

Mysticism and religious harmony 神秘主義と宗教的調和

Cyril VELIATH

Way to Meaning and a Sense of Universality. By John SAHADAT.
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最近、神秘主義や比較宗教学に関する著作を何点か読む機会を得たが、それを通じて、ウィリアム・ジョンストンやトーマス・マートンのような一部の現代神秘主義者を除いて、大部分の宗教学者が神秘主義の本当の意味を理解していないのではないかと感じた。すなわち、神秘主義は迷信や魔術と混同されており、そこからはキリスト教以外の宗教に対して傲慢ともいえる姿勢を感じざるを得なかった。しかし、これらの多くの神秘主義研究のなかで、サハダート氏の著作は西洋と東洋双方の宗教的伝統に対する深い理解とともに、諸宗教に対する著者の寛容さを感じさせる好著として高く評価することができる。

この著作の中でサハダート氏は、この世界には人間に救いを約束するさまざまな宗教があること、そして、それぞれの宗教をお互いに対立し合うものとしてではなく、同じ神へと導いてくれる異なった道であることを認めることの重要性を強調している。これは、マハートマ・ガーンディ、ラーマ・クリシュナ・パラマハムサ、スヴァーミ・ヴィヴェーカーナンダなどの現代インド思想家と共通した思想である。たしかに、現代世界に目を向けると、原理主義的、または排他主義的な性格を持つ宗教があることも事実だが、そのような時代になっても宗教は、心の平穏と人生の意味を与えてくれるものとして、依然として人々から憧れの眼差しを注がれ続けている。このような時代だからこそ、神へ到達する正しい道はキリスト教だけではないこと、そして、仏教やヒンドゥ教のようにキリスト教よりも長い歴史を持つ宗教があることを理解することが重要であろう。

この著作のなかで私が何よりも感銘を受けたのは、神秘主義とは何か、そして、世界宗教をいかに理解するか、という根本的、かつ困難な問題への一つの答えが明示されている点である。いかなる宗教を信仰する者でも、

神秘主義者となるには3つの段階があり、この段階を理解することによって世界のすべての宗教がどのように統一されているのかが明らかになるのではないか、という問いかけは示唆にあふれたものである。

サハダート氏はヒンドゥ教、仏教、儒教、キリスト教、ユダヤ教、イスラム教などの諸宗教について、神話や伝説なども用いて詳しく説明し、哲学、思想史、心理学などがいかに神秘主義をとらえているか、という問題についても、フォイエルバッハ、マルクス、エリアーデ、チリク、タゴール、ラーダークリシュナン、フロイトなどの著作を引用して興味深い議論を幅広く展開している。

この著作は、世界の伝統宗教に関する優れた研究書であると同時に、神秘主義の本質を説いた優れた教科書であり、比較宗教学、及び、神秘主義研究において大きな意義を持つものといえる。

The recent decades have certainly witnessed a wide proliferation of literature revolving around the fields of Mysticism and Comparative Religion, but aside from the classical works of certain ‘ present-day mystics ’ such as the late Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths, and researchers in the field of mystical science such as William Johnston, it appears to me that few if ever have bothered to tackle the subject with the empathy and delicacy that it deserves, for Mysticism and Comparative Religion constitute nothing less than the bedrock of inter-religious harmony, which is indeed one of the crying needs of the day. Viewed from this perspective, Dr. John Sahadat is undoubtedly a notable exception, for not only has he quoted extensively from a variety of sacred texts and covered almost all the major religious traditions both oriental and western, he has dealt with them all in a deeply humane and sympathetic manner, a manner conducive to greater religious harmony and understanding.

On more than one occasion in his book, Sahadat draws attention to the truth that no single religion in the world can claim an exclusive monopoly on salvation, and that the various religions in the world should not be understood as being in competition with one another. Inner peace, a sense of meaning, and the fullness of life are according to him factors that all human

beings still long for, despite the fact that fundamentalism and exclusivism may appear to persist in religion, in one form or the other.

