

**BERDYAEV, Nicolas (1939): *Spirit and Reality*, (trans. George Reavey), Geoffrey Bles, The Centenary Press, London**

*In this extraordinary work, Nicolas (or more correctly, Nikolai) Berdyaev directs his highly original thinking to an exploration of the nature of Spirit, which he understands to be a hidden yet powerful motive influence within the phenomenal world. "Spirit and Reality" is among the most coherent and penetrative explorations of the nature of spirit that are available to us.*

*Berdyaev is deeply familiar with the Western intellectual traditions. He has fully assimilated the works of Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel and Schopenhauer, yet remains unapologetically Christocentric in his philosophical position.*

*Berdyaev was born into an aristocratic Russian family in 1874 and died at his desk in France at the age of 74 years. As a young man, he was drawn into the turbulence of the Russian Revolution. In 1898, he was expelled from his university for participating in revolutionary activities. In 1913, he was charged with blasphemy by the Russian Orthodox Church and barely escaped life-long exile in Siberia. Seven years later, his continuing and vocal opposition to the Revolution resulted in his being expelled from Russia as an enemy of the State. The strength of his character was clearly present from an early age.*

*According to Berdyaev, the historical materialism embraced by the architects of the Revolution was a distortion of the nature of the redemptive forces that were at that time trying to find expression in Russia. Peter Maurin comments: "Although the bourgeois spirit had always existed in culture, it had reached its apex in the nineteenth century. Berdyaev saw then that its concupiscence was no longer restricted by supernatural beliefs as it was in the past, no longer kept in bounds by the sacred symbolism of a nobler traditional culture. The centre of life, the spiritual, had been exiled to the periphery. The triumph of the bourgeois spirit led Berdyaev to declare that history was a story of failure. Berdyaev lamented that the will to power and affluence had triumphed over the will to holiness and genius" (Peter Maurin: "Prophet in the Twentieth Century", Paulist Press, 1981)*

*Berdyaev's immense intellectual power was charged with penetrative spiritual insight. His writings reflect a deep knowledge of the works of many of the carriers of the mystical traditions of both the East and the West. A close reading of "Spirit and Reality" suggests that Berdyaev himself walked in the light and participated intimately in the realities that he sought to describe. He experienced the activity of spirit within the world and realised personally the freedom from conventional authority and rationality that deep spiritual awareness can bring.*

*Berdyaev is very interested in the nature of asceticism and offers a perspective that acknowledges the seemingly contradictory impulses to serve as an instrument of the spirit through the vehicle of highly ascetic disciplines and a near-Manichaeian negation of physicality and the phenomenal world, and the cultivation of a capacity for active love of others and of the world as manifestations of divine providence. Yet Berdyaev is surprisingly brash in his criticism of such ascetic works as "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas a Kempis, and in his dismissal of such phenomena as stigmatisation as "unacceptable" to the resurrectionist perspective with which he so strongly identifies.*

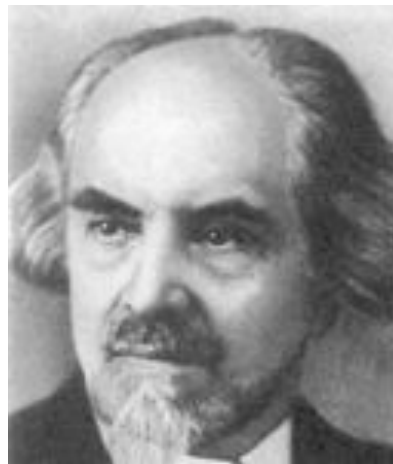
*In such matters, Berdyaev has perhaps failed to understand that not all incline so easily towards his fiercely intellectual style or his illuminism. He seems to have little patience with those who may be given more to devotional approaches rather than the sharply analytical approach that he clearly favours. He comments: "Eastern mysticism is predominantly that of resurrection whereas Western mysticism is mainly that of crucifixion." (p. 142)*

*Berdyaev examines the divide between the self-directed asceticisms that aim to escape from the reality of suffering and the Divinely-mediated mysticism that enables one to live in freedom even while in the midst of the suffering and tragedy that are an inevitable part of human life. He concludes that "Buddhism knows only compassion but not love." (p. 100) He is unambiguous in his view of the place of happiness as a realisable goal of human experience: "There are no very happy men but only moments of happiness." (p. 107)*

*Berdyaev is uncompromisingly critical of the role of those ecclesiastical and secular institutions that claim to represent Divine Will or Mandate in human affairs. He is forthright in expressing his strong distaste for the authoritarianism exercised by Roman Catholicism.*

*Berdyaev's primary task is to offer an understanding of the relationship between spirit and freedom. Above all else, he identifies love as the essential quality that is necessarily kindled in deep and authentic spirituality. Not surprisingly, Nicolas Berdyaev has had a significant influence on such Christian thinkers as Thomas Merton and Matthew Fox.*

VDS, Belgrave  
May 2000  
Revised August 2010



## **Chapter I: THE REALITY OF SPIRIT AND BEING**

Kant was not an idealist in the current sense of the word; his researches were directed to the discovery of reality. In his philosophy are laid the foundations of the only true metaphysics: a dualism of the spheres of freedom and nature; voluntarism, indeterminism, personalism; the doctrine of antinomies; the avowal of another manifest, deeper reality hidden from the world. The German metaphysicians of the early nineteenth century, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, were too eager to oppose monistic systems of thought to Kantian dualism. But Kantian dualism contains a

greater element of eternal truth than monism, which is a type of self-objectifying and self-hypostasizing thought. p 8

