

Is mysticism compatible with Christianity? With so rich a mystical tradition as that possessed by the Catholic Church, this might seem a superfluous question to ask. But the term 'mysticism' which for Catholics has normally meant a direct apprehension of God, initiated by God and leading to the closest union of the soul with God, has nowadays been called upon to cover a variety of states of soul which many Catholics would not consider to be mystical at all since there is no direct confrontation of person with Person, no union between the two poles and no love.

Be this as it may, I propose for the purposes of this article to include two well-known types of preternatural experience as 'mystical' because, in non-Catholic circles, they are usually considered to be so, and because the characteristic of each is that the 'mystic feels himself to be transplanted beyond time and space into an eternal 'now' in which death can have no relevance and man's natural condition is seen to be one of certain immortality. This type of experience can be 'extroverted', that is, the soul feels itself to be merged in the undying life of all things; or it can be 'introverted', in which case the soul plunges into its own deepest essence from which all that is phenomenal, transient, and conditioned, falls away and it sees itself as unfractionably one and beyond all the dualities of worldly life. Either or both of these experiences may be what the Zen Buddhists call enlightenment, and it will be the purpose of this article to show how, if at all, Buddhist enlightenment can be correlated with Christian mysticism.

As examples of the first type of experience ('extroverted') I would quote two passages. The first is from the Jesuit Father Enomiya-Lassalle's recent book *Zen, Weg zur Erleuchtung* in which he attempts to describe this strange condition which the Buddhists call enlightenment and which he experienced under the supervision of Zen monks in Japan; the other is from a novel of the Irish novelist, Forrest Reid. This is what the Jesuit, Fr Lassalle says:

'I was as if dead. Everything was, as it were, cut off. There was no longer any before or after. The object of my contemplation and my self disappeared. The only thing I felt was that my inmost self was wholly at one and filled with everything that is above, below, and round about. A boundless light shone within me. After a while I came to myself again like one who has risen from the dead. My sight, hearing, and speech, my movements and thoughts were quite different from what they had been before. When, gropingly, I tried to think about the realities of the world and take hold of the meaning of the incomprehensible, I understood everything. Without wishing to do so I began to throw up my hands and dance with my feet, so overwhelming was my joy. Suddenly I cried out: "A million *Sūtras* are nothing more than a candle in the light of the sun". How wonderful! How really wonderful!'

This is not Fr Lassalle's own experience, but he quotes it as representing what he actually felt as nearly as is possible. These experiences, he tells, come suddenly: 'All

the opposites appear to be transcended. There is no difference between Yes and No. For anyone who has not experienced it, this seems nonsensical; and it must do so. However, anyone who has experienced it, knows what is meant. It is a real liberation of the human spirit – a liberation from the world of the senses and a liberation from the world of concepts which depends on the senses . . . It is the discovery and activation of a spiritual power which before one neither knew nor had at one's disposal.'

Among the Zen Buddhists the experience involves a long and arduous training under the direction of a spiritual director to whom absolute obedience is due; and in the Sōtō sect at least (the larger of the two Zen sects to which Suzuki does not belong and which has not yet been exported to America) a strict moral discipline is insisted on, and, according to Fr Lassalle the end-product is very impressive indeed. He has nothing but praise for the virtues of these Sōtō masters, for their selflessness, humility, and kindness. This is undoubtedly due to the moral training that the Sōtō monks insist on, for this release of spiritual energy, it seems, need not necessarily be turned to good purposes. The experience, moreover, can be quite spontaneous, striking you right out of the blue. This is what happened to Forrest Reid, and this is what he says on the matter:

'It was as if I had never realized before how lovely the world was. I lay down on my back in the warm, dry moss and listened to the skylark singing as it mounted up from the field near the sea into the dark clear sky. No other music ever gave me the same pleasure as that passionately joyous singing. It was a kind of leaping, exultant ecstasy, a bright, flame-like sound, rejoicing in itself. And then a curious experience befell me. It was as if everything that had seemed to be external and around me were suddenly within me. The whole world seemed to be within me. It was within me that the trees seemed to wave their branches, it was within me that the skylark was singing, it was within me that the hot sun shone, and that the shade was cool. A cloud rose in the sky, and passed in a light shower that pattered on the leaves, and I felt its freshness dropping into my soul, and I felt in all my being the delicious fragrance of the earth and the grass and the plants and the rich brown soil. I could have sobbed with joy.'