Concerning Christianity too, Sahadat refers to a point often stressed by modern and recent Indian thinkers such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Gandhi, namely that Christianity is one way among many others, and that it is pre-dated by several religious traditions. The Reader is possibly unaware of the fact, that this happens to be a point that the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church has implicitly acknowledged in its document *Nostra Aetate*, wherein it states:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men....

The Church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity, into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve, and encourage, the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture. (*Nostra Aetate*, Number 2)

Since the book by Dr. Sahadat deals with the subject of Mysticism, the Reader I feel assured will kindly condone my digressing a few paragraphs, in order to provide a few general insights of my own into the subject of Mysticism as such, for the benefit of those unacquainted with it.

Mysticism has been characterized and explicated in a variety of ways by a variety of scholars. Johnston notes that William Ralph Inge of the last century cited no less than twenty-six different definitions of this word, and Johnston believes that had Inge lived in the present century, he would in all probability have cited fifty or maybe even a hundred definitions. Underhill portrays it as the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order, irrespective of the

theological formulae under which that order is understood. She goes on to expound it not as an opinion or a philosophy, but as the perfect consummation of the love of God. In her opinion, true Mysticism is embedded in personality, and is accordingly a science of the heart. Dasgupta speaks of Mysticism as a spiritual grasp of the aims and problems of life, in a more real and ultimate manner than is possible through reason. A developing life of Mysticism would be for Dasgupta, a gradual ascending in the scale of spiritual values, experience, and spiritual ideals, a many-sided development, rich and complete as life itself, the basis of all religions, and particularly of religion as it appears in the lives of truly religious men. He goes on to define Mysticism as a theory, doctrine, or view, that considers reason to be incapable of discovering or of realizing the nature of ultimate truth, whatever that nature may be, but at the same time believes in the certitude of some other means of arriving at it.

The word Mysticism was in the past linked up with some of the mystery religions or sects which were prevalent in the Greco-Roman world, and it was introduced into Christianity by way of the introduction of the term 'mystica,' by Dionysius the Areopagite, who was possibly a Syrian monk and a Christian Neo-Platonist of the late fifth or the early sixth century, and who is said to have authored certain theological dissertations (among which we have the *Mystica Theologia*), and who is often referred to by certain contemporary scholars as Pseudo-Dionysius. From this period onwards, the word was not widely used until the ninth century, after which its use was much more frequent. Before the word Mysticism was popularly employed, the expression used to illustrate the phenomenon was 'contemplation,' and Johnston cites Thomas Aquinas as having provided what he considers to be the broadest possible definition of contemplation, which places every contemplative into a single category, whether Christian or non-Christian. According to Aquinas, contemplation is 'a simple intuition of the truth.' Johnston goes on to say that Mysticism is wisdom or knowledge through love, that is to say, it is loving wisdom or knowledge. As love is an activity that is truly and genuinely human, the "most human of human activities,"

so Johnston believes that Mysticism too which is a question of love, is an intensely human activity.

Underhill is of the view that a straight grasp of absolute truth, the "Reality" that lies behind all presentations, is impossible for the standard non-mystical consciousness. There is a point at which human nature contacts the Absolute, and man's true being is penetrated by that Divine Life, which constitutes the underlying reality of all things. She appears to be of the view, that this is the keystone on which the whole mystical claim of possible union with God must rest. True Mysticism is according to Underhill the most integral and arduous expression of life, as yet possible to man. She describes it as at once, an act of love, an act of surrender, and an act of supreme perception. The authenticated mystic she feels is capable of sundering the boundary between human and non-human life, so much so that he is capable of communicating with all reality.

Mysticism has been investigated and grouped in diverse ways by different researchers. Stace contends that two principal classifications of mystical experiences, namely the 'introvertive,' and the 'extrovertive,' have been isolated by different writers under diverse names. The introvertive way, also called the inward way, would correspond to Otto's 'Mysticism of introspection,' and Underhill's 'introversion,' while the extrovertive would be the outward way, or the way of 'extrospection.' The inward way looks into the mind, while the outward way looks out through the senses, but both result in the perception of an Ultimate Unity.

