

Is there no alternative but violent repression, in which, reluctantly no doubt, you decide that it is better for the establishment to be maintained by the exercise of the power which is entirely in white hands, and which ought to remain in white hands because they are white (because, of course, Negroes are 'not yet ready' for any kind of power)? This presupposes a simple view of the situation: a belief that when the chips are down it is going to be either whites or blacks, and since whites have proved their capacity to 'run the country' and 'keep order', it is unthinkable even to permit the possibility of that disorder which, you take it for granted, would follow if Negroes took a leading part in our political life.

Conclusion: revolution must be prevented at all costs; but demonstrations are already revolutionary; *ergo*, fire on the demonstrators; *ergo* . . . At the end of this chain of thought I visualize you goose-stepping down Massachussets Avenue in the uniform of an American Totalitarian Party in a mass rally where nothing but the most uproarious approval is manifest, except, by implication, on the part of silent and strangely scented clouds of smoke drifting over from the new 'camps' where the 'Negroes are living in retirement'.

Placing Indian Religion

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Professor Zaehner is one of the few Catholics in England to-day who is seriously concerned with the relation of Christianity to other religions. Though his special subject is Zoroastrianism, he has an intimate knowledge of the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and has worked out a definite theory of their relation to Christianity. This was made clear in an earlier work, *At Sundry Times*, where he tried to show how all these traditions 'converge' on Christ and find their fulfilment in him. In his most recent work¹ he develops this idea further, particularly in the light of Teilhard de Chardin's conception of the

¹*The Convergent Spirit*, by R. C. Zaehner; Routledge, 18s.

convergence of the whole creation on Christ, and tries to show how in the evolution of human consciousness the different religious traditions are stages in the progress of mankind under the guidance of the Holy Spirit towards the consummation of both man and the universe in Christ.

What is perhaps most original in his vision of human history is that he regards Marxism as an important stage in the development of religion. Marxism, particularly in its most authentic exponents like Marx himself and Engels, is concerned with the ultimate nature of man and the universe and with their ultimate destiny, and in this sense it may be called a religion. In Professor Zaehner's view the Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, are concerned almost exclusively with the salvation of the individual soul through its escape from this world of time and space. Marxism on the contrary, rejecting both the concept of the individual soul and any world beyond seeks the collective salvation of mankind in this present world through the working out of the 'inner laws' of nature, by which the 'essence of man' (in Marx's phrase) will be realised.

In an extremely interesting chapter on Zoroastrianism Professor Zaehner shows how this religion, also in contrast with Indian religion, seeks the collective salvation of mankind in a 'final renewal', but it goes far beyond Marxism in that it finds this salvation not only in the integration of man with man, but with the integration of 'matter with spirit and of the total man with God.' Professor Zaehner's very close study of Zoroastrianism suggests that the Jewish-Christian doctrine of the last things as it appears in the later apocryphal writings owes very much to this source and that in this sense Zoroastrianism has already had a positive influence on Christianity.

Professor Zaehner has done well to emphasise the importance of this conception of cosmic salvation, which is, of course, an essential element in the Christian vision of the destiny of mankind. But I think that in dismissing Hinduism and Buddhism as religions of 'escape', which have nothing to give the modern world, he is making a great mistake. This is due, I believe, to his failure to understand the real nature of the Hindu mystical experience. For him the Hindu experience of *advaita*, that is of 'non-duality', is essentially an experience of the soul in 'isolation'. It is a type of what he calls 'soul-mysticism'. The soul experiences itself in its inmost depth, and this is a profound and blissful experience, but it is 'closed' on itself. 'The experience', he writes, 'is confined to the individual self and makes all communion with other men and with God impossible; it is the deadest of dead-ends.' I agree

with Professor Zaehner that the Hindu experience is an experience of the soul in itself, beyond image and concept in the 'ground' of its being, but so far from its being 'closed' I would maintain that it is precisely in this 'ground' that the soul is 'open' to all being. So far from a 'dead-end', it is a living point, which opens on the infinite. In other words, it is at this point above all that man is open to God. It seems to me that, apart from all other considerations, the extraordinary fertility of this experience throughout history is evidence that it is not a dead-end. How does Professor Zaehner account for the fact that the *advaita* doctrine of Sankara and the *nirvana* doctrine of the Buddha have in fact been the source of an immense development of religion and culture and have opened the way to an astonishing sense of communion with nature and with God?

I would agree that this experience may lead to isolation and there are examples of this both among *advaitins* and at least among Hinayana Buddhists, but this is by no means the rule. The Buddha himself was a being of immense compassion and the development of the Mahayana doctrine with its sense of communion with all living beings is surely evidence that the mystical experience of Buddhism is not a dead-end, but leads spontaneously to communion both with God and man. In the same way Sankara himself was not only a philosopher but also a devotee, and the typical *advaitin* of modern times like Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi is both a devotee of God and a man of deep compassion for his fellow-men. I believe that there is a tension both in Hinduism and in Buddhism between the experience of 'identity' or loss of individuality in *brahman* or *nirvana* and the sense of personal communion which is never fully resolved, and it may well be that it is only in Christ that this experience can reach its full dimensions, but we should not underestimate either the depth or the breadth of the experience.