The essence of the experience is, perhaps that time and space seem to be transcended and one feels that one is living in what Meister Eckhart called the eternal Now; and since time is abolished death becomes what Tennyson called an 'almost laughable impossibility'. This is the so-called 'extrovert' experience.

The introvert experience is like it in that time and space are transcended; but whereas in the extroverted experience the self seems to merge into the world and the world into the self, in the introverted variety all multiplicity too disappears, and there is experience of nothing but unfractionable oneness. The classic exposition of this is found in the *Māndūkya* Upanishad which says this:

'[This ultimate state of the soul] has cognizance neither of what is inside nor of what is outside, nor of both together; it is not a mass of wisdom, it is not wise nor yet unwise. It is unseen; there can be no commerce with it; it is impalpable, has no characteristics, unthinkable; it cannot be designated. Its essence is the firm conviction of the oneness of itself; it causes the phenomenal world to cease; it is tranquil and mild, devoid of duality. Such do they consider this fourth to be. He is the Self: he it is who should be known.'

This state, the only positive characteristic of which is absolute oneness, the Upanishad interprets as meaning that when a man reaches this state, he then realizes that he actually *is* the Absolute: he is the Godhead itself, of which God is only the first emanation, and a semi-illusory one at that. Nothing at all really exists except the One. God, simply because he acts in time, must himself be less than real, less real indeed than the human soul which in its essence *is* the One. If this is indeed true, then obviously neither Christianity nor any other religion has any relevance except in so far as it is a pointer to the ineffable One who we all really *are*. This is the position of the non-dualist Vedānta. It has recently been reaffirmed in its full rigour by Swami Vivekananda in the following terms:

'When we have nobody to grope towards, no devil to lay our blame upon, no Personal God to carry our burdens, when we are alone responsible, then we shall rise to our highest and our best. I am responsible for my fate, I am the bringer of good unto myself, I am the bringer of evil. I am the Pure and Blessed One . . . I have neither death nor fear, I have neither caste nor creed. I have neither father nor mother nor brother, neither friend nor foe, for I am Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute; I am the Blissful One, I am the Blissful One. I am not bound by either virtue or vice, by happiness or misery. Pilgrimages and books and ceremonies can never bind me. I have neither hunger nor thirst; the body is not mine, nor am I subject to the superstitions and decay that come to the body. I am Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute. I am the Blissful One, I am the Blissful One.'

All this is logical enough to someone who claims actually to have experienced himself as the Absolute, the One without a second, of which the personal God whom Christians worship is but the most august, but ultimately illusory, emanation. Reality is absolutely One, and what appears to be other than the One is not really real at all; and this, the monists claim, is the truth to which all the mystics bear witness. Superficially there would appear to be some truth in this, for even the Christian mystics sometimes speak of a certain identity between the soul and God in the mystical union. The fact that this identity is never absolute as it is with the non-dualist Vedāntins is attributed to the alleged fear of the Christian mystics of being thought unorthodox with the horrid spectre of the Inquisition in the background. This, however, is a gross over-

simplification for there have always been mystics in India too who have spoken not of realizing oneself as the One but of a tender love affair with God in which the soul attains to union with God indeed but not identity: the soul is not obliterated in the process.

The experience of absolute oneness in which there is neither time, space, nor multiplicity, appears to be authentic enough, and the Yoga techniques in India are designed to bring on precisely the realization of this oneness. What the Vedāntins and their apologists forget, however, is that the Yoga techniques were originally devised by persons who had quite different ideas concerning ultimate reality – the philosophers of the so-called Sāṃkhya-Yoga school.