Happold and others speak of a Nature, Soul, and God Mysticism. Nature Mysticism would be the apprehension of the inherence of the One, or God, or Soul, in nature, whereas in Soul Mysticism, the soul is regarded as numinous and hidden, and it seeks to attain complete isolation from everything other than itself. God Mysticism may take many forms, but the cardinal idea behind it is the return of the spirit to God. Happold makes a distinction between a mystic in the 'wide sense' and a 'contemplative.' Though the paramount experience and the effect are the same, there is a

difference in degree between them. The contemplatives are those who attain to a high state of consciousness which is so very frequent and so much a way of life for them, whereas for others such a state can only be intermittent and irregular. Happold also speaks of the Mysticism of ‘ knowledge, love and union, and action. ’ He holds that these are three inter-connected aspects, embracing four inter-related visions, namely the vision of oneness, the vision of timelessness, the vision of a Self other than the empirical self, and the vision of an all-enfolding love.

As one might well expect, the different characteristics of Mysticism listed by different authors, vary in accordance with their understanding of the term. Azzopardi declares however that all the same there appears to be some kind of a consensus regarding the common characteristics, though he hastens to add that even the presence of all these characteristics, is no guarantee at all that the mystical consciousness is authentic. The characteristics that he lists are:

- (1) Ineffability, or the feeling of inability on the part of the mystic to speak about the experience.
- (2) Certainty, or the feeling of self-authentication regarding the truth of the experience, or of the fact of the experience itself.
- (3) Newness of Understanding, or seeing with new eyes as it were the reality that lies before us, and of attaining a new grasp of its meaning and value.
- (4) Unpredictability, or the inability to predict when, where, or how the experience will occur.
- (5) Passivity, or the feeling of being the object of the action rather than the subject.
- (6) Un-utterable Peace, which is a far more profound feeling of peace than we have ever experienced before.

Mysticism or God-experience has again and again been the subject of faultfinding by different individuals, as a flight from the responsibilities and obligations of human life into an hallucinatory world of emotional rapture, which is selfishly enjoyed. Stace however points out to the fact that the sum

and substance of Mysticism is love, and that love is the motivation for all virtuous conduct. This being the case, one must admit that despite the weaknesses and drawbacks due to our human nature, the general propensity of Mysticism must be towards the good. As Johnston rightly notes, the forces of the unconsciousness are deeply stirred by love. Love and compassion are the quintessential elements in any mystical development, and it is a fact that mystics in general have been profoundly god-fearing men and women, who have often submitted their conclusions to the institutional authorities with deep humility, and often at considerable jeopardy to themselves. Some like the Buddha, Mahavira, Francis of Assisi, and many others in the east and west, even extended their love to all living creatures.

Problems such as death, disease, affliction, unexpected disasters, and so on are not solved for the mystic in the sense that he becomes invulnerable to them, but as Stevens puts it, these problems though not rationally solved, are trans-rationally dissolved. That is to say, his profound awareness of the Holy has enabled him to rise above them all, and he leads a life dominated entirely by virtue, for virtue is a mandatory hallmark in any mystical evolution.

Sahadat in his book provides the reader with a brief and thought-provoking description of the standpoints adopted by Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, Eliade, Otto, Tillich, Tagore, and Radhakrishnan, and then goes on to discuss the ways of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, including in the process certain beautiful legends, copious notes, a good bibliography, and excellent suggestions for further reading. What impressed me the most however was his treatment of Mysticism, and the three-level path of the mystic ascent which he proposes as a model, for the inter-religious study of the mystic way to the meaning and the fullness of life. His proposal reveals a deep and penetrating insight into the life of the spirit and an openness to the world's religious traditions, factors that could pave the way for greater religious harmony and understanding.

In brief, what Sahadat has produced is not only a manual on the major religious traditions of the world but an excellent reference work on

Mysticism as well, which would certainly prove a boon to all students and scholars of Comparative Religion.

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