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The Meaning of Creation as Sacrifice in Hinduism and Christianity against the Background of the Reflections of R. Girard

Abstract

An attempt at an expansion of R. Girard's views concerning the Hindu vision was undertaken by a student of his, P. Antonello. He widens Girard's considerations, particularly by appealing to two concepts crucial to Hinduism, namely *kāma* and *tapas*. These concepts throw new light on the Hindu understanding of sacrifice. In order to see this, however, it is necessary to consider them together with the *Not Non-Being* (*Nāsadiya*) hymn from the *Ṛg-veda*. We are then faced with the question, how to reconcile the vision of the beginning in the hymn *Not Non-Being* with the vision of Puruṣa or Prajāpati in their being-sacrificed, which brings forth creation. The reflections of Maria Krzysztof Byrski are helpful here. The Hindu vision reveals the mythical unity of Divinity and Humanity, without taking into consideration the temporal dimension of the revelation of this mystery. In the historical person of Jesus the mystery of the oneness of God and the created world is fulfilled.

When René Girard was asked, in recent years, about his further creative plans, he declared that he would like to “set right the perspective” which he had applied in his first works on archaic religions, in order to interpret them today, “in a light more favorable to them”. He revealed, furthermore, that he feels tempted to write something about the meaning of sacrifice in Indian texts, Vedic and later, and added, “this project may seem titanic, since first it would be necessary to introduce the reader to elementary elements of Indian culture, which, in the case of Greek or Hebrew culture, can be assumed as known” (Girard 2003: 29). The three lectures, presented in Paris in the autumn of 2002, and published in Italian under the title *Sacrifice* (Girard 2004) represent his first attempt at this task.

1. The divine character of sacrifice

In his lectures, Girard does not provide a systematic presentation of the Vedic vision; rather, he focuses his attention on certain chosen elements in an order derived from the logic of his own mimetic theory. He restricts himself to two types of text, namely the *Ṛg-veda*, and its later commentaries, the *Brāhmaṇas*. His attention is drawn to stories of the beginning, that is, the Hindu versions of creation, connected, on the one hand, with the figure of Prajāpati, and on the other hand speaking of Puruṣa. The first lecture provides a clear example of the very desire for mimesis, which, in the further development of the creation begun by Prajāpati, appears as a rivalry between gods (*deva*) and demons (*asura*). The second lecture begins by describing the sacrifice, offered by the gods at the beginning, through the slaying, or rather dismembering of the mysterious figure of Puruṣa, before considering additional elements of the initial sacrifice connected to the figure of Prajāpati. Each of the two lectures focuses on details of the story having reference to Girard's own theory. Finally, in the third lecture, Girard considers criticisms of the institution of sacrifice and compares the Hindu vision with the Biblical judgment concerning sacrifice.

Before we supplement Girard's presentation with additional texts from the Vedic tradition, let us consider the elements drawn out by him in the order in which they appear in his lectures, rather than according to the logical and chronological order proper to the Indian vision. The first lecture bases itself, fundamentally, on later *Brāhmaṇas* and has to do not with the beginning, but rather with the unfolding of creation. Here it is established that after the bringing-forth, by Prajāpati, of gods and demons, both groups wage unrelenting war over the further works of the "Lord of Creatures", as one may translate the name of Prajāpati. The decisive meaning of sacrifice in the process of calling into existence the gods and all of creation is indicated by two elements. One is reminded of the close bond between sacrifice and Prajāpati, considered as the highest god and as the very personification of sacrifice. For this reason, Girard, following in the steps of the French Indologist S. Levi (to whom he dedicated his reflections), names the "Lord of Creatures" the "god-the-sacrificed". Later preferring the reversed description "sacrifice as god". The latter being the sacrifice which, in the person of Prajāpati himself, undergoes deification. This sacrificial beginning unfolds and fulfills itself in a process that consists not only in rivalries between gods and demons, but also the repeated quelling of rivalry by means of further sacrifices. In his first lecture it is precisely to this always-renewed process that Girard devotes his attention.

Though distinct, the stages of this process follow a similar course: first Prajāpati, as Creator, grants to gods and demons determinate portions of the created world, which allow of being divided or not. The gods, however, are not satisfied with their allotted portion, desiring also the portion granted to the demons, which they win, finally, thanks to their offering of sacrifices which the Lord of Creatures recognises as more pleasing than those of the demons. In the eyes of Girard the mechanism described here confirms his theory, namely, that the mimetic desire of gods and demons leads to a rivalry that

ends in sacrifice. This type of dynamic is a reflection of the fact that gods and demons themselves derive from a deified sacrifice-of-god of the highest rank. This process means the gradual fulfillment of the initial act of creation: the gods move ever closer to Godhead and immortality, whereas the demons “become ever more deeply entrenched in their demonic character” (Girard 2004: 22; abbreviated: G 22). The desire for mimesis appears also where rivalry does not end in sacrifice, namely, in a story in which Woman plays a crucial role. She appears as Vāc, or Speech. To begin with, Prajāpati allots her to the demons, while the gods receive the male figure Yajña or Sacrifice itself. On this occasion the gods win Vāc by inducing Yajña to respond appropriately to her coquetry. The Woman draws close when the male side remains unmoved, as if indifferent to her advances. For Girard, coquetry is indeed a sign of the mimetic character of desire, which in actual fact models itself on the other. This is why the indifference of the other causes unease, and betrays one’s own insecurity and lack, since the coquette “in secret feels contempt for herself” (G 31). In this story, as in modern romance novels, mimetic rivalry does not lead to the sacrificial death that ends more violent crises – as in tragedies and in archaic religions.