Spirit is neither an objective reality nor a rational category of being. Spirit has never existed, nor can it exist anywhere, in the form of a real object. The philosophy of spirit should not be a philosophy of being or an ontology, but a philosophy of existence. Spirit is not only a reality of a different kind from that of the natural spirit or that of objects, but it is an altogether different reality. To make use of Kantian terminology - in which, incidentally, the word '*spirit*' does not occur - we may affirm that the reality of spirit is that of freedom rather than that of nature. Spirit is never an object; nor is spiritual reality an objective one. p 10

Spiritual states do not correspond to anything, they simply *are*; they are the prime reality, they are more existential than anything reflected in the objective world. p 12

Spirit is a personal revelation, but it endows the personality with a supra-personal content. It is also a subjective revelation, but it preserves man from *subjectivity* in the worst sense of the word, from the inability to distinguish between realities and to participate in them. The reality of spirit is also an awareness of realities. Spirit is visionary and beholds realities, spiritual and objective, natural and psychological, historical and social. p 17

In Plato and Aristotle spirit is the highest impulse of the soul, but it is primarily an intellectual force. In Plotinus, for whom spirit is invariably *nous*, the spirit-intellect is an emanation of the Divine One. Similarly, in Scholasticism, in Thomism, spirit is always and uniquely an intellectual force enabling man to establish contact with being. But this is not yet the *ratio* of modern rationalistic philosophy. For Plato the non-material world fails to be the spiritual world. For him the spiritual world is a world of ideas apprehensible by means of concepts, a world of stability. In general, the term *nous* is associated with Platonic dualism and idealism, whereas the term *pneuma* is associated with Stoicism, monism and helioistic materialism. Thus *pneuma* is a vital force, whereas *nous* is reason, the ethical principle. Man's divine content is *nous*. The spiritual part of the human soul is emphasized in Plato. The *pneuma*, on the other hand, has associations with a popular belief in demons and gods who control and inspire the human soul. The achievement of Greek philosophy was to overcome man's dependence on the power of good or evil spirits, to subordinate him to the rule of reason and intellect. pp 21-22

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit remains the least explored and developed part of the Christian theology. For a long time the Holy Spirit was interpreted subordinately. The Holy Spirit is Divine, but there was some difficulty in acknowledging It as God, as a Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, together with the Hypostases of the Father and the Son. This was no accident. The Holy Spirit is the nearest to and the most immanent in man; the spiritual, the emanation of spirit, becomes a human property, a component part of man; through spirit a Divine element is infused into man. For this very reason, spirit can least of all be represented as an object of rational and objectified knowledge. We shall consider this point later in greater detail. p 25

The reality of spirit is quite different from that of the natural world. This reality is not demonstrated, but is revealed by those able to distinguish qualities. The reality of spirit is independent of the categories of thought which leave their imprint on being. It would be an error to identify spirit and being. Spirit is freedom, creativeness. Spirit exercises a primacy over being, the primacy of freedom. p 32

## **Chapter II: THE ATTRIBUTES OF SPIRIT**

A rationalistic definition of spirit would not only be a presumptuous but also a hopeless undertaking. Such a definition would kill spirit or transmute it into object. Spirit defies conceptual interpretation, but nevertheless its attributes are apprehensible. Among these attributes are freedom, meaning, creativity, integrity, love, value, an orientation towards the highest Divine world and union with it. p 33

Scheler does not fully understand that spirit is not an epiphenomenon of the life-process, that a vitalistic interpretation of it is inadequate. In this inert world spirit is energy, dynamism, creativeness, transcendence. Pico della Mirandola claims a heavenly or extra-natural origin for the human spirit. Hence spirit is an energy in the natural world rather than something determined by it. p 33

The principle of causality is inapplicable to spirit and the spiritual life. Spirit emanates from and is reabsorbed by the Divine Essence. Through spirit man receives everything from the Deity and through it he gives back everything to the Deity, magnifying the gifts bestowed on him and creating the hitherto non-existent. p 34

Spirit is timeless as well as spaceless. Spirit is whole and resists division in time or space. Spirit is not being, but the purpose and truth of being. Spirit is mind, the whole mind, Spirit is both transcendent and immanent. The transcendental and the immanent become fused in spirit. p 35

Spirit is everywhere and in everything active as an illuminating, transfiguring and liberating force. Spirit is an emancipating force from the power of the elements, that of earth and blood, that of the cosmic-tellurgical forces which it dominates but does not destroy. p 35

The spirits of the angelic and the demoniac hierarchies are not personalistic in the sense in which the human world and God are personalistic. The natural spirits are also lacking in spiritual qualities. Thus, spirituality is a liberation from the tyranny of the natural spirits. pp 37-38

In the history of spiritual consciousness the error has often been perpetrated of identifying spirit and soul, the spiritual and the psychic. It is a well-known problem of the spiritual life how to distinguish spiritual from psychic states. p 38