According to this school of thought there is no Absolute to realize; so the experience of absolute oneness cannot be the experience of a non-existing Absolute. On the contrary, existence is divided up into spirit and matter which, in their essence, are totally distinct. Matter is uncreated and its characteristic is motion – perpetual flux and change. Spirit, on the other hand, is eternal in the sense that it is totally static, beyond time and space and change of any kind. The ultimate goal of Yoga is to separate spirit from matter, and this, as in the Vedānta, constitutes final bliss. Spirit, however, is not one, but many. There is an infinite number of souls each by nature eternal and independent both of matter and of all other souls and of God (for the Sāṃkhya-Yoga admits of a God of sorts who differs from all other souls only in that he is never involved in matter). For reasons that are never explained the souls get involved in matter and are incarnated into it. Salvation means the final release of the soul from matter and the return to a state of timeless isolation which is at the same time perfect bliss. Each soul is in a sense an absolute on its own, free, independent, and autarchic: and this is how the experience of introverted mysticism is to be interpreted. The soul is identical with nothing but itself: it is certainly not identical with the Absolute or the Godhead from which the creator proceeds. Nor is there any question of union with God: you use God as an object of contemplation, simply as something on which to concentrate your mind which is the beginning of the process of the realization of the oneness of your own deep self. Once you have done this, God too, like everything else will disappear from your vision.

All this, one might well object, does not sound at all like Christian mysticism; and one would be right, since neither in the Vedānta nor in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga is there any mention of love, and love is of the very essence of Christian mysticism, and love necessarily implies duality – there must be a lover and a beloved. Christian mysticism however, does know of the existence of a deep, 'transcendent' self, though until quite recently this has not been much emphasized. Recently, however, the American Cistercian, Thomas Merton, has re-affirmed this eternal, non-temporal self, which

earlier mystics had identified with the image of God which every human soul bears within him. He speaks of the two selves of man, the transcendent and the empirical, and what he says on the subject exactly corresponds to what the Indian theists have to say:

'Contemplation', he writes, 'is not and cannot be a function of this external self. There is an irreducible opposition between the deep, transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. We must remember that this superficial "I" is not our real self. It is our "individuality" and our "empirical self" but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. (It is interesting to note in passing that "person" is precisely what the Sāṃkhya-Yoga calls this transcendent self). This "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this "I" is really "not I" and the awakening of the unknown "I" that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself. It cannot even say "I" with the assurance and the impertinence of the other one, for its very nature is to be hidden, unnamed, unidentified in the society where men talk about themselves and about one another. In such a world the true "I" remains both inarticulate and invisible, because it has altogether too much to say – not one word of which is about itself.'

This self, the image of God in man, is plainly the same as the timeless individual soul of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga; and according to Merton this true self which subsists eternally before the eyes of God, is only the first thing we must realize before we are even in a fit state to draw near to God himself. 'To reach one's real "self"', he writes, 'one must be delivered . . . from the illusory and "false" self whom we have created by our habits of selfishness and by our constant flights from reality. In order to find God, whom we can only find in and through the depths of our own soul, we must first find ourselves.' Finding your true self, however, does not mean that you have thereby found God or the Godhead as the non-dualist Vedāntins maintain: on the contrary, it is the beginning, not the end of the journey. For 'if you succeed in emptying your mind of every thought and every desire', Merton writes, 'you may indeed withdraw into the centre of yourself and concentrate everything within you upon the imaginary point where your life springs out of God: yet you will not really find God. No *natural* exercise can bring you into vital contact with him. Unless he utters himself to you, and speaks his own name

in the centre of your soul, you will no more know him than the stone knows the ground upon which it rests with inertia.'

According to Merton, both the pantheistic experience of feeling that the self is All and that All is the self, and the experience of pure oneness are only preliminaries to the second stage on the authentic mystical ascent – only what the medievals called the *via purgativa*. The second stage depends entirely on the grace of God, and this brings you into direct and personal confrontation with him. There is, however, a still further stage, and that is the actual *unio mystica*, and in describing this, theistic mystics will often themselves use language which seems to imply that all distinction between God and the soul has been swept away. Of this experience Thomas Merton himself writes:

'The inmost self is beyond the kind of experience which says "I want", "I love", "I know", "I feel". It has its own way of knowing, loving, and experiencing which is a divine way and not a human one, a way of identity, of union, of "espousal", in which there is no longer a separate psychological individuality drawing all good and all truth towards itself, and thus loving and knowing for itself. Lover and Beloved are "one spirit".'