The initial merging of divinity and sacrifice in the figure of Prajāpati “symbolises what is perhaps the fundamental event” for religion, namely, a primordial slaying leading to the deification of the sacrificed and the establishment of sacrificial rites. However, with a view to a more precise analysis of the myths concerning the Lord of Creatures, Girard considers, in his next lecture, the Vedic *Hymn about Puruṣa*. He notes, that, while today *puruṣa* means simply ‘human being’, the hymn portrays him as “a kind of duplicate of reality in its entirety”, prior to the differentiation associated with creation. The sacrifice, which gods and sages make of him, involves his division, parting out, dismemberment. It brings to mind the “Dionysian sacrifice, the terrible *diasparagmos*”, the attack of the hysterical crowd upon one who is literally torn apart. And yet, the Indian tale rather conceals the violent aspect of this event, giving the sacrificial act the dignity of ritual, as if, in this way, to make a “positive response to a certain religious necessity” (G 43–45).

In the hymn’s last strophe Puruṣa ceases to be solely the passive object of the sacrificial act; and reveals “as if another face, the activity of the sacrificed”, which represents a step in the direction of the “deification of the sacrificed, in both his passive, and his active form” (G 49). Girard sees here a confirmation of his theory, which ascribes to the primordial sacrifice (serving to “resolve” crises) divine attributes, intended to “clarify” this unexpected resolution. He lacks only one element, namely the initial recognition of Puruṣa as guilty of the death he suffers. He finds this element in later *Brāhmaṇas*. These not only link the initial sacrifice with Prajāpati, but also clarify its “necessity” in view of the guilt of the Lord of Creatures, whose being put to death is a reaction on the part of the other gods, his creatures, indignant over the incest visited upon their sister, Prajāpati’s daughter, whom he possessed, yielding to his own concupiscence. Although on the one hand, the coming together of Creator and creature represents a deadly rape, destructive of God Himself, on the other hand, it is the creation, in the form of the other gods that

helps the Lord of Creatures to once again regain his strength. The myths depict him as being brought to life by the same powers that earlier led him to his death. Our author concludes: "God-the-Sacrificed is given over to the law of death and resurrection, since he is its embodiment" (G 57).

In the *Brāhmaṇas* Girard finds further examples, which indicate that the Brahmins were aware that sacrifices serve to curb human violence by redirecting it through ritual, onto "substitutes". We can see this, for example, in the preparation of *soma*, an intoxicating drink meant to augment the effectiveness of sacrifice: the very preparation of this drink involves the sacrifice of the god Soma, and the violence necessary for the extraction of the drink is turned away from the god, in order not to awaken his wrath and directed towards imagined enemies. Thus, in Girard's view, the Brahmins saw in a penetrating way the link between the effectiveness of sacrifices and their ability to curb violence, and yet they continued to delude themselves as to the mechanism of sacrifice, when they imagined that even a god allows himself to be deceived by violence directed at his "substitute". This delusion "as to the mechanism of sacrifice was the condition of its effectiveness" (G 62).

In the last lecture Girard presents first the Judeo-Christian demystification of the mechanism operative in sacrifice. The fulfillment of this process in the Gospel's presentation of Jesus as the innocent "Lamb of God" is the ultimate de-masking of this delusion – tied, in religions, to the offering of sacrifices – that begins "the greatest cultural revolution in human history" (G 76). This statement, admits our author, "sounds like an affirmation of the absolute superiority of the Judeo-Christian religion over other faiths, and in particular over the Vedic tradition", which, in the light of the texts analysed has revealed itself as a "rigorous and quite subtle system of thought, which nevertheless remains within the limits of the sacrificial vision, interpreted mythically. This thought is, in fact, rooted in the phenomena of the Scapegoat, which have not been adequately described and in consequence have not been distinguished from the illusion associated with sacrifice." In the next sentence, however, Girard weakens the force of the above "affirmation", adding: "In fact, a glance at a specific problem, such as the one presented here, is too limited to justify even this minimal conclusion." (G 85) Then, our author limits himself further to comparing criticisms of sacrifice, such as can be found, on the one hand in the *Brāhmaṇas* and on the other hand in the Bible. In the former he discovers a satirical tale about the primordial human being Manu, who through his faith in the power of sacrifices himself becomes a victim of sacrifice at the hands of demons, whose activity betrays the self-destructive mechanism implicit in sacrifice. The Biblical prophet also portrays the disastrous effects of sacrifices (Mic. 6,6-7). In both traditions sacrifice is criticised as a practice that "aims at freeing humans beings from violence, but in reality supports it" (G 90).

