her face of what one might describe as a noble sadness; an expression of true resignation. One could not detect a trace of bitterness in her voice, nor any sign of resentment on those calm and dignified features, although she had to face, day after day and year after year, a destiny so bleak and cheerless.

Two Similes

In conclusion we might perhaps sum up the difference between the idea of the Christian Heaven and that of the Buddhist Nirvana in the two following similes:

The first is from the Light of Asia, by Sir Edwin Arnold, in which he the soul's attainment of Nirvana in the following terms:

"O Mane Padme Om! the sunrise comes,
The dew-drop slips into the shining sea.

The other is from Dante's immortal poem, The Divine Comedy,

in which he visits Hell and Purgatory and finally Heaven.

He describes Heaven in the following couplet:

"In fashion of a snow-white rose, lay there
Before my view the saintly multitude."

In the first simile we see the individual - the dew-drop - lose all its form and individuality as it "slips into the shining sea." In Heaven, on the other hand, the individual personalities survive as separate entities, but are all caught up together into a higher unity, since each separate petal, while still retaining its individual identity, is joined up with the others in the higher unity of the rose.

Cheerful Corollary

We mentioned, earlier on, that this question we have been considering is not simply an academic one, but rather one which has a most tremendous practical issue. So now, in conclusion let us apply this in a more personal manner.

I am writing this in my ^{eightieth} ~~eighty~~ year; and it cannot be long before I shall come to the term of this present life, to pass over into the Great Beyond. Let me assure you, my dear friends, that one of the first things I intend to do after I have crossed that great dividing line - is to ask the authorities there to bring me in touch with those who were very dear to me in this life and have already passed on.

One of the first of these will be our dear and mutual friend Suhrid. In all these years that have elapsed since he has left us, I never have, and never could, entertain any other idea except that Suhrid still exists as Suhrid. When I was with you, as you will see from the letters in this book, Suhrid really became one of my best friends, a real friend, in spite of the disparity of our ages. He was one of the most gracious personalities that I have ever come across in my long and varied life. I could never for a moment think that God would bring such a charming personality into existence, to lose and dissolve it. How often, in fact, have I not consoled myself with the thought that I should one day renew my contact with him "up there". The same for the others I knew and loved in India, who have already passed on. I think of Nima Bhen, for whom I had such a high esteem, and Wasu Bhen and her mother, Mrs. . Mr. Bakhubahi too - I shall look out for him, and many others; I am sure that they are there waiting to renew their friendships with those whom they loved on earth; so, when I go, I shall greet them all from you. It is all, as you see, very thrilling! But that is not all. "Time marches on", as the saying is, and in course of time you others, my dear friends, who still remain here on earth, will also come when you will "finish this incarnation". I shall be watching out for you too. Or rather we shall be watching out for Saraladevi, Mr. Ambalal, Mrudula, Bharati,

Vickram, Leena etc. So Suheid will be there never a doubt and Mr. Bakhubhai, Nima Bhen and all the others. What a Joyful reunion it will be!

After all, we should never forget the original meaning of the Gospel is Good News, and the essence of Christianity, is just that, it is Good News. In fact, it is news so good that at first one can hardly believe it to be true; it is so much beyond ones highest expectation, or even our imagination.

AU REVOIR not GOODBYE

So, my dear Oriental friends, you who have meant so much to me all my life, I leave you - but only for the time being. I shall ask to be put upon the "committee of welcome" which will be there waiting for each of you in turn as you arrive. There our spirits will not be subject to the same limitations of Space and time; and we shall be able to enjoy and develop our friendship more fully than was possible here on earth.

I can imagine perhaps some of you saying to yourselves, "After all, even if it is true, how can we, who are not such professing Christians, expect to go to the Christian Heaven?" In answer to that I would say that none of us can understand the wideness of God's mercy or His infinite love for all His creatures. Christ Himself said, "Oeher sheep I have, that are not of this Fold; them also will I bring so that there might be one Fold and One Shepard."

So, once more farewell, or rather "Au revoir", until that time comes. And once again, thank you for all that your friendship has meant and still means to me. My God and His Holy Mother - the Blessed Virgin Mary - bless you till we meet in one of those "Heavenly Mansions" that Christ has prepared for those whom He loves.

Affectionately yours,

Ted Standing