

The Sacrifice of God in the Vedas And Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Three concepts and their relationship to one another within the field of comparative philosophy of religion are explored: the Vedic theology of sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the philosophical implications of the Big Bang theory.

Tapas (burning, tormenting, heat and penance) is a crucial term of the Vedic cosmology. The Rig-Veda states: "What was surrounded by the void that One was born through the power of heat (*tapas*)."¹ Similarly, the *Big Bang* is a cosmological phenomenon of physical nature. To Vedic thinkers, *consciousness (cit)* is the cause of the *Big Bang*, not its product. For "at the beginning *love* took in what was the first seed of *mind*. Thus, the Sages who searched their heart with the hymn found the bond of Being with Non-Being."² *Love* and *mind* imply a *consciousness* that must have pre-existed the emergence of Being and Non-Being. We may see the *Big Bang* as the self-immolation of the Person, the *Lord of Creatures (Puruṣa-Prajāpti)*, who emits *fire* and becomes its *fuel*.³ Thus, the post-*Big Bang* emergence of *time* and *space* may be seen as combustion triggered by *consciousness* and making *sacrifice* possible. In consequence of Jesus' words, "I and the Father are one,"⁴ *His* self-sacrifice also acquires a *creative character* being a redemptive repetition within the *time* of the creative sacrifice, and through the revelation of the fact that it has been the death of *the Person* that made it possible for *Him* to make beings the eaters of food and *Himself* to become their food.⁵

INTRODUCTION

It is rather daring to carry on a debate that has already lasted for over a century, and in which stalwarts of world reputation such as Kittel (1872), Levi (1898) and Panikkar (1964) have taken part. One may feel that Praseed (2009) had the last word when exploring all substantial opinions that have been presented about the Vedic Sacrifice and the Eucharist compared. The bibliography attached to his study counts 32 pages! However, since Aguilar's (1976) question, and quoted by Praseed (2009, 294), as to whether the two concepts can be fully homologated, is still valid, I feel justified in presenting my opinion. The Vedic Vision of Genesis, which is the origin of the universe as described in the *Puruṣasūkta*, should be questioned in the light of Eucharist with the Old Testament on one side and the idea of the Big Bang formulated by modern cosmology on the other.

¹ *Rig-Veda*. I.129.3.

² *Rig-Veda*. I.129.4.

³ *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa*. II.2.9.1--10.

⁴ In John 10:30, Father is being equated with the *Puruṣa* of the *Rig-Veda*.

⁵ John 6:35; Matt. 26:26.

It certainly may be construed as unjustified temerity on the part of an Indologist, who is neither a theologian nor an astrophysicist, but encouraged by the late Pope John Paul II⁶, I do it with a hope that the reaction of specialists in these fields will enable me to remove all possible misinterpretations.

All agree that an Absolute Being can be only one; if at all any such category can be applied to it. This conviction was aptly expressed by the Vedic seers saying, "One Being the wise variously name."⁷ This idea of "oneness" of Being is also not alien to other prophetic traditions, including the Judeo-Christian one. The most divisive problem is the way that Being is defined and consequently understood. The formula quoted above may be conveniently placed just between the apophatic and kataphatic theological approach, leaving quite a broad scope of the search of an ever more adequate understanding of that Being.

If Christians are to take the dictum of Jesus Christ seriously that, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me,"⁸ then it is justified to ask why, in that very way, we meet other religions and gain ever more precise scientific knowledge about the nature of

⁶ "My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems. In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind. The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures. The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today's engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defense of the uniqueness and originality of Indian thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions." Vatican. 1998. "Encyclical letter *Fides Et Ratio* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason." Accessed January 2, 2015.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.

⁷ When Griffith (1973, 113) looks at *Rig-Veda*. I.164.46. he apparently takes the word *Sat*, which denotes Being-Truth, as the verb *is*.

⁸ Bible Study Tools. 2014. "John 14:6 (The Latin Vulgate)." Accessed September 20.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/vul/john/14-6.html>.

our material world and of its origin? I trust that it gives us a better, though probably never complete, knowledge of the way, the truth and the life, though under one condition that following Saint Paul, who says that we know in part, and we prophesy in part⁹, we reconcile with the idea that what is available to us in the Judeo-Christian revelation does not completely exhaust the matter and that human capacity for grasping the absolute truth is also limited. Panikkar (1964, 14) states that the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity would be easier, "if only Christianity would give up its claim of exclusiveness and, in consequence, its pretension of being ultimate." This is confirmed by no lesser an authority than that of Saint Paul, according to whom: "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known."¹⁰ Consequently, it means that there is practically an endless scope to strive for ever more precise knowledge of the nature of, among others, the act of creation, but being aware that only "then we shall know fully." The Good News about the incarnation of God, in the case of Christians, indicates the direction in which we may go and certainly does not forbid further enquiry. Thus, there is scope for the new theological approach. The said direction to our mind is demarcated by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, an unprecedented scale of religions not only demands adequate enquiry but also enhances research by bringing into discussion ideas that until now were absent in the Judeo-Christian discourse. It is indeed because of Hindu spirituality that we suggest that the sacrifice of Jesus may not just be considered a redemptive one. It should also be taken for the redemptive repetition in time and space of the creative sacrifice of the Father as Person (*Puruṣa*). Moreover, as such, it may also be considered non-contradictory concerning modern cosmogony. Such an approach is justified by the fact that according to Vagaggini (2005, 168),

in the past the original Christian message was interpreted and developed in Hellenistic terms, although earlier it had been interpreted strictly in Hebrew terms. Later on, after the period of the New Testament, it again was given an even fuller form and from the Catholic point of view that process had been completed without deformation of the original message. Thus, if this was so in the past, therefore there is no reason it should not be done even today."