Girard is aware that the *Upaniṣads*, more subtle and "mystical" in their reflections than the *Vedas* and *Brāhmaṇas*, move even further in their criticism of sacrifices. That, moreover, the rejection of the very idea of sacrifice leads to a tradition which "emerging from India, gave birth to Buddhism" (G 86). And yet, these later traditions do not fit within

the sphere of Girard's reflections in the above lectures. Elsewhere he has signalled his great interest in the *Mahā-bhārata*, so perhaps his thought will see further development and deepening.

2. The negative vision of the beginning

The first attempt at an expansion of Girard's views concerning the Hindu vision was undertaken by a student of his, who, in point of fact, published in Italian the lectures mentioned above. In the afterword to this publication, P. Antonello notices in his master new tendencies to read the sacred in ancient religions "in a less negative light than has been done up till now" (G 104). For his part, the Italian author widens Girard's considerations, particularly by appealing to two concepts crucial to Hinduism, namely *kāma* and *tapas*. The first term he translates as 'yearning' and juxtaposes it with the notion of *desire* as having a mimetic character in the sense of Girard. He notes, further, that *kāma* can have both the positive sense of yearning (which in another hymn of the *Ṛg-veda* is described as "the first seed and germ of Mind" (G 108); and also the negative form of *rāga* or craving, which requires purification in accord with the words of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Here the leader hears from the lips of the God: "Wisdom is darkened by craving, ever-present foe of the sage. Be a warrior and slay craving, the mighty enemy of the soul." (G 109) Against this background Antonello sees the specificity of Christianity in that "it acts in a manner more 'worldly' than that of the Oriental religions, seeking not the destruction of human desire, but rather its redirection" to an appropriate "model", represented by Jesus (G 110). *Tapas*, in turn, as the "inner heat, asceticism" indicates, within sacrifice, its relation to the stance of the person who makes the sacrifice. This ascetic dimension plays an increasingly important role within the tradition of Hinduism, gradually predominating "over other aspects of ritual, particularly the more violent, and leading, finally, to the thought of the *Upaniṣads* and to Buddhist mysticism" (G 113).

In these remarks we can find tropes that require more thorough analysis. The concepts of *kāma* and *tapas* throw new light on the Hindu understanding of sacrifice. In order to see this, however, it is necessary to consider them together with the above-mentioned hymn from the *Ṛg-veda*, to which Antonella rightly draws attention with a view to supplementing the thoughts of Girard. Only against the background of this fundamental and most subtle of Hindu statements concerning the beginning of all things will it be possible to find the meaning of the connection between the two myths of Prajāpati and Puruṣa, analysed earlier.

We begin then with the first words of the hymn known as *Not Non-Being* (*Nāsadīya*) which speak of the beginning of all things: "Non-being did not exist then, nor did being exist". Further, negative descriptions follow of that which did not exist; not until the second strophe does a positive characterisation appear: "This One will breathe without breath". The expression remains mysterious, paradoxical. On the one hand, all the earlier negations are now described positively as "The One" (*tad ekam*), which expresses the

fundamental oneness of reality; on the other hand the positive determination of this One is expressed, paradoxically, as a “breathing without breath”, as if a motionless movement... The additional statement that this is effected by the “will” (*svadhā*) of the One may be taken to indicate His absolute freedom. The Polish author of the most profound analysis of this hymn adds: The One is, here, “a perfect fullness devoid of any lack which might necessitate the creation to come. The Absolute does not need to create, nor does He have to. Whereas He can, if He wants to.” (Jurewicz 1995: 116; abbreviated: J 116)

The following strophes describe the differentiations leading from the will of the One to creation. Since, apart from Him, “nothing else existed”, the will of the One appears at first in activity directed upon Himself. The first differentiation appears: “In the beginning, darkness was hidden within darkness.” In primordial darkness two spheres become distinguishable: darkness concealing and darkness concealed – the source of two aspects of reality, the unmanifest, that which is always hidden, and the manifest, gradually drawn out from concealment. The two spheres are described precisely in two enigmatic verses: “That which was to be, was surrounded by emptiness / This was born, by the power of Heat, the One.” The concealing darkness appears here as “emptiness”, since it is, as explains our commentator, that “part of the One, which will not be revealed, a part which, from the point of view of the created, does not exist, and yet which surrounds that part which is to become” (J 117). And yet, even the “part” which is yet to become manifest is described mysteriously: for within it is concealed the element *abhū*, which can mean “that which is not, emptiness”, and which reveals an additional belonging-together of the two aspects of reality – on the one hand an emptiness remaining in concealment, on the other hand an emptiness gradually becoming, in unconcealing-being – within the One. Still further, this happening according to the will of the One, also leads to the One, this time in a manifest form, “the power of heat”: from now on an element of being, “that which is begotten and bright, which shines in an ocean of unbegotten darkness” (J 118). The Hindu *tapas* is equally heat and asceticism, the ardent, zealous spiritual exercise by which the human being moves towards the One. Here, at the beginning of the hymn, *tapas* reveals itself at first from the side of the One – on the path towards the arising of Being, in particular the human being.