I think that Professor Zaehner is also mistaken in his judgment on Taoist mysticism. He calls this 'nature-mysticism' in contrast with the 'soul-mysticism' of Hinduism and Buddhism, and maintains that it is essentially a return to the primitive level of consciousness or sub-consciousness, which has been called a *participation mystique* with nature. Taoist mysticism, like that of Wordsworth, may be a *participation mystique* with nature, but it is not by way of a descent below consciousness, but by transcending normal consciousness. There is a 'return to the beginning', as Mircea Eliade has written on the Hindu experience of *samadhi*, but it is a return with a new element in it, namely knowledge

and freedom; it is a conscious and deliberate return to the simplicity of man's original consciousness; it is becoming a child again in the Gospel sense, a 'return to Paradise'.

This brings me to a last point of disagreement and that is Professor Zachner's conception of the place of asceticism in the spiritual life. He apparently accepts the very naive Zoroastrian ideal of a this-worldly happiness based on enlightened self-love and can find no place for the asceticism of the Fathers of the Desert, this is to him a 'radical perversion' of the spirit of Christianity. It is true that there was a definite influence of Manichaeism (derived ultimately, it may be remarked from Indian asceticism) on early Christian asceticism, but the Fathers who shaped the tradition of monastic asceticism had entirely freed themselves from this. Their object, even when they were most austere, was not to destroy nature or the body but to restore them to their original state by freeing them from the power of sin. Their aim was precisely a 'return to Paradise,' in which body and soul and nature were once more restored to harmony. St Antony, the model of monks, is a perfect example of this, who when he came out from twenty years seclusion in the desert, 'fighting with demons', was found to be radiant in health of body and soul.

This failure to recognise the place of asceticism in the spiritual life seems to be due to a failure to recognise the depth of the mystery of death and resurrection in the Christian life. The Christian ideal is essentially that of a world renewed and restored, as Professor Zachner sees it, but it is a renewal which takes place through death and resurrection. If he had seen this perhaps, he would have been better able to appreciate the contribution of Indian asceticism and mysticism to world religion. I would say that Hinduism and Buddhism, as also Taoism, represent a permanent stage in the development of religion. They are not an 'escape' from reality, but one of the greatest efforts ever made to encounter reality in its inmost depth. The modern world has not passed beyond this; it has simply lost sight of the goal.

Yet I agree with Professor Zachner that there is a grave defect in Indian mysticism. It has never learned to reconcile adequately the reality of this world of space and time with the ultimate reality of being nor to find the true place of personal relationship in the experience of absolute being. In this sense I believe that he is absolutely right to stress the importance of a realist view of nature and of man such as we find in Zoroastrianism and in Marxism. It may even be true that Marxism is in some respects a natural reaction to the extreme individualism and

other-worldliness, to which Russian monasticism has always tended. It is certainly true that the modern world needs the vision of Teilhard de Chardin of a world in which both matter and man 'converge' on Christ, not, I would say, by the necessary movement of their own nature, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, working in them and leading them towards the new world of the Resurrection. In the Resurrection, which is also the 'time of the restoration of all things', the universe and man, both individually and collectively, are taken up into the new life in Christ, not losing their reality or their individuality by being merged in the absolute, but fulfilling themselves in a new order of being, in which man will enjoy personal communion with God and with his fellow-men and the world of nature will recover its original harmony.

This, it seems to me, is the kind of vision to which Professor Zaehner's view of religion rightly leads. If I have criticised many of the details of his exegesis, this is not to deny the fundamental truth of his vision or its immense importance for Christianity to-day. This is one of those seminal works, like that of Teilhard de Chardin himself, with which one may quarrel over the details, but which gives a new understanding of the meaning of religion and the destiny of man.

Heard and Seen

MARGINAL BENEFITS: FILMS AT VENICE

This year the Venice Film Festival was once again under new management; but there was from the start no shadow of doubt that Professor Luigi Chiarini, the new Director, was exercising effective control. A rigorous limitation of participating nations and in addition a severe system of pre-selection virtually excluded the type of film all too often encountered at festivals—lasting for three hours plus and employing most of the clichés long since outgrown by adult cineasts. The result was a festival in which almost every picture was worth seeing for one reason or another; a festival, in short, of much more consistent level with fewer peaks, perhaps, but certainly fewer shocking depths.

Moreover, the entries from the eleven countries competing were divided into two sections: 1st XI and Colts, as it were, for the established directors showed