

THE  
INDIAN  
JOURNAL  
OF  
THEOLOGY

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Volume One Number One

March 1952

# A Theology for Democracy

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Independent India gave herself a democratic Constitution two years ago and as I write this article, she is having her first General Elections in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. The General Elections is a colossal affair, more than a hundred and fifty million people participating in it to elect their representatives for various State Assemblies and to the Union Parliament. Nothing like this has ever happened in the East and, therefore, a new chapter in this side of the world's history has begun. To write at the present juncture in a journal published in India on some problems connected with the ideological basis of democracy needs no apology.

A sound democracy can be built only on the basis of a sound theology, though a statement like this may sound strange to some. To the people of the democratic West, the chief enemy of democracy may seem to be atheistic Communism. This may be true but there is, however, another enemy working from within, which is more subtle and which if undetected and unchecked, might gradually destroy democracy. If orthodox Communism is atheistic, democracy is not always and necessarily founded on theistic beliefs or even on beliefs having vaguely an extra-mundane reference. As a matter of fact, many leaders of political thought both in the East and the West would resent an extra-mundane reference as a sanction for those values which are an indispensable support for democracy and on which democratic structure, polity and practice stand. They would maintain that religious belief only confuses issues, and since there is never any agreement on what constitutes religious truth, religious considerations and sanctions are to be kept out of political theory. In many countries, therefore, democracy is supported primarily by a secular philosophy, though no doubt Christian ideas have contributed in no mean measure to democratic theory and continue to do so even now in the West.

Democracy that is founded only on a secular philosophy has something in common with orthodox Communism. Both are secular movements, having as the sanction for their respective ideologies certain values deduced strictly empirically and without any transcendent reference. So, as between a secular democracy or what in the end amounts to atheistic democracy and atheistic Communism, an ordinary individual has no a priori grounds on which to make his choice. In a case like that, one might argue that since both are founded on empirical grounds, the choice is determined necessarily by pragmatic considerations. If political values are deduced empirically without any extra-mundane reference, there is no sanctity attached to them. Any one of a given number may be chosen, provided it brings happiness to the human species. You cannot reject a priori Communist ideology. If it brings prosperity and happiness to

men, it may be chosen, and if that is the crux of the problem let experience alone prove it. Success in this sense will prove the survival value of democracy or Communism.

This attitude is not altogether absent in the democratic West. Of course, the tradition of democracy in some of the countries of the West is so strong and so firmly embedded in their culture and national ethos that democracy is not likely to give way easily. Nevertheless, the lessons of history must not be forgotten. Garibaldi's Italy submitted itself to the dictatorship of Mussolini, and if the history of many countries of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries was a story of ceaseless *fight* by common people for democratic freedom, the history of some of these same countries in more recent times has been a story of the *flight* of the same common people from this freedom, partly under the stress of economic difficulties. A purely secular ideology, however inspiring it may be in itself, cannot draw out from men enduring loyalty to itself. That the supremely secular ideology of Communism has succeeded in winning the unflinching loyalty of many intelligent people is no proof against our thesis, for Communism is still young and history has yet to pass its verdict on it.

The point is that any value we cherish, if it is to draw out from us unflinching and unflinching loyalty, must be believed in as arising in the permanent nature of things, as belonging to the very heart of the Universe, as issuing forth from that which supports, sustains and rules the Universe. All this means that our values must have an extra-mundane reference, and they and our religious convictions must be integrally connected, the latter being the intellectual and emotional basis for the former. Our values, in fact, have their source in that which we worship.

Let me not be misunderstood. I am not pleading for theocratic states. I am not pleading that a State should adopt a religion officially. But it is necessary that the ideology of democracy should be inspired by transcendent ideals. The culture of a people that desires a democratic form of government must be undergirded by a belief in and adherence to religious values. A dominantly secular culture cannot guarantee either a pure or strong democracy. Generally speaking there will be agreement on this point among Indians. But it is not sufficient that the belief needed to undergird a democratic culture is belief in any form of religion or religious value. The Indians, generally, are incurably religious, but as an Indian intensely concerned that democracy for which India has voted shall stay in the country, I am interested in the question whether Hinduism, the religion of an overwhelming majority of my people, has in it that motive power necessary for safeguarding democratic values. Too long in this country have we been proud of a hoary spiritual history and of the fact that people generally place religion over everything else and are inclined to be self-adulatory. The needs of the time with the decision of the nation to launch out on democratic experiment demand an examination of the fundamental assumptions involved in Hindu culture and religion.