Before the distinct appearance of human beings in the next strophe, the hymn portrays the next phase of the process of creation, specifying the activity described earlier by means of the notion of the power of ardent asceticism: “At first longing possessed the One / being the first seed of thought”. Here is revealed another key notion mentioned above: *kāma*, ‘yearning’, but also ‘love’, and this in the deepest sense of love, both divine and human. One is struck by the fact that *kāma* appears, as did *tapas*, as if “from nothing”. Similar also is the fruit they bear, revealed, earlier, in that first particle of being of the manifest One, described as “the first seed of thought”. We have here the bringing together of the first revelation of being and the first seed of thought, indicative of the unity of being and knowing, thus of the ontological and epistemological order of reality. The next two verses confirm this unity and elaborate on it, speaking about the human beings who first recognized it: “seers seeking in the heart with thought / discovered

the kinship of not-being and being". The kinship of not-being and being thanks to the manifesting of the One, is able to be recognised through *manas*, heart, the seat both of feeling and of thought. Our commentator adds: thinking "in the heart, in other words a cognitive activity directed to the interior of the subject, identifies itself with asceticism or *tapas*. It seems justified, thus, to suggest that in and through the seers, who search their hearts, the One acts upon Itself. It repeats within the sphere of its own manifested aspect the primordial creative and cognitive difference, achieved through the act of ascetic self-kindling." (J 121)

Yearning-love as well as ascetic zeal unite on the one hand the One, which manifested itself in the seed of Being-Thought, and on the other hand the seers, who recognise within themselves the One and its manifestation. Thus the questions, with which the hymn concludes, do not express the impossibility of knowing the process of creation, rather they constitute "a provocation meant to awaken one to self-knowledge. All who hear the words of the hymn should reenact within themselves the creative asceticism of the One, in order to confirm the truth of the vision presented in the hymn's earlier strophes. One can imagine a master addressing his student thus: 'And now you tell me: whence came the creation...?'" (J 126) Here is revealed a conviction central to Hinduism, that the path to knowledge of the nature of reality is at once an act of self-knowledge. This conviction came to expression in another hymn of the *R̥g-veda*, according to which "the human being, not merely ontically, but structurally, corresponds to the structure of all things". We refer to a hymn devoted to Puruṣa, where "Puruṣa-Man is identified with the whole of creation, including its manifest part – the Creation, whose individual elements, constituting community, cosmos and ritual, are identified with the parts of his body" (J 109).

In Girard's analysis we saw that Puruṣa reveals himself as the whole of reality, whose coming into being is achieved through a sacrificial dismemberment, finally recognised as God-the-sacrificed. This in turn led, in later Hindu tradition to the identification of Puruṣa with Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures and his sacrifice. We are faced with the question how to reconcile the vision of the beginning in the hymn *Not Non-Being*, where the transition from non-being to being emphasises the roles of *kāma* and *tapas* – as well as, more fundamentally, the will of the One – with the vision of Puruṣa or Prajāpati in their being-sacrificed, which brings forth creation. The reflections of Poland's most eminent contemporary scholar of Hinduism, Maria Krzysztof Byrski, are helpful here. His arguments in support of understanding *kāma* as love throw light on our understanding of the beginning from both sides – from the side of the unbegotten One whose will brings about the world, and from the side of the sacrifice of Puruṣa-Prajāpati.

3. *Kāma* – love and longing

Byrski argues against inconsistent translations that mostly make do with the translation of *kāma* as "yearning", but occasionally have recourse to "love" (Byrski 2001: 12;

abbreviated: B 12). The translation of *kāma* as “yearning” appears not only in Polish translations of the *R̥g-veda*, but equally in translations of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Moreover, in the latter work, translators have recourse also to “desire” or “craving”, in those places where *kāma* is described as an enemy whom it is difficult to approach and whom it is necessary to kill. The negative meaning appears again in the same work, but in a different context, where it is nevertheless accompanied by a positive sense, translated, therefore, as “love”. Here is how Kṛṣṇa speaks concerning himself: “I am the strength of the strong, free of desire (*kāma*) and passion (*rāga*). I am... a love (*kāma*) present in creatures which is in accord with the Law.” According to Byrski, in the original text, we are concerned not with the negative or positive meaning of *kāma* in the sense of an evaluation according to notions of “evil” and “good”; rather, the connection between *kāma* and the person of Kṛṣṇa is to be taken in the spirit of the hymn *Not Non-Being* where the will of the One, precisely as *kāma*, leads to the One’s first manifestation in “one” as “seed of thought”. It is for this reason that Kṛṣṇa, as the “volitive” source of *kāma*, can be described as free in relation to it. This indicates a negative, unmanifest aspect of the Godhead, whereas on the positive side, connected to creation, *kāma* becomes the manifestation of the Godhead’s presence in creation.