Spirit introduces the qualities of wholeness, unity and design into man's psychic and psychic-corporeal life. The soul is invariably fragmentary and partial; spirit alone is whole and universal. Spirit resolves the opposition between the particular and the universal, the personal and the supra-personal. p 39

The abstract interpretation of spirit common to intellectuals, who as a class are denied the full life, is the result of a false dualism of spirit and flesh, of spiritual and intellectual work on the one hand, and material and physical labour on the other. It is the classic heritage of aristocratic Greek intellectualism. p 42

### **Chapter III: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF SPIRIT: SYMBOLIZATION AND REALIZATION**

The fettering of spirit by everyday sociality is apparent in the organized activities of the State, the Church, academics, classes, the family, as well as in dogma as a system of rational concepts, conventions, customs, laws and norms. In contrast to all this we have the subjective flame of the personal spirit. p 51

Authority is the typical product of objectification, the typical product of a mass of human subjects, the typical symbolization of the subjects' spiritual state, of their servility, spiritual immaturity, self-abstraction. The part played by authority in the history of social life is tremendous. But in the sphere of authentic spiritual reality God is in no sense an authority; nor is revelation, for in that sphere there is no objectivity to condition the symbolical illusion of authority. In his uncertainty man seeks an authority on which he can rely; but such an authority is merely the product of his weakness, the projection of his subjectivity, of his failure to discover another, concretely-universal world. As it happens, authority does nothing to free man from his prison. The interpretation of anything in terms of external objectivity implies man's limitation and inability to transcend himself. Authority is the tyranny of the generic over the individual principle. pp 53-54

Truth is essentially spiritual; it not only has no worldly utility, but may be prejudicial to organized life. Truth is an explosion in the world. The pure truth of the Christian revelation would mean the end of the objectified world. But historical Christianity has compromised by adapting this truth to the needs of society. p 54

Spirit is fire, its creativeness is flame. Objectification is the death of the creative fire of spirit. Cultural objectification implies a compromise with others, with the normal world, with social environment. . . . The fiery infinite urge of spirit is made the servant of social actuality. This subjugation of spirit is manifest in the historical Church, in those who follow the letter of the law, in Pharisees, in lifeless authoritarian systems, in the State, in legalistic morality, in formalistic art, in the pseudo-classicism of academies, in the legally established family and its suppression of love, and in other institutions of a similar character. Spirit is incarnated both really and existentially in the human personality, in its creatively intuitive attitude to life, in a fraternal communion with other men. pp. 57-58

The creative subjective spirit is transmuted in its historical forms. The Christian revelation is unrecognizable in historical Christianity. There is little of St Francis in

Franciscanism. Luther has been deformed in the history of Protestantism. There is no trace of Leonardo da Vinci in the later development of technical invention. The historical achievements of revolutions belie their original spirit. Marx no longer stands for the same principles in the light of subsequent Marxism. *Freedom, Equality and Fraternity* have no reality in the societies professing their ideal. The fiery creative spirit is unrecognizable in its products, in books, theories, systems, artistic works, institutes. p. 58

The organized world is founded on socially useful falsehood rather than on truth. This admittedly serviceable falsehood rules the world. In this way the very truth of Christianity has been transformed into a socially useful fiction. Truth, pure truth, can be dangerous and destructive; it has no social utility and is of no practical help to men. Truth can be an upheaval, a judgment, an end of the world. Pure Christian truth, undeformed and uncompromising, might prove to be destructive and anarchical. Truth is spiritually revolutionary just as spirit is revolutionary, but this must not be interpreted in any political sense. pp 59-60

The life of the State is, of course, entirely symbolical. Symbols and signs are the prerogative of authority; and the ceremony with which it surrounds itself has nothing in common with reality. Formalities, decorations, discipline are all the paraphernalia of armies and warfare. Titles such as Tsar, general, Pope, metropolitan, bishop are all symbols. All hierarchical grades are symbols. In contradistinction to them we have such realities as Saint, prophet, creative genius, social reformer. Thus the hierarchy of human qualities is real. p. 62

The objectified world pays no heed to the living concrete personality but is concerned with objects, the reality of which is apprehensible. Men's relation to objects is always symbolical. The same is true of knowledge, scientific or philosophical; formal academism propounds methods of dealing with the object but fails to apprehend reality, for which living intuition is necessary. Mathematics, the most completely objectified branch of knowledge, has evolved a symbolism which is easily grasped by a spiritually disintegrated world. Objective scientific methods are symbolical. Perfect knowledge is achieved independently of the primal realities, just as perfect justice is administered independently of real relationships between men. Men live in the objectified world as if it were a real world, whereas it is actually a world of attributes and symbols; and an objective interpretation of it, although it helps to establish communications of general validity, is still a symbolical one. pp 62-63

The consciousness that anything in this world is merely the symbol of another world has the effect of liberating man from a slavish dependence on this world. It is to perceive the purpose underlying an otherwise meaningless world. It is not a form of objectification, but on the contrary a return of the objective world to the sphere of inner existence. p 64

*Kenosis*, the Divine incarnation, the descent of God into the human world, is a form of spiritual realism to which processes in the human world should correspond. But

symbolical sanctity has taken the place of the realization of the Gospel commandments. And that was the historical tragedy of Christianity. pp 65-66