### The Foundations of Democracy

Democracy can thrive only if it is founded on the following fundamental axioms: first, that the individuality and personality of man are real; second, that a compelling sense of social responsibility is the sustaining factor in democratic polity and that in its absence the democratic machinery

is bound to break down; third, that the world in which humanity is planted is ruled by purpose. These beliefs are the minima for democratic practice. But though we call these axioms, they are not autonomous and self-evident. They are, in fact, derived truths and, as such, are rooted in a philosophy deeper than themselves. That the Hindu generally recognises these axioms as the minima for democratic practice need not be doubted. But are they derived or can they be derived from Hinduism? It is no use saying that whatever the religious faith of the Hindu may be, he has accepted democracy and, therefore, will accept or is committed to accepting these fundamental axioms. Religion is something that permeates the whole man; his thought, attitudes and his overt behaviour reflect his fundamental religious convictions. Either these fundamental axioms are rooted in the Hindu religion and culture, in which case democracy is assured a safe future in the country, or because of a lack of integration between the two there is bound to be a frightful tension between the religious and cultural outlook of the Hindu and the political behaviour he is called upon to adopt. If there should be such a tension, either the religious and cultural outlook will triumph defeating democracy, or the democratic outlook will prevail defeating religion in favour of a secular culture. As a matter of fact in India among all classes of educated people there is at present no lack of theoretic appreciation of the fundamentals of the philosophy of democracy. This is due, however, to the secular culture coming from the West, and many Hindus obviously hope that they can integrate this secular culture into their own peculiar religious philosophy. But new wine cannot be poured into old wine-skins; the new wine is bound to burst the old wine-skins, spill itself and get lost. The loss will be a double one, viz. both of the new wine and old wine-skins and the result will be an emptiness which will, however, soon be filled by something totally different from both, perhaps, Communism! On the other hand, if a secular culture should prevail, eliminating the old religion, then democracy may thrive for a time but it will not abide.

What grounds have we to suspect that the fundamental axioms of democracy are not derivable from Hindu philosophy and religion? One of the most important systems of Hindu thought is the philosophy of metaphysical monism. This is, of course, not the philosophy of every Hindu, but it has in one form or other influenced the outlook generally of an overwhelming section of Hindu intelligentsia, and it has its popular variants also. Metaphysical monism cannot safeguard the values for which democracy stands and on which it is founded.

### Hinduism and Democracy

Metaphysical monism looks upon the human soul as identical with the One Reality. *Tat tvam asi* (that thou art) expresses to many Hindus the Scriptural basis for this identity. This identity may seem to invest man with a profound dignity. As a matter of fact that is how it is interpreted by Hindus generally. While perhaps transcendently this may be so (but I question this), the belief at any rate has certain devastating consequences empirically. The individuality and personality of man become mere transient facts, for, in his essence, man is one with the Impersonal Absolute. The individuality and personality of man are only fortuitous, and since this is so, they have at best the status of the facts of 'appearances'. In such circumstances, the right thing for man to do is

to work for an escape from his empirical existence. Is this attitude conducive to the maintenance of the value that democracy places upon the individual and his personality? The Hindu would contend that whatever the transcendent destiny of the individual may be, there is always the insistence on the relative reality of the empirical order, and one can neglect his duties in this order only at the peril of reaping unhappy consequences for one's self in accordance with the Law of Karma. The transcendent destiny of identity or absorption is never meant to blur facts and realities within the empirical realm. Within this realm man is an individual and has his own personality and personal history. While this is true, psychologically our beliefs with regard to what constitutes ultimate truth determine our conduct in this world generally. If the individual cannot look forward to the persistence of his individual existence, and if transcendent bliss is not the enhancement of personality but its extinction, what psychological incentive is there for efforts to maintain personal values which are so important for democratic practice?