The connection between *kāma* and the beginning of creation came to be formulated even more clearly in the *Upaniṣads*, particularly in the *Great Forest Upaniṣad*. For Byrski, the restriction in Polish translations of the meaning of *kāma* to ‘yearning’, “trivialises” the Hindu vision. Translators, and not only Polish ones, in spite of everything, occasionally have recourse to the notion of ‘love’, displaying the same inconsistency found in translations of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. In two places in the *Great Forest Upaniṣad* there appears “a certain kind of ‘litany’ in which is expressed the thought that there are many things not pleasant (*priya*) to their own *kāma* (*kāmāya*), although they are pleasant to our own *kāma* (*ātmanah*). These litanies list ten such things: husband, wife, sons, wealth, *brahmana*, power, worlds, gods, entities, and finally, all that is!” In the first instance, in relation to the role of husband, both the French and the latest Polish translation of the *Upaniṣads* speak of love in the following sense: the husband is dear to the wife not by virtue of his love (that is, the love proceeding from him), but rather by virtue of the wife’s “own” love towards herself. This caution and commandment (the first of ten!) would be incomprehensible were it not for the statement in the *Great Forest Upaniṣad*, that Puruṣa is created from *kāma*. For this reason, of Puruṣa too it is not enough to say that he was born of “yearning”; rather, we should say that he was “born of love”. Byrski interprets the relationship between the two statements thus: “all love is possible only because Puruṣa, ‘born of love’ or Brahman, was able to love himself (= *ātmanam*), and in this way the love from which he was born led to the transformation of the One into a perceiving (= loving) subject (= *Brahman*) and a perceived (= loved) object (= *ātman*)” (B 18-19).

Byrski’s interpretation illuminates for us the connection between *kāma* as love and the Hindu vision, equally with respect to the Godhead and the world proceeding from His will. The very differentiation of Godhead and world appears gradually as the working

of “the One”, Whose will, as if “immovably moved”, manifests itself as *kāma* within the “first seed of thought”. This is the first positive beginning of the work of creation, the “luminous object” brought to light, by the “dark” unmanifest subject, through the power of *tapas*. Since we grant that *kāma* means love, this means that while love conceals itself within the One considered as unmanifest, in connection with creation love reveals itself as a subject who loves the “One”, the first seed of thought, as a beloved “object”. Further, we may link this manifestation of the unmanifest One to a differentiation within One-Love: the One Loving (*Brahman*) Himself (*Ātman*).

Byrski indicates a further figure within whom this manifestation is continued: the “Human Being, the Lord of Creatures (*Puruṣa-Prajāpati*) otherwise known as Brahman” who is born of love. The *Great Forest Upaniṣad*, immediately linking *Puruṣa* with love, puts to him the following question: who is your God? To which he replies: “Woman”. This is made clearer in the light of another statement in the same *Upaniṣad*, which “compares the comprehension-in-recognition of *Puruṣa* by *Ātman*, to a man and woman embracing. Further, it states that for Him this is the state of the realisation of love (= *āpta-kāmaṃ*), the love of SELF (= *ātma-kāmaṃ*) and is the shape of non-love (= *a-kāmaṃ rūpaṃ*).” According to Byrski: “We have to do here with the final overcoming of the dichotomy of subject-object, which is called into existence by love and which, by virtue of this very love, is overcome.” The fact, mentioned earlier, that in the *Bhagavad-gītā* love may be understood as an enemy, indicates the same thing as a similar statement concerning *Ātman*, who is not only “his own ally” but also “his own enemy”. Byrski adds: “Just as we ourselves are our own worst enemies, so also love, in the context of freedom, is, for the human being, the source of the greatest happiness and the greatest suffering. Perhaps because it is identical with *Puruṣa*, hence also with Brahman and *Ātman*.” (B 20-21)

These last words establish the link between *Puruṣa-Prajāpati-Brahman* and, not only love, but also sacrifice. In this intuition of Hinduism, Byrski sees its superiority over Buddhism, which failing to grasp sacrifice as love, but linking it solely with desire and suffering, chose a different path: “Buddha appears not to have known, that suffering is the cost, which not only the human being, but likewise God, Whom the Hindus called Human Being-Lord of Creatures (*Puruṣa-Prajāpati*), pays for the realisation of love.” (B 21) And yet, how are we to evaluate the Hindu vision in the light of Christianity?