As is always the case, the transition period is terrifying and torturing; it is an experience of death. The passage from organic incarnation, in which man was at the mercy of cosmic forces, to organized and technical incarnation, in which man becomes the master of the cosmos, is an inner moment in the history of spirit. In this connection, when considering the different types of spirituality, it is important to investigate the relation between technique and asceticism. p 68

#### Chapter IV: THE AIM OF ASCETICISM



The term *asceticism* lends itself to various interpretations and uses. In the first place, it can be interpreted in a broad, comprehensive and formal manner. Asceticism has no immediate solutions to offer for the problems of evil and sin. In the literal sense of the word, asceticism means exercise and may be practised in various spheres and for different ends. It is a concentration of man's inner forces and a mastery of self. Man has need of discipline, of renouncement and concentration, in order to achieve complete

mastery over himself and to attain effectively his goal whatever it may be, spiritual or athletic. Man should not be a slave either of himself, his baser nature or his environment. In this sense asceticism implies man's liberation. . . .

There is an athletic as well as a spiritual asceticism. The former is probably the only form of asceticism acceptable to modern man. pp 69-70

Ascetic metaphysics turns its back on love and charity, on the mystery of the personality and freedom. Schopenhauer at least knows compassion, although he typifies an extreme form of Buddhistic ascetic metaphysics for which being is evil. There is neither love nor compassion, but only austerity in Neo-Platonic asceticism and in Gnosticism with its sharp antithesis between pneumatic and psychic or physical elements. p 72

Christian asceticism, which is in itself in need of being purified from extraneous elements, helps to liberate the body from the power of the lower elements by acting spiritually upon it. In this sense, asceticism is a concentration of strength in the body as an instrument of spirit rather than as a mortification or neglect of the body. But Christian asceticism was penetrated by Neo-Platonic, Stoic and Manicheistic elements and, as a result, there was a tendency for asceticism to practice indifference to and abhorrence of the creature. p 74

Jesus Christ did not disdain the plural world, the human world in all its misery; He did not renounce the sinful world, but, on the contrary, went out to meet it and mingle

with it. He spent His life among men, among sufferers, among sinners; He also appeared at feasts. The Pharisees reproached Him for this, for not observing the rules of purity, for frequenting the impure. The Gospel is the glad tidings of the coming of the Kingdom of God rather than an ascetic manual for the salvation of the soul. . . .

The Gospel does not preach the individual salvation of the soul through schooling or discipline. It is Messianic, it announces the Kingdom of God. That is the essential difference. p 76

A moderate asceticism like that of St John Cassianus aimed at purity of heart. By the flesh he designated not the physical creature, but the corporeal will and evil desires. The necessary degree of abstinence was to be judged by each individual. Pride was admitted as a universal passion. Salvation was a matter of grace and freedom. Man was free and he freely accepted the agency of grace. Such was the teaching of St Cassianus, who stood midway between the Eastern and the Western modes of thought. p 78

*The Imitation of Christ* still holds its place as the classic of Christian asceticism and spiritual life. This book stands above any confessional differences. It is a splendid work: grave and sorrowful in tone, sensitive to the evil of this life, to man's bitter destiny. It expresses an eternal truth. It preaches repentance, but admits that repentance is worthless without grace and love. It calls upon man to examine the depths of his conscience. It proclaims that the loving man has wings, he lives in joy and freedom; that the man who does not value himself too high is free and safe; that communion with God is man's victory over himself. But in the *Imitation of Christ*, as in other ascetic writings, there is no love for perceptible things, for the plural created world. A thirst for knowledge is considered sinful. Man's greatest danger is above all impure love for the creature. All that is not God is worthless and must be treated accordingly. p 81

Asceticism is undeniably full of dangers. It may lead to an enslavement rather than a liberation of man's spiritual forces. It was often merely an opportunist compromise with evil and unjust actuality, a refusal to come to grips with it.

Asceticism is what man can do. He can practise abstinence, he can fast, he can be continent, he can distribute his wealth among his fellow-men, he can limit his necessities. He can attempt to do this at any time. But the gift of love, the mystical experience of communion with God and the other world, the vision of heavenly light, all these things do not depend on him alone. Mysticism as opposed to asceticism does not emanate from man alone; it supposes the agency of Divine grace, the influence of spirit on man. The *pneuma*, like a breath of evening wind, blows upon man and transforms him. It is sometimes said that through asceticism man ascends to God, but that in mysticism God reveals Himself in man. pp 84-85

The bearing of the Cross is a fundamental mystery in the life of this world; it is neither an ascetic exercise nor a form of self-torture. On the contrary, to bear the Cross is a liberation from the darkness and gloom of the world and of human suffering. It is an illumination, a communion with Christ's ways, not a human principle of salvation. The asceticism which advocated self-torture has turned away from the commandments of the Gospel. The Gospel spirit is radically opposed to any

form of utilitarianism or formality such as is to be found in asceticism. The Gospel overcomes the ancient dread of impurity. p 85

It seems paradoxical that the Church should have insisted on a strict and coercive attitude to sex, while at the same time it should have been comparatively indulgent towards sins related to property, covetousness, gain, and the economic exploitation of men. . . . The question may well be asked: Which is nearer the original sin, *concupiscentia*, the sin of the flesh, or an offence against fellow-men, against human dignity, a condemnation of men to penury and hunger? But the Church had fallen into the hands of the governing classes, and therefore its hierarchy was unable to put into practice the commandments about property. p 87