Furthermore, though there is the insistence that the facts of the empirical realm must be treated seriously, in a philosophy of metaphysical monism these facts not only have the character of mere 'appearances' but are also sometimes treated as an 'evil'. Individuality and personality arise through the association of the 'Self' or 'Spirit' with an organism which is material in nature. Matter, however, is non-being or is transient, and to that extent is an 'evil', i.e. it does not belong to the order of that which alone abides and endures and, therefore, which alone is 'the good'. The psychological unity felt in the sense of 'I', 'me' and 'mine' is the Ego, the empirical self, and is the result of the association of the sinless Atman with a physical organism. *Mukti* consists in disassociating the sinless Atman from the Ego through the latter's destruction by knowledge of the true nature of the Atman. Surely, when you are compelled by the logic of your position to look upon individuality and personality as an 'evil', what intellectual and spiritual motive is there to maintain personal values?

The One Reality is timeless and actionless. But if the Atman which alone is real in man is actionless and all activity belongs to the Ego, and Atman remains the non-participating background, there must be elimination of action in order to gain *Mukti*. As long as there is action there is subjection to the Law of Karma which expresses the reign of the moral law of retributive justice in the empirical realm. No doubt the Law of Karma does not touch the actionless Atman but only the Ego, yet the Atman once enslaved remains in that state till the Ego is freed. Who can justify himself by good works? If conduct always involves some censure before the Law of Karma, the only remedy is to avoid action altogether. The true end of Yogic discipline is not the enhancement of personality but its elimination, and with it of all action. The Gita is more realistic and admits that complete actionlessness is impossible. It ridicules those who think they can cease from all activity and, therefore, developes the doctrine of *Nishkama Karma*. The net result of all this is that embodied existence is looked upon as unfortunate. Such an attitude, I submit, robs one of faith in the purposiveness of life in the world and creates a cynical attitude towards human activity and its achievements and aspirations. This cynicism, which sometimes passes off under glorified names such as detachment, philosophical indifference, etc., is in no mean measure responsible for many evils in public life in India.

In the end the philosophy of metaphysical monism cannot attach any value to this world and, therefore, to history. If Reality is one, immutable and changeless and without any activity and history, it excludes from its realm the order of change, activity, progress and everything that has a history. Temporal process is antithetical to the timeless Being. The world and its history have, therefore, no link with Reality. They have only a relative reality. The world is not the scene of the purposive activity of Reality, and, therefore, there are no eternal purposes that judge, rule and redeem human history. If a personal God is conceived in such a system and is conceded sovereignty over the world, he is only phenomenal, for, being other than that which is ultimately real, he cannot have any other status. What psychological attitude is such a system likely to inculcate in the minds of its adherents? Surely, it is difficult to believe that it gives man that supreme faith so necessary for democracy, that the world in which humanity is planted is ruled by purpose. Even if one truly believes in this system that as long as one is in this world, one cannot ignore it and the course of its history, surely, the teaching that the 'higher point of view' (*Para Vidya*, according to which one is to look upon the world only as relatively real) is alone valid, cannot give that supreme faith to which we have referred. Lack of such faith paralyses all activity aimed at making this material world progressively a more fitting home for the human race.

I have admitted earlier that metaphysical monism is not the accepted point of view of all the Hindus. It is, however, the point of view of an overwhelming section of the intelligentsia of the country, and it has influenced in one way or another others who do not consciously profess it. I think it would be true to say that whether a Hindu is a theist or a monist, he is inclined on the whole to under-rate the value of life in this world and to look upon human history not as something to be redeemed but as something to escape from. Even to the theist the creation of the world by God is due to *Leela*. While *Leela* does not express meaningless playfulness on the part of God, the idea behind it is indicative of the general tendency of the Hindu to refrain from ascribing purposes to God in creation. 'Purposiveness implies a working toward ends, and working toward ends implies that there is something yet unrealised—something that is in the end only. But to God and in God there is nothing that is unrealised. There is no lack in Him and so it is concluded that we cannot ascribe purposes to God—the Law of moral economy in the world is the Law of Karma. No doubt the Law of Karma in a sense expresses Divine purpose, but once having been ordained by God for man's good, it operates with as absolute an autonomy as the causal law in the physical realm. So in the end no active and present Divine purpose need be resorted to to interpret history.'<sup>1</sup>