A key question concerns the relation of *kāma* to the unmanifest One, whose first self-manifestation allows us to recognise within Him – in distinction from Him – Brahman and *Ātman*. We sense here an at least formal analogy to the Christian mystery of the Holy Trinity, where the differentiation within the One of Father and Son is achieved within the Holy Spirit. The analogy concerns not only the relation of the One to Love, but also the three “elements” of this unity. Hinduism draws from the One considered as Love: Brahman-as-Loving and *Ātman*-as-Loved, whereas the Christian vision links the one loving with the Father, the one loved with the Son, while describing Love itself as the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, if we consider in detail the “elements” of the respective Trinities, their similar structure reveals in each case a different meaning. According to the Hindu vision, the “elements” appear to have a transitional character and in the final

analysis come down to being different aspects of “the One”: in the bringing-together of Brahman and Ātman the unity of Both leads to the Primordial One – the source of Love. The Christian vision gives the three “elements” of the One personal traits: Father, Son and – expressed most abstractly – Spirit. What is the significance of this difference? We come now to the difficult question of comparing both visions.

4. Sacrificial love as the heat of ascesis

Both of the views presented concerning the Divine Trinity, the Hindu and the Christian, are incomplete, in the sense that they do not express all of the elements of both traditions, considered by those traditions as revealed. Besides, there are many notions in both traditions that attempt to bring closer the mystery of the One in His various manifestations. The Hindu religion is sometimes understood as polytheism, since there appear in it the figures of many gods – but a significant proportion of these are placed on the side of the creation, being analogically like the angelic spirits in the Biblical tradition. The various names of those gods recognised as most important can be brought back to the vision of the already mentioned “Trinity”: One-Brahman-Ātman, where we have, actually, to do with a theistic monism – the final oneness of all things. The Christian vision of the Holy Trinity invariably emphasises the oneness of God – it does not abandon the monotheism of the *Old Testament*, being rather its fulfillment, in so far as it indicates within the unity of God a plurality of simultaneously existing Persons. Here the Persons are connected with a revelation having a historical character: the God of the *Old Testament* is revealed by Jesus as Father, and as having sent Him into the world as His Son, in the Holy Spirit. This is attested to not only by His earthly life and activity, but also more fully by Jesus’ Paschal-Passing through death to new life. Through this the unity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit is revealed to the human community of the children of God, who confess – in virtue of the same Spirit of Jesus as Son – one Divine Father.

The historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, is decisive in the Christian vision, not only in the light of His earthly life, but also of His passage through death as the fulfillment of the mystery of the Person of the Son, of the Divine Father, in the Spirit. Jesus reveals the God of love. This is achieved in the sacrifice on the Cross – for this reason, that human love had already, from the beginning of history, turned onto another path, revealing itself in violence. The Cross, while it is the culmination of violence against the Crucified One, also reveals the love of Jesus as Son, being the perfect image of the Father and His love. God’s acceptance of violence enables him to bear it until the very end, until the complete victory of Divine Love. This new perspective, established thanks to Jesus, makes possible a new view concerning both God and the beginning of the world and of the human being. This is why the *New Testament* calls Christ not only “the beginning, the first born from the dead”, but moreover “the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.” (Col. 1,15-18)

Before revealing the further consequences of this vision, let us return to the earlier Hindu intuition in which creation itself is linked to the sacrifice of the God-Man. The peculiar necessity of the sacrifice flows here from the recognition that it is the “cost” of the revelation of love in the world. Admittedly *kāma* as the will of the One is not “compelled” to create, but when it does so, it links itself in an inevitable way with sacrifice... And yet, is this formal connection between love and sacrifice sufficient, particularly in view of the problematic nature of suffering? Is suffering also inevitable in a world created by God, in other words Love? From the Buddhist side, which links suffering with *kāma* considered as desire (through *ṭṣṇā* or in Pali *taṇhā*, the Buddhist “embodiment” of *kāma*), the answer seems clear: only freedom from desire grants liberation, or “extinction” (*nirvāṇa*), equally of *kāma* as of *tapas*, the “heat” implied in creation. But what does Hinduism have to say with regard to this?

In Hinduism the beginning-as-sacrifice takes a few different forms. Beyond the mythical figures of Puruṣa-Prajāpati there is hidden, as we have seen, the One, containing everything within Itself – in relation to which all differentiation appears secondary. Here it is necessary to recall another vision of the beginning, which is particularly crucial for the connection between *kāma* and *tapas* on the one hand, and suffering and sacrifice on the other. The significance of this vision is underlined by the fact that it appears in the first hymn of the *Ṛg-veda*, therefore as the beginning of the Hindu revelation. The hymn addresses itself to the god of fire – Agni – confessing him as “supervisor of the divine priest’s sacrifice”, adding, “who rules over rites of sacrifice / shepherd of the luminous order” (Byrski 2003: 32). In Byrski’s view the chief role accorded to this god indicates that “the ancient Vedic seers recognised fire as the earliest and most essential manifestation of the creative power of the Absolute, which, while being a category of perceivable reality, has at the same time the power to destroy this reality”. This vision is filled out in further hymns and commentaries. The creative activity of *kāma* and *tapas*, described only briefly in the hymn *Not Non-Being*, received its elaboration in one of the *Brāhmaṇas*, where the whole creation, emerging out of “non-being” is described in terms of a longing-to-be and a gradual “generation of *tapas*”, a heating up, from which is born first fire (*Agni*), then brightness, radiation, stars, finally “ten parts of the sacrifice”, where “ten parts of the sacrifice are the same as the Lord of Creatures”, who in turn “drew forth creation”. According to Byrski, this whole vision brings to mind “the Big Bang of contemporary cosmogony” (Byrski 2003: 36).