The spiritual life is highly dangerous and full of risks. There is evidence for this in the descriptions of the most remarkable psychic experience of humanity. Trials and tribulations are the lot especially of spiritual men. Comparative security is the privilege of simple shopkeepers. Man's dignity as a free spirit is closely associated with trials, temptations, dangers and risks. The very search for safety and security is an evil temptation of the religious life, a falsehood, a self-delusion. The development of spirituality should be accompanied by increasing dangers rather than by security. Only the middle-classes seek a secure, solid and assured foundation in religion. p 89

Human nature is dual, lofty and base, free and slavish, Godlike and elemental. Human nature is polarized; and that fact influences the whole of man's spiritual life. This dualism is apparent throughout Christian history and assumes the most perverted forms. Christianity ascetically denied the world, but at the same time it adapted itself only too easily to the world. Christian asceticism was the reverse side of its adaptability to the world. p 90

The achievement of Divine simplicity implies not the annihilation of the complex world, but its illumination and transfiguration, its integration in a higher unity. This will involve the appearance of a new type of saint, who will take upon himself the burden of the complex world. p 92

## **Chapter V: EVIL AND SUFFERING AS PROBLEMS OF SPIRIT**

The greatest of all rationalistic illusions is that ultimate deliverance from human suffering and unhappiness will be realized in the external sphere of organized life. That is, in fact, a form of human abstraction. Human happiness cannot be organized; nor can life's tragic contradictions, human fatality, death, be rationally and technically controlled; nor can the essential mystery of life be resolved. p 94

A sensitive awareness of evils and a capacity for suffering are one of the attributes of the spiritual man. Man is a creature who suffers and feels compassion, who is sensitive to pity, who in these ways proves the dignity of human nature. Hence man seeks deliverance not only in the outer but also in the inner world, not only in the social but also in the spiritual sphere. And his longing to be delivered from society

and mediocrity may be even more intense than his longing to escape the suffering caused by tragic contradictions in the world. Man's spiritual history is a search for inner deliverance both from his own suffering and that of the world. p 95

The significance of *unfortunate accidents* lies in the trial of our spiritual strength, in the subjective rather than the objective sphere. From the objective standpoint universal life has no purpose, but the task of spirit is to infuse it with purpose. p 96

In this world there is no apparent rational and moral uniformity of goal. There are, instead, irreconcilable good and evil, unjust suffering, the tragic destiny of great and just men. It is a world in which prophets are stoned and unjust men, the persecutors and crucifiers of the just, are triumphant. It is a world in which innocent children and innocent animals have to suffer. It is a world in which death, evil and suffering reign supreme. Is Divine Providence effective in this world? That is the question of reason - meaningless when confronted with the mystery and secret of love. Suffering is also a mystery and secret. Suffering is a mystery because it can also become expiation. We are confronted with the most torturing problem of human consciousness and conscience - the problem of the origin of evil in a divinely created world. pp 98-99

From the remotest times man has longed to be delivered from the intolerable burden of suffering and from servitude to evil. Man's greatest spiritual flights are associated with this longing. Men of the highest standing in the human hierarchy, men of royal blood like Sakya-Muni, like Marcus Aurelius, have given tentative answers to the torturing problem of evil and suffering; and so have men of humble position like the slave Epictetus, like the carpenter Jesus, who gave a Divine answer to this problem. p 99



Buddhism identifies being and suffering. Evil is also suffering. The realization of this truth, that *being is suffering*, is already a step towards deliverance from suffering, from the bitterness of being. It is salvation through knowledge - self-salvation. Thus Buddhism dispenses with a saviour. It is a debatable point whether Buddhism can be included in the category of atheistic religion. It represents rather an *apophatic* form of pantheism or acosmism. Buddhism is afraid of suffering and renounces the human personality in order to be delivered from suffering. The amazing and touching thing about Buddhism is its sensitivity to human suffering, the great compassion it feels not only for man but for all animals and living creatures. That is the great virtue of Buddhism. But Buddhism knows only compassion but not love; it is spiritually cold and ignores the warmth of the human heart. . . . Love is an eternal affirmation of the being of the human personality. Buddhism abstains from such an affirmation. p 100

The problem of spiritual life does not consist in explaining or justifying the sufferings of life, but in illuminating and spiritually surviving them. The burden of the Cross is such a spiritually illuminating experience of suffering. Man should bear his own Cross

in life and help other men to bear theirs. The notion that every suffering is deserved, and is a just consequence of sin, can lead to a conception of life diametrically opposed to that propounded in the Gospel commandments of love and charity. There are austere ascetics and puritans who are predominantly unfavourable and censorious in their attitude to their fellow-men. They have no wish to lighten the burden of human suffering, which they regard as a just punishment. p. 107

We shall never understand why one man is so unhappy while another seems so happy - I say *seems*, because there are no very happy men but only moments of happiness. Man's entire life, from the hour of his birth to that of his death, is but a day of life torn from the whole, infinite and eternal life. The events of a single day, sometimes very important events, are incomprehensible when regarded independently of preceding and succeeding days. And so it is with the whole of man's life. The doctrine of metempsychosis is an attempt to rationalize the mystery of human destiny, and it may appear to be a more satisfactory and reassuring doctrine than many others. But it involves a denial of injustice and evil in human life and a belief in an all-embracing chain of causality, moral as well as natural. pp 107-108