### Christianity and Democracy

The three fundamental axioms on which democracy rests are derivable from the Christian Faith alone. The individual is a creation of God and God cares for each individual. Even the very hairs on one's head are numbered. The shepherd goes out to reclaim the one sheep that is lost from his hundred. The personality of man is his Creator's gift, for God

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<sup>1</sup> From the chapter by the present writer in the book entitled, *Biblical Authority for Today*. S.C.M. Press, London.

created man in His own image. While individuality is merely a principle of division, it is the personality of man with all the personal qualities, spiritual, intellectual and emotional that make man what he is. These qualities reveal that man is essentially a social being, for they flower into maturity in social intercourse. Family and community contribute to the process of maturity. God according to the Bible intended this schooling for man. He created not only an individual but a family—Adam and Eve. He called Abraham, an individual, to found a nation. The individual with his personality is a value in the sight of God. What greater sanction can individual and personal values have than that they are values in the sight of God? They belong to the very centre of the Universe. And can they be values if the sanction for them is anything less? Why should I not look upon man in a purely instrumental capacity and exploit him? After all in the animal kingdom the stronger exploit the weaker. If I do not exploit a weaker man, it is because such exploitation is out of joint with that which alone is true at the heart of the Universe.

The sense of social responsibility is primarily a moral quality, for it involves not only the will to do good to my neighbour but the will to act morally in society. Moral duty for the Christian is inspired neither by prudence nor by an appeal to altruistic motives. The inspiration is in something higher. When Jesus Christ commended to His disciples a type of 'good life', the only motive that He desired to draw out from them for such a life was that they may be the sons of the Father in Heaven, and that they may be as perfect as He is. The disciples should love their enemies because God Himself gives generously from His bounty both to the good one and the evil one, 'for He maketh His sun to rise on the just and the unjust'. The ground of man's moral action is in God's nature, or the moral value arises in something inherent to the nature of Reality. The 'good life' expresses a life that is in tune with that which is true to the heart of the Universe. The 'good life' is accordingly spoken of as the 'Eternal Life' in St. John's Gospel. 'Evil life' is one which is out of joint with the life of Reality, with the life of God, and, therefore, is spoken of as a life of enmity to God, of alienation from God.

The Christian Faith is a realistic one. It knows that though man is created in the image of God, that image is blurred in him by his misuse of the very potentialities in that image, for instance, by the misuse among other things, of the capacity for free choice. The 'good life' is not easy for man, for the 'good life' arises not only in man's appreciation of the nature of God, as we have stated above, but also by his living a life of fellowship with and in obedience to God—a life of sonship to God, a life in tune with Reality. But by misusing his capacity for free choice, man places his self above God and becomes disobedient to Him. This life of enmity, this 'evil life' resulting from his preference for his own self and will is sin, and sin is the primary cause for his incapacity to do good. This is more or less the natural state in which man finds himself. Therefore, the Christian Gospel is a Gospel that calls for repentance and reconciliation. If 'evil life' is enmity to God, there is violence to a personal relationship, and the personal relationship can be restored only when there is repentance for the personal wrong done and forgiveness is offered by the one wronged. When these occur there is reconciliation. The Christian Gospel calls men continually to repentance and to the acceptance of forgiveness and reconciliation offered by God in Christ. It is only when man is reconciled to

God, puts himself right with Him, with Reality, that the 'good life' is possible for him.

Democracy places value in personal freedom, but by the misuse of personal freedom either individually or collectively men have often thwarted and frustrated democratic purposes and ideals. Disillusioned, a whole people have sometimes given up their personal freedom for security against the evils in a misused democracy. Hence modern dictatorships. Democracy allows room for men constantly to misuse freedom, and because of this there arises the dilemma in which it perpetually finds itself: if you guarantee personal freedom men tend to misuse it to defeat democracy; if you restrict personal freedom you deny certain democratic rights. There is no escape in the natural state of things from this dilemma of democracy. The utmost one can do by political methods is to minimise this difficulty by finding a proper balance between personal freedom and state controls. The real difficulty arising for democracy is through extra-political grounds, in man's nature. Christian Faith alone is realistically alive to this in its recognition of man's sinfulness. It takes the only measure possible in such an impossible political situation by exercising the ministry of reconciliation of men with God in Christ. It is an extra-political measure to deal with an extra-political situation in politics!