The difference between this final mystical union with God in which God empties the personality of all that is specifically human and 'natural' and fills it with the supernatural and divine, however – the difference between this and the experience of pure oneness we find among the Hindus, is that in the first case there has never been any question of love – there has never been a second to love and with whom to be united, whereas in the latter case the whole process is accompanied with an intense yearning, at times intensely painful, for the divine Beloved. The experiences are easily distinguished in theory; but it is not always so easy to distinguish them in practice. Oddly enough it is among the Hindus who, more than anyone else, developed a mysticism of the soul in its eternal isolation, that we find the distinction most clearly made. This is astonishing, for once one has realized the absolute oneness of the transcendent self, it is natural, almost inevitable, it appears, to mistake this absolute unity for the unity of Being itself – for the unity of the Godhead. In this state the newly discovered transcendent self, secure in the knowledge that it cannot die, is almost bound to think that it is the Eternal *tout court*, that is, God.

Martin Buber succumbed to this temptation and only later realized his mistake. Without knowing it he moved from an extreme Vedāntin to a Sāṃkhya-Yoga position. His analysis of his experience is extremely interesting and important for anyone seriously interested in mysticism. This is what he says:

'Sometimes I hear it said that every *I and Thou* is only superficial, deep down word and response cease to exist, there is only the primal being unopposed by another. We should plunge into the silent unity, but for the rest leave its relativity to the life to

be lived, instead of imposing on it this absolutized *I* and absolutized *Thou* with their dialogue.

'Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seem to have fallen away from us and we experience an undivided unity. But I do not know – what the soul willingly imagines and indeed is bound to imagine (mine too once did it) – that in this I had attained to a union with the primal being or the godhead. That is an exaggeration no longer permitted to the responsible understanding. Responsibly – that is, as a man holding his ground before reality – I can elicit from those experiences only that in them I reached an undifferentiable unity of myself without form or content. I may call this an original pre-biographical unity and suppose that it is hidden unchanged beneath all biographical change, all development and complication of soul. Nevertheless, in the honest and sober account of the responsible understanding this unity is nothing but the unity of this soul of mine, whose "ground" I have reached, so much so, that, beneath all formations and contents, my spirit has no choice but to understand it as the groundless. But the basic unity of my own soul is certainly beyond the reach of all the multiplicity it has hitherto received from life, though not in the least beyond individuation, or the multiplicity of all the souls in the world of which it is one – existing but once, single, unique, irreducible, this creaturely one: one of the human souls and not the "soul of the All"; a defined and particular being and not "Being"; the creaturely basic unity of a creature, bound to God as in the instant before release the creature is to the *creator spiritus*.'

Mysticism is a tricky subject, and, as Buber says, there is a fearful danger that the soul, once it has discovered its real, 'transcendent' self which is deathless in the sense that it does not have its being in time and therefore cannot die, will mistake itself for God. This is continually happening in the history of mysticism, and is particularly noticeable among the Muslims; and this is theologically what you would expect.

For the Muslims there is no God but the one God and he alone is Eternal. As the *Koran* says: 'Everything perishes save his face'. The mystic, however, has the experience which carries with it an authority which brooks no denial, that he, in his inmost essence, is eternal, deathless, and timeless. Since, then, his theology teaches him that nobody and nothing is eternal but God and that it is the height of impiety to associate anything at all with God, it must follow that, since he has actually experienced himself as being eternal, he must therefore *be* God; and this in turn leads philosophically to an extreme monism.

The Buddhists, on the other hand, did not believe either in a personal God or an impersonal Absolute. Their approach to mysticism was purely empirical. Like all Indian religions they conceived of salvation as liberation from our human condition

as such, that is to say, our finite existence which is bounded by space and time. Salvation means to break through this time-space barrier, and the Buddha's teaching is the one sure way that will enable you to do so. The Buddha never commits himself in any positive way on the nature of *nirvāna* except that it is an unconditioned form of existence, beyond time, a state of perfect peace and rest. And in this respect there is no incompatibility between Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism tells fallen man how he can realize himself as the very image of God, though of course, no such terminology is used; and it does so in the best possible way; for it teaches that this image can only be restored by complete detachment from the things of this world and by the exercise of the virtues of non-violence, compassion, self-denial, and self-giving. For the Buddhist these virtues which are, in fact, the virtues of the Sermon on the Mount, must in the long run lead to enlightenment or *nirvāna* because the practice of them leads slowly to the destruction of what Thomas Merton calls the false, 'empirical' self. This man can achieve by his own efforts without recourse to divine grace of which in any case the Buddha knew nothing.