The history of the world as a whole has a fatal tendency to relapse into a bourgeois state. Christianity, spiritual philosophy, socialism, revolution, all revert sooner or later to bourgeois stability. The bourgeois state is the end of the creative spiritual impulse, the extinction and death of fire. The bourgeois makes use of the creative achievements of spirit. To further his ends he will not disdain any great symbol of the past. He does not believe in the world of invisible things, and does not venture to associate his destiny with that world. He believes in the world of perceptible things; and this is the world which he builds and consolidates, and with which his destiny is irremediably bound. He has transformed Christianity into a conservative, visible institution. He fears anything in the nature of uncertainty or a problem. He lives in perpetual fear that his assured and peaceful existence will be abrogated. He has evolved for his use a special type of spirituality which is not at all spiritual. A voluminous myopic literature has grown up to lull him in false security. The reign of the bourgeois is essentially of *this world*. It is a state to which all things gravitate as if fulfilling a universal law. p. 109

The idea that man is a creature longing for happiness is erroneous, just as the idea of happiness itself is invalid, a mere fiction. Nevertheless pessimism is a profounder attitude to life and shows a greater sensitivity to suffering and evil. Optimism is more superficial and lacks this sensitivity. There is, for example, the optimistic theory of progress which regards every concrete human personality as an instrument of future perfection. Pessimism is a more noble philosophy than optimism, because it is more aware of evil, suffering and sin, of the more profound aspects of life. Christianity is opposed to an absolute hopeless pessimism, but a relative sort of pessimism is in accord with the Christian consciousness. This involves the problem of fate. p 114

Man will be no happier when his life is better organized; his suffering will merely manifest itself in more subtle and more intense forms. Happiness cannot be organized. While this world persists, beatitude is a mirage. The mystics of all ages have struggled

with the eternal foundations of his problem. But mysticism reveals contradictions inherent in the spiritual life and poses the problem of the new spirituality.” p 116

## Chapter VI: MYSTICISM: ITS CONTRADICTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The pontiffs of Christianity, as of all religions, have invariably regarded mysticism with suspicion as a sphere of inner spiritual freedom hardly amenable to the authority of hierarchical jurisdiction. . . . Mystics and prophets are the most free of men, for they refuse to be determined in any way by collective groups, society, or even a religious community. Prophets are distinguished from mystics by the fact that they are the mouthpieces of God and execute the Divine Will to influence the destinies of communities or peoples, whereas mystics are solely concerned with the spiritual world. pp 118-119



The affirmations of Angelus Silesius and other mystics are the expression of a paradox revealed in the depths of non-objectified existence. In the same way the greatest mystic of the Christian East, St Simon, the New Theologian, spoke in terms which are incomprehensible to rational theology and ontology. Among his sayings are: *‘I thank thee, O God, that Thou, Who reignest over all, art now in very truth and unchangeably one spirit with me.’ ‘Suddenly He came and united Himself to me in a manner quite ineffable; He entered into every part of my being, as fire penetrates iron, or light streams through glass.’ ‘I rejoice in His love, and in His beauty, and I feel myself overwhelmed with divine happiness and sweetness. I*

*am filled with light and glory; my face shines like that of my Beloved and all my members glow with heavenly light. Then I am lovelier than the loveliest, richer than the richest, stronger than the strongest, greater than the rulers of the world, more honourable than anything visible, and not only more honourable than the earth and all that is in it, but also than heaven itself and everything it holds.’ ‘I move my hand and my hand is itself and everything that it holds.’ ‘I move my hand and my hand is wholly Christ’s, for God’s divinity is united inseparably to me.’*

Like passages may be found in Tauler and in St John of the Cross. A theological and metaphysical interpretation only deforms these truths of mystical experience and introduces pantheistic and monistic associations. . . . Mystical experience is a triumph over creatureliness - an achievement which cannot be adequately described in terms of theological concepts. Thus theology interprets this as pantheism, whereas it is nothing of the sort, but something dynamic and inexpressible. pp 122-123

The mystical gnosis of Jacob Boehme, the greatest Gnostic mystic of all time, presents almost insurmountable obstacles to rational theology and metaphysics. Boehme differs from Eckhart in that his vision is founded on the Cabala rather than on Neo-Platonism. His gnosis is expressed in myths and symbols rather than in concepts. Boehme is a visionary. He dwells entirely in the spiritual world and his vision is untranslatable in

terms of the objective world. He gazes into depths which the objectified world, armed with intellect and concepts, is unable to grasp. Boehme is also penetrated with the biblical spirit.

pp 129-130

Boehme's vision helped to enrich the thought of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer. But the later German metaphysicians have so rationalized and transformed Boehme's vision that it has assumed a completely non-Christian character out of keeping with Boehme's original intention. His mysticism is essentially Christo-centric. Jacob Boehme and St Thomas Aquinas represent two divergent types of gnosis. Boehme's grandiose structure is musical and symphonic; that of St Thomas Aquinas is architectural, like a Gothic cathedral. Boehme's vision is dynamic; St Thomas Aquinas's is static. The strength and weakness of German metaphysics lies in the fact that it rationalized a musical theme. But by its very nature mysticism is more musical than architectural.