### **Democracy and the Purposive Character of Creation**

The Christian's faith in the purposive character of the world is rooted in the conviction that it is the realm of God's purposive activity. We may answer the Hindu's difficulties in ascribing purposes to God in the following way. Purposes are of two types. Something is purposive in contrast to something that is chaotic, ugly and disorderly. In this sense the purposive is the rational, the intelligible and the beautiful. A work of art is purposive in this sense. It is something rational, intelligible and beautiful, and its purposive nature is conceived not in relation to anything outside itself but as it reflects these features. In the first place God's activity is purposive in this sense. It is purposive because it is intelligible, rational and beautiful and not because it aims at achieving something not yet achieved. The world as the creation of God is an expression of this type of purposive activity. God's creation is comparable to the creations of an artist. The artist's creations are not the result of a lack but of a fulness in him—a fulness that seeks expression for its own sake. Similarly in creating the world God did so not seeking the satisfaction of some want in Him but giving expression to something inherent to His nature—to a fulness in Him, viz. love. And as long as God is what He is, He will always be creative in this peculiar purposive way. But purposes may also aim at something not yet achieved. God's activity is also purposive in this sense, but such activity is for the good of His creatures and has reference to their needs but not to any need in Him. God created man in His own image, but man through the misuse of his freedom blurred that image and so God, the artistic creator in Himself, is now the Redeemer in relation to man, so that the second type of God's purposive activity is His as the Redeemer of men. The world, then, is the scene of God's purposive activity in both these senses. As the creation of God, the transcendent artist, its purposiveness is in its intelligibility, rationality and beauty. God created the world out of chaos, out of nothing and He saw it was good! But as the



intelligibility, rationality and beauty of the world are made into a mess by man, it is now the scene of God's redemptive activity in Christ. St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Romans that the whole creation is groaning to be redeemed, and in Colossians he sees a beautiful vision where Christ stands as the Eternal Archi-type towards which the process of redemption is taking the created world. The God of the Bible is both the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Such faith in the purposive character of the world is necessary if we are to work whole-heartedly for the betterment of the human race. On the contrary, if this world is looked upon as having no integral connection with the life of Reality and is to that extent unreal, we stand paralysed spiritually and psychologically to engage ourselves in such work of betterment.

From what has been said about the nature of man, it should be clear, however, that the Christian Faith in the purposive character of the world is not to be identified with shallow optimism, which looks upon the human race as ever progressing and which believes that the consummation of the *summum bonum* for man and society as certain in history and perhaps not in the distant future. Between the Christian Faith and shallow optimism of this kind there is not only no identity but there is also an antithesis. The Christian Faith is a religious faith and the idea of progress is a secular one. The Christian sees in history God's judgment of men alienated from Him and their supreme need for redemption with God continually working for this redemption. But men as free beings may resist the redeeming activity of God so that neither progress nor the end of progress, viz. the consummation of the *summum bonum*, is guaranteed within history. But the God of the Bible is also the Creator of the world, and as such, its sovereign Lord who may not be defeated in his redemptive work. The Christian is committed to an eschatological hope rather than to a faith in uninterrupted progress. But if the Christian is not a shallow optimist, he is not a pessimist either, because to him the world and its history are related to God's purposive activity, creative and redemptive.

So it is the plea of this article that my fellow countrymen who have definitely voted for a Democratic State should ask where they may obtain those ideals and values on which alone democratic polity can safely be founded.



Christ claims lordship over the whole of life, and we are responsible to Him for striving to make His will prevail in all spheres including the industrial and political. Freedom is a responsibility for playing an active and effective part in the making of decisions which affect any aspect of our common life. It is a heavy and burdensome responsibility which cannot be discharged simply by casting a vote and leaving the rest to the appointed trade union leader or to a parliamentary majority.—Eric Brewin and Reginald Johnson: *The Renewal of Democracy*. S.C.M. Press. p. 99.