God, however, works in a mysterious way; for both in Hinduism and in Buddhism, we find that mysticism moves on from the ideal of the passionless peace of *nirvāna* to that of a living and loving relationship with a personal God. In Hinduism this is very much more marked than in Buddhism; but it is there in Buddhism too, for in the course of the centuries the Buddha who had never claimed to be more than a man was himself deified: the Buddha's Body of Eternal Law became the Absolute from which all things proceeded and which in turn pervaded all things, and in the *Lotus of the True Law* the very ideal of *nirvāna* is called in question.

It is frequently alleged that Buddhism denies any such thing as a self. I think this is untrue, but this is no place to argue it out. It is certainly true that he denied all reality to what has been called the 'empirical' self, the *ego* of everyday experience, but he did not deny the reality of the transcendent self which has its habitat in *nirvāna*. On the nature of this self, however, he refused to speculate. He certainly did not identify it with the Absolute as the Vedāntins did, nor did he think of it as an isolated monad as the Sāṃkhya-Yogins did: he just did not commit himself. All that he would say was that it was deathless, timeless, unborn, and uncompounded. This honest and agnostic vagueness, however, had its disadvantages, for if the world and the empirical selves of human beings was totally without substance, it followed logically that once *nirvāna* had been achieved, the man so liberated was now totally detached from the world, and being detached and seeing the unsubstantiality of all things, he had no motive to take any further part in a life which he now understood to be both unreal and meaningless. The Buddha, himself, however, had taken a very different course. Once he had achieved enlightenment he made it his earnest business to make the gospel known and



to bring enlightenment to all who were ready to listen. In this there was a serious dichotomy between his theory and practice. This the Mahāyānists who became influential some five hundred years after his death, came to realize, and once they had realized it they proceeded to transform his doctrine.

For them the Buddha was now God, the Self-subsistent and Highest Lord, and as Gautama he had become incarnate on earth. He is also the Father of all creatures and loves them with a tender compassion. In his stay on earth he had proclaimed the law by which men could infallibly win through to *nirvāna*, but in the *Lotus Sūtra* he appears in a glorified body to a concourse of supernatural beings, gods and men, and delivers himself of a totally new revelation, and that was that *nirvāna* is only a step on the way to perfect enlightenment which consists in becoming a Buddha oneself, that is, in participating in the nature of the Celestial Buddha who is himself God. When this doctrine is announced, many monks of the older dispensation who had already attained their *nirvāna*, left the assembly. The Buddha, however, did not attempt to stop them. 'Now, in this congregation', he said, 'I am free from twigs and weeds, and have none but the true and real. It is good that men of such overweening haughtiness should have gone away.' For, the text goes on to say, 'the root of sin was deep in them, and their haughty spirit was so enlarged that they imagined they had already attained'. *Nirvāna* is thus dismissed as being only a step on the way: further progress is only possible by faith in the infinite grace of the Celestial Buddha, and this will lead you to perfect enlightenment and the perfect wisdom of Buddhahood.

But what is this perfect wisdom which is so infinitely superior to the *nirvāna* of the older dispensation? After describing the virtues, including enlightenment itself, which lead up to this perfect wisdom, the author rather disconcertingly tells us that all virtues and all things are devoid of essence as a plantain is of pith; they are like magic or a dream. In reality there is neither bondage nor liberation; nothing really exists except the Buddha's Body of Eternal Law. 'All virtues and all things are the same; all things that are the same are forever identical. He who knows this, knows *nirvāna*, deathlessness, and peace.'

This looks very like a reversion to nature mysticism in which the self merges into the All and the All into the self. And yet, so strongly does the *Lotus Sūtra* insist on the immeasurable difference between the defective *nirvāna* of the older dispensation and the perfect *nirvāna* of the new that we are entitled perhaps to interpret this passage in accordance with the general trend of the *Sūtra*, for 'emptiness' which, oddly enough, is the word usually used to describe the Absolute is itself reckoned among the virtues that lead to the final Buddha-wisdom. The author would, then, seem to mean that in the ultimate Void or emptiness which is at the same time the perfection of wisdom, all virtue, including the supreme virtues of the Māhayāna – self-giving, morality, long-

suffering, fortitude, contemplation, and wisdom itself – exist in an absolute state, compared to which their earthly manifestations are indeed no more than a dream – rather like the ideas of Plato, at one and identical with the Absolute (for the Void, being empty of all that is relative *is* the Absolute). The Buddhist void, then, can be likened to the Christian God who contains in himself all perfections to a superlative degree. In him there is neither defect nor diminution; and this is I think, true of the *Lotus Sūtra*, if not of the Mahāyāna in general.