p 131

The mysticisms of all ages, countries and religions have generic characteristics. By their attributes we can distinguish the types of mystics. They call to each other from different parts of the world. There are greater affinities between the mystics of various religions than between the religions themselves. The depths of spirituality may manifest a greater community than objectified religions. Nevertheless there are different types of mysticism, and the most important distinction is between Christian and non-Christian types.

p 134

Orgiastic cosmic mysticism unites distinct, limited and determined human existence with the cosmic soul, the national soul, the terrestrial soul, sexual elementalism in their most universal non-individualistic manifestations. This mysticism is vitalistic rather than spiritualistic, it is expressive of soul and body. But this type of mysticism also aims at overcoming the limitations of consciousness, at breaking away from the domination of rationalism. It is problematic whether this path leads man to superconsciousness or to subconsciousness.

p 136

The Dionysian mysteries are a prototype of these cosmic Orgiastic mysteries. They were not of Greek origin and have in them a deep sense of the chthonic subterranean gods. The human personality becomes dissolved in the Dionysian mysteries, in which man surrenders himself to a sort of Divine bestiality.

p. 137

The Dionysian element is still active in the Christian world. Its manifestations are particularly noticeable at the peak of civilization, when human existence appears to be completely formulated and when every irrational element appears to have been suppressed. Thus Nietzsche rediscovers Dionysius. Polaristic forces are always active in the world. Whenever a culture becomes too formalistic, whenever a civilization becomes too rationalistic, then there ensues a reaction of the irrational forces, of the Dionysian elements. Man longs to commune with the *natural* and the *irrational*.

p 137

Of all the relations the most mysterious and the most difficult to realize in life is that between freedom and Divine grace, between the human soul and Divine or Holy Spirit.

This relation defies both monistic and dualistic interpretation; it is situated outside our category of thinking. Both mystical monism and Quietism fail to grasp this relation. Man's inspiration comes from God and from freedom, from Divine grace as a gift from the Deity, from the primordial, ineffable non-determined human freedom. This then is the great mystery of the spiritual life, which no monistic system is able to explain without doing violence to it. The spiritual life is both dualistic and monistic; it is a confrontation, a dialogue, an interaction, an agency of one upon another; it is, in short, divinely human. In the depths of spirit there is a genesis not only of God in man, but also of man in God; there is speech - not only of God, but also of man replying to Him. There is man's nostalgia for God; and there is also God's nostalgia for man, God's need of man.

p 139



Eastern Christian mysticism is not interested in the life on this earth of Jesus Christ or in the idea of imitating His passions. The idea of stigmata is likewise foreign to it. It is far less anthropogenic than Western Christian mysticism; it is far less concerned with man's complex life on earth, with his struggle in life. The object of contemplation is not humanity, but the divinity of Jesus Christ. As a result, the East has almost none of those confessions, diaries, autobiographies, accounts of the spiritual life of saints and mystics which are so common in the West. St Augustine's idea that a knowledge of God is attainable through a knowledge of the human soul is equally foreign to the East. Thus Eastern mysticism is less dialogical and less dramatic than Western mysticism. . . .

Such phenomena as *stigmata* are unacceptable to Eastern thought. Nor do disease and physical suffering play such an important part as they do in Catholic mysticism. . . . Eastern mysticism is predominantly that of resurrection whereas Western mysticism is mainly that of crucifixion.

pp 141-142

The principles of mysticism and magic are not only different, but diametrically opposed. Mysticism is a spiritual force while magic is a natural force; mysticism is freedom, magic is power. Mysticism is communion with God, magic is communion with cosmic forces generating power. Magic was the first technical means at man's disposal in his struggle against inimical forces, against spirits and demons; it was a technical source of power over the gods themselves. Occultism is related to magic. Magic is never spiritual, although magical elements find their way into spiritual life. Mysticism is, however, always spiritual. Its distinguishing quality is freedom of spirit - a quality denied to magic, which remains, indeed, the servant of causality and determination.

pp 142-143

Prophetic religion is social, mystical religion is not social. Prophetism is masculine, mysticism is more feminine. Heiler will not admit prophetic mysticism as a type distinct from both Gnostic and liturgical mysticism. I personally am inclined to affirm the existence of a particular type of prophetic mysticism. The prophet is a man inspired by the Divine Spirit and conversing with God, a man free from the power of the world, of nature and society, a man beholding clearly the paths of freedom as well as those of necessity. The prophet dwells in his own spiritual world; and therefrom he

judges the world around him. The prophetic spiritual experience is the contrary of apathy, impartiality, or indifference to the destinies of the world and of history. p 144

Prophetism and mysticism are the two principles that can revive again the still fires of the spiritual life. But the new spirituality should include both these principles. There is a note of eternal truth in the voice of the prophet when he condemns a petrified spirituality and its ritualistic forms. p 145

## **Chapter VII: THE NEW SPIRITUALITY, THE REALIZATION OF SPIRIT**

The longing above all for the Kingdom of God, for the truth revealed in it, is not merely a longing for personal but also for social salvation. The symbolism of socially sacred phenomena, such as monarchy, national government, property, tradition, is no road to salvation. Salvation comes only through realizing or establishing truth in human relationships, in those of the Ego and Thou, the Ego and We, through realizing community or the brotherhood of man. p 149