Another *Brāhmaṇa* places the Lord of Creatures at the beginning, as one who “loves” and through this “ignites heat”. It is said that, “He spoke twelve times” and through the power derived from his speech he drew forth “all beings”. According to Byrski, we continue to have to do here with “the physical aspect of heat”; in his view it is difficult to determine “at what point in the perception of the times *tapas* comes predominately to be seen as the ascetic heat, to which suffering too is not foreign”. In any case this new element goes hand in hand with the increasing identification of the Lord of Creatures and Human Being in the single figure of Puruṣa-Prajāpati. For when the heat of the One begins to manifest itself within the human being, then “fire turns into pain”, and in effect

“*tapas* acquires the sense of something like ‘the heated struggle of asceticism’ or ‘the heat of pious zeal’.” Byrski concludes: “So then, the heat of the great explosion of the One is, at the same time, the burning pain involved in the ascetic mortification of the Human Being-Lord or Creatures. This then is the price, which the highest reality, however we choose to imagine it, pays for the act of creation. The act, incidentally, whose cause is the activity of love (*kāma*), as we can recall from the hymn *Not Non-Being*. In other words, the Indian *tapas*, or the heat of mortification or asceticism, is the cosmic fire, which consumes itself in pain so as to realise universal *caritas*.” (Byrski 2003: 37)

Hence, the element of sacrifice apparent in the myths about Puruṣa-Prajāpati, reveals itself as the creative link between fire (*Agni*) and love (*kāma*) on the way towards creation by the power of *tapas*. Creation as becoming inflamed is tied to exertion and suffering, which is why the *Brāhmaṇas* express the activity of the Creator by means of the formula “He exerted Himself, burning in the fire”. For the human being, as a bodily being, the fulfillment of this process is the “act of cremation, considered as a third birth” which is connected to death – distinct from the first birth “from mother and father” as well as the second, taking place as a result of sacrificial struggle and ascetic heat. The third birth, which in the Hindu tradition is achieved by means of fire on the funeral pyre, permanently transforms a person, granting him immortality in a “splendid body” (*tanu suvarcas*). Byrski sees a confirmation of these intuitions in the Christian tradition that links the resurrection of Jesus with the evidence of the Turin Shroud. In this last instance the mysterious likeness “can be explained solely by means of an emission of radiation from within the body in the direction of the cloth”, more precisely “the dematerialisation of the body, which in the course of a millisecond transformed itself into energy”. The Polish Indologist interprets this evidence in the light of the ending of the above-mentioned hymn to *Agni*, where the Vedic seer “attempting to describe the reciprocal relationship between the human being and this manifestation of creative power, which is *Agni*, and is without a doubt identical to *tapas*, has recourse to the metaphor of father and son”. Byrski adds, against the background of his considerations of the resurrection of Jesus, the following: “We know only one such instance, in which this vision ceases to be metaphorical and *tapas*, permeating the whole being of the human, assures him Divine Sonship.” That is, in accordance with the witness of the Gospel, “God named Jesus as His Son, as if fulfilling the request of the *R̥g-veda*, and Jesus Himself could henceforth speak of Himself thus: ‘I and my Father are one’, precisely by means of *tapas*, an experience which – so it appears – seems to have been the very essence of his mission. Consequently, the final transformation occurred spontaneously in the grave, without the involvement of a funeral pyre.” (Byrski 2003: 38-40)

5. The sacrificial love of the persons

How are we to judge this Christian interpretation of a Hindu intuition? The linking of *Agni* with the Divine Father, and Jesus as the God-Man with the Person of the

Son appears to be another form of bringing together in One-Love: Brahman-as-Loving with the Father, Ātman-as-Beloved with the Son. We are also faced with an additional question concerning the “place” of the Holy Spirit in this vision. In Hinduism, as we noticed earlier, Spirit-Love may be both the initial and the final form of the One, both source and goal of the differentiation of Brahman-Ātman. Whereas the Christian vision grants the Spirit not only a personal character, but acknowledges Him – as evidenced by the formula of the declaration of faith – as proceeding from the Father “and the Son” (*Filioque*). And yet even among Christians this formula remains controversial: it faces accusations of one-sidedly “subordinating” the Spirit to the Son, when all the while the mystery of the Annunciation indicates that the Incarnate Son originates from the Father “and the Spirit”. This calls for a supplementation of the Trinitarian formula: *Spirituque* in relation to the Son (Bolewski 1998: 385-391). A deepened, comprehensive view helps us to more fully compare both visions – the Hindu and the Christian.