Therefore, a certain very special kind of homogeneity is postulated between three concepts

⁹ Ebible. 2008. "Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians." 13:9--13:12. Accessed October 19, 2014. <http://ebible.org/web/1Cor.htm>.

¹⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2014. "1 Cor. 13:12." Accessed December 19. <http://www.usccb.org/bible/1corinthians/13>.

within the fields of comparative philosophy of religion: the Vedic sacrifice, the Christ's sacrifice and the philosophical implications of the Big Bang cosmological theory.

Tapas (burning, tormenting pain, heat and penance) is in this context a crucial term of the Vedic cosmology. The Rig-Veda states: "What was surrounded by the void that One was born through the power of heat (*tapas*)."¹¹ Similarly, the *Big Bang* is a cosmological phenomenon of physical nature, which tallies well with the Vedic vision of the said creative heat (*tapas*). We should remember that according to Vedic thinkers, *consciousness* (*cit*) is the cause of the emission of that heat, not its product (Crangle 1994, 55). For "at the beginning *love* took in what was the first seed of *mind*. Thus, the Sages who searched their heart with the hymn found the bond of Being with Non-Being." *Love* and *mind* imply *consciousness*, which had generated that heat, i.e., *tapas* must have preceded the emergence of the distinction of Being and of Non-Being and in consequence, the expansion of the universe (Jurewicz 2010, 127). Subsequently, this pattern is endlessly repeated in the form of the creative activity of each and every man. Any act of human creativity is preceded by the act of consciousness, followed by "the heat of toil" (125) necessary to create anything. This especially concerns generating fire. Rubbing two pieces of dry wood to generate fire is an act prompted by consciousness. In recognition of the creative role of fire, the Vedic sages made generating and sustaining fire into a central act of the Vedic liturgy, for this particular human competence connotes man's participation in the creative activity of Being who thus reveals Itself as Person (*Puruṣa*).

So why is this act deemed a sacrifice (*yajña*), i.e., an act of offering oblation in the sacrificial fire? As it has been mentioned earlier, consciousness, the nature of which is cognition, was its ignitor. Therefore, this very consciousness, to realise its nature had first to recognise, i.e., to come to know itself as both the subject and the object of its perception. The notion of Person (*Puruṣa*) was used to designate consciousness after that act of self-cognition.¹² It is this very Person that prompted by Its love for creatures (*prajākāma*)¹³, began Its creative activity by

¹¹ *Rig-Veda*. X.129.3.

¹² The Indian tradition has an expression, "I am *Brahman*" (*aham brahmāsmi*). *Brahman* is tantamount to both Absolute and to the word of Vedas (*Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*. IV.21.1.), which corresponds to the Greek *Logos* as used by Saint John, the Apostle.

¹³ *Kauṣitakibrāhmaṇa*. 6.1.

generating fire for which It became fuel.

Lévi (1898, 14) quotes from the *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (II.2.9.1—10) that:

"Nothing existed in the beginning, neither heaven, nor earth or space. Then Non-Being generated thought: 'let me be!' Then It heated [itself]. From this heat, smoke was born. Then It heated [itself] again. From this heat, Fire was born. Then It heated [itself] again. From this heat light was born [...]. Then It heated [itself] again. Then the atmosphere came into turmoil. Then It cut the abdomen. This became the ocean [...]. Then the 'Ten Oblations One' emerged. The Lord of Creatures is the 'Ten Oblations One'. From Non-Being thought emerged. Thought created the Lord of Creatures. Lord of Creatures created creatures."

According to cosmologists, the Big Bang was not an explosion in space but was an explosion of space, and it did not happen within time, but it also was an explosion of time (Singh 2007, 420). The very first phrase of the passage quoted above tallies well with this opinion. It is obvious that since there was nothing besides It. It, using the eruption of energy-heat-*tapas*, had to "spread" first the time and space in which It could then feed that fire only through immolation of itself, i.e., through Its self-sacrifice. Thus, the Big Bang of cosmologists seen with the eyes of the Vedic sages appears to be the self-immolation of the Person, the *Lord of Creatures* (*Puruṣa-Prajāpati*), who generates *fire* and becomes its *fuel*.¹⁴ Therefore, the post-*Big Bang* emergence of *time* and *space* may be seen as the result of combustion triggered by *consciousness* and, therefore, bestowing upon this act the character of the Person's self-*sacrifice*.

This interpretation finds support in the following hymn of the Rig-Veda:

"The Person who was born the first—he heavenly beings and the sages who should be propitiated—laid on hay and consecrated in order to be offered in the rite."¹⁵

"When they spread this sacrificial rite, then heavenly beings bound this Person—an animal [to be sacrificed]."¹⁶

To more fully understand, one must ask, who precisely are these heavenly beings (*deva*) and what is their role? This term is usually translated as gods. However, the etymology of it is derived from the noun *div*, meaning "heaven" that does not justify this translation. Vedic theology,

¹⁴ Creation is, "seen as a process in which *Agni*, due to a lack of food, wants to eat his father *Prajāpati*." (