The new spirituality repudiates the notion of the elect. It believes that each man must shoulder the destiny of the world and of mankind; that he must aim at freedom and achieve it as his spirituality develops; but this freedom must not be man's abstraction from the world or his refusal to share in the problems and torments of the world for the sake of his own personal salvation. On the contrary, man must feel himself independent of and spiritually antagonistic to the world in order that he may penetrate into the human world, sunk in nostalgia and in a presentiment of doom. pp 150-151

An emancipated spirituality is preoccupied with universal salvation. Christianity should at once be free of the world, revolutionary in its attitude towards it, and also full of love for it. Hence there are two schools of asceticism: that of flight from the world and that of action in the world. The new spirituality will favour only the second type of asceticism. Some of the elements of this new spirituality are already to be found in the Christian spirituality of the Renaissance, in Nicolas of Cusa, Pico della Mirandola, Paracelsus, Erasmus and St Thomas More. But the further development of humanism did not realize these possibilities. p 151

Personal monastic asceticism frequently sets an evil social example by tolerating social evils and injustice, by sanctifying the existing order of things, and by insisting on passive obedience in the face of falsehood and injustice. A spirituality endeavouring to transfigure and conquer the world postulates personal spiritual activity, a spiritual independence of worldly determination. All the old Christian precepts of spiritual life insisted that man must shoulder the burden of the Cross. But there was a tendency to forget that the cross had a universal significance and application. The Crucifixion awaits not only the individual man but also society as a whole, a State or a civilization. In this light only can we understand the sporadic nature of historical and social processes, the mistake of attempting to interpret them exclusively from an organic standpoint. In its application to social life the Cross does not imply an acceptance of social conditions, but rather an acceptance of the idea of

inevitable catastrophe, revolution and radical social change. It is a profound error to regard the Cross in a conservative light. pp 151-152

The material domination of human life is the result of a divorce between spirituality and the complete life. It has fostered a bourgeois spirit in the affairs of men. Socialism may fail to save man from bourgeois slavery - it may even help to reinforce it - unless it can rediscover spirit. The reign of the bourgeois involves despiritualization, it is a surrender of man to the power of money. Money is the only criterion in a despiritualized world, in a world which has lost all notion of freedom, purpose, creativeness and love. There are two symbols, bread and money; and there are two mysteries, the eucharistic mystery of bread and the satanic mystery of money. We are faced with a great task: to overthrow the rule of money and to establish in its place the rule of bread. pp 159-160



The most perfect authoritarian doctrine - that of Catholicism - can achieve no real security, for no such thing exists. Catholic doctrine has only succeeded in building up a strongly disciplined authority or, in other words, in demonstrating that authority is associated with the social sphere of religious life. In the last analysis it is impossible to distinguish when the Pope is speaking *ex cathedra* or infallibly, and when he is speaking like any fallible mortal. When the Pope was fallible, and he was often fallible in history, it would

appear that he was not acting like an infallible Pope. The implication is that the Pope was infallible only when he uttered infallible truths like any other man. The Pope is infallible when inspired by the Holy Spirit. But there is no criterion to decide when he is so inspired. An even more complicated situation arises when infallible authority is claimed by a council or a synod. A council is infallible only when it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and gives utterance to truth. But there is, again, no criterion for judging when a council is so inspired. Nor is there any criterion of the Holy Spirit. And in any case the Holy Spirit is not a criterion, always a rational and legal concept, but is rather grace, freedom and love. It is independent of any kind of determinism.

pp 166-167

Objectification of spirit fatally leads to idolatry, for it involves the recognition of social institutions like the Church, the State, the nation, and so on as sacred institutions. Spirit is betrayed and transformed into a conventional symbolism. . . . In history there is a constant clash of two antithetical principles: subject, spirit, prime reality, freedom, truth, justice, love, humanity are all opposed to object, world, external causality, utility, adaptability, violence and power. This is, indeed, a struggle between God and Caesar. The Son of God and of man was crucified in this world. And in the same way spirit is constantly being crucified in the objectified world; the objectification of spirit is in fact its crucifixion. p 169

The spiritual life is not determined by rules, laws, norms, or general principles. It is, rather, an inner struggle, an experience of freedom, a clash of opposing principles; it is based on a tragic principle postulating contradiction, antagonism, negation. The new spirituality involves purification from extraneous principles, from all forms of compromise with the average and normal consciousness. Hence the new spirituality should reveal the creative essence of spirit and it should justify the purpose of creativeness. It should demonstrate that only spiritual manifestations are free from falsehood, which in worldly affairs is merely a means to an end. Ascetic metaphysics, which replaced the idea of the Kingdom of God by that of personal salvation, also adapted itself to social conditions, for it regarded the world as being both sinful and immutable. But pure Christianity does not repudiate the cosmic world as such, but only the world of untruth, falsehood, hate, slavery and sin. And, moreover, it insists on the necessity of transforming this world, of discovering the Kingdom of God. As I have already said, the Christian Gospel and prophecy are not fundamentally ascetic, but rather Messianic and revolutionary. Perfection is attained not through concentration on self and the salvation of self, but through forgetfulness of self, through renunciation of self, through interest in other men and, finally, through serving the Kingdom of God on earth.

pp 173-174