In the Christian vision, Fire-Agni most fully fits not the Father, but the Holy Spirit. Concerning Him Jesus Himself declares: “I have come to send fire on the earth; and what will I do if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12,49) Likewise, in the *Acts of the Apostles* the sending of the Holy Spirit is linked to the appearance of tongues “like as of fire” (Acts 2,3). The longing of the Son (*ti thelo–quid volo*, or literally: ‘what I want’) is nothing other than the will, which He nurtures together with the Father, that the Spirit of Love, Who unites the Divine Persons, may unite into “One” also the whole of human kind, as children of God, beginning with the disciples and followers of Jesus. Hence when Byrski speaks of the oneness of the Son with the Father “by means of *tapas*”, this suggests again – from the Christian side – statements concerning the Incarnation “by the Holy Spirit”. If, moreover, we remember that from the Hindu point of view Agni too is not absolutely primordial, but is born from One-Love, then we have yet another reason to distinguish definitively and for good: Personal Love, within which the differentiation of loving and beloved Persons is achieved through a third Person, Who enlivens the infinite community of human persons.

The Divine Fire of Love in the Person of the Holy Spirit initiated everything: both the incarnation of the Son of God, and the “remaining” works, which in His light are illuminated, in other words, creation, then its fulfillment, first made manifest in the resurrection of Jesus. The writings of the *New Testament* repeatedly indicate that His rising from the dead was a work of the Holy Spirit – in oneness with the Father (Rom. 1,4). The revelation connected with the Person of Jesus led to new distinctions, which fulfilled the vision of the *Old Testament*. The most well known version of the beginning of creation, from the *Book of Genesis* speaks, in relation to the activity of the creator, first concerning the Spirit of God (*ruah Elohim*), then later about the creative Word (Gen. 1,2f). Christian tradition and theology link these various dimensions of the works of the one God in terms of the revelation within Him of a community of Persons. The Father is the source of all things, whereas the Holy Spirit and the Word, proceeding from Him, cooperate in creation (“outside”) in a way corresponding to the internal relations of the Divine Persons. The Word-Logos, revealing Himself in Jesus as the Incarnate Son of

God is, both in God and in the creation, the principle of diversity, gradually growing within nature with the emergence of life and its spiritual form in human persons. While the Holy Spirit, uniting the Father with the Son–Logos, constitutes the principle of the preservation of unity also in relation to the diversity of nature. As the Son-Logos makes possible the diversity, independence and order of creatures, both in their mutual relations and in their relation to God, so the Divine Spirit enlivens everything, giving creatures His Own dynamism of development and energy, manifested particularly clearly in life and love.

Is there any place in this vision for the notion that the primordial sacrifice of a God-Man is necessary for creation? From the Biblical and Christian perspective we must once again make distinctions. God's sacrificial love revealed itself most fully in the mystery of the Incarnation – in the love of Jesus, who as the Son reveals the love of the Father. It is precisely in light of the Incarnation, culminating in the mystery of the Paschal-Passing – the path from the death on the Cross to the fullness of resurrected life – that the mystery of the sacrificial love of God encompasses also His “inner” life. The spirit of sacrifice, as the surrender of oneself, permeates the Divine community of Persons. The Father, as Loving, loves not so much “Himself”, as the Son as “His” likeness, in full surrender to the other Person. It is thus, paradoxically, that the relations among Persons express themselves: the loving of “oneself” is realised through an emptying (*kenosis*) of “oneself”, a surrender of oneself to the other, without destroying one's “own” person, but rather revealing it in its fullness. This personal surrender assumes mutuality, since only through this can both persons become truly themselves – without the objectification of themselves or the other person. In turn the mutuality of self-surrender of the Loving and Beloved Persons reveals the unity of Love, which “promotes” persons only because It is Itself a Person – in the Christian vision this is expressed through the linking of love to the third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit of Love. Thanks to this personal love, giving oneself and receiving oneself not only constitute one whole, but also open themselves to another form of themselves – in the other person. Thus is revealed a unity in which diversity is not so much transitional, as enduring forever in persons, both Divine and human.

The *kenosis* revealed most fully by Jesus in the mystery of Incarnation (Phil. 2,7), illuminates the “external” creation in the light of God's inner life: everything, in the created world that seems to contradict the closeness of God, is a sign of His closeness in *kenosis*, in self-emptying, in suffering. The negative, difficult to accept aspect of suffering is linked to the distinctive dialectic of the manifestation of God, Who shows Himself only partially to human beings on earth, since He remains at the same time unmanifest. The Hindu vision, in which the coming into being of the world is linked with the sacrifice of the Human Being-the Lord of Creatures, reveals the mythical unity of Divinity and Humanity, without taking into consideration the temporal dimension of the revelation of this mystery. In the historical person of Jesus is fulfilled the mystery of the oneness of God and the created world. The dogmatic formulation of the unity, within the One Person of Jesus, of a Divine and a human nature, “without mixing” and “without division”

can be used to express the relation between Creator and creation – as against both the pantheistic confusion of divinity and humanity and their dualistic opposition.

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