In the Mahāyāna, and particularly in the *Lotus Sūtra*, Buddhism draws remarkably near to Christianity. Its mysticism too is almost exactly that of Thomas Merton. Soul mysticism is sharply distinguished from the mysticism of the love of God, the former being considered a very poor thing when compared to the latter.

In Hinduism we find exactly the same thing happening. Brahman, the timeless Absolute, with which the *ātman*, the transcendent self, is in some sense identical, is in the later Upanishads and *Bhagavad-Gītā* considered to be inferior to God. There is a realm of spirit which is timeless and changeless on the one hand, and there is the world of matter and mind on the other. Liberation or salvation consists in shaking off matter and becoming or entering into Brahman. This, the non-dualists Vedāntins as well as the Sāṃkhya-Yogins thought was as far as it is possible to go; indeed they were bound to think so, for, as Martin Buber says, the experience of the unfractionable unity of the transcendent self can scarcely not be interpreted as identity with the Godhead. It is indeed, the ultimate stage it is possible to reach through one's own natural powers without the intervention of the grace of God. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* and even more the theistic commentators on it make this abundantly clear. Worship and loving devotion to God does not cease once you have reached *nirvāna* unless, of course, this worship was performed simply because it was laid down by the religious law and with no real love of God in it. On the contrary it is only when the soul has passed out of space and time and has detached itself completely from all things temporal that God will awaken in the soul a yearning for himself. This, for the Hindus, was a real and astounding revelation, for the earlier ideal had been, as it had been for the Buddhists, the stilling of all the passions, the good ones as well as the bad, love as well as hate. How strange it must have seemed that God should now intervene and demand the love of man. A South Indian text speaks of this reorientation of the soul in this way:

'Through cessation of all inclination to other things and the increase of longing for God *in a timeless and spaceless manner*, and through the pangs of separation in not realizing him constantly, he considers himself as a woman, and through the pangs of love loses his consciousness.' This might well have been written by a Christian mystic, for the soul is the bride of Christ and as such essentially feminine, and Eckhart

too says that the soul must become a woman in its relationship to God.

Mysticism, then, taken as a whole, is wholly consonant with Christianity. The only type of mysticism that is at variance with it is the monistic variety which considers that the unfractionable oneness the soul experiences in certain mystical states is absolute identity with the Ground of all Being, with a Godhead that is higher than God. This is the great mystical heresy, and in so far as Eckhart seemed to preach it, he was condemned by Pope John XXII.

Christianity, moreover, is the ideal framework for mysticism, for the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ can be mystically interpreted. 'Through the mystery of this water and wine, grant us that we may be sharers in the divinity of Him, who condescended to share in our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord,' we read in the Catholic Mass; and this is precisely what mysticism is about. Mystically interpreted the crucifixion of Christ represents not only the destruction of the empirical self but of the transcendent one too, for the image of God, however well it may have been polished, is still marred and subject to spiritual pride, and this too has to be slain. With the resurrection the God-image emerges finally purified, and with the ascension the human soul, like the human soul of Christ, ascends to and is united with the Father.

Monism is to mistake the individual human soul in its timeless essence for the Godhead, and, deceived by the unfractionable unity it has discovered in itself, it refuses to concede that there can be relationships and diversity in the eternal, timeless world. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity might have been expressly revealed to refute this error. If there are relationships within the Godhead itself, then surely there must be relationships between God and the soul, and between one soul and another.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism tend to describe the Absolute in negative terms: they tell us nothing about God. The Hindus, indeed, have intuitions about God and in their truly mystical writing very profound ones; but the God of mystical experience (whom the mystics themselves prefer to call the 'Lord') is inevitably bound up with either Shiva or Vishnu, mythological gods whose exploits are not always edifying. In Christ the mystical and the moral meet as they do in no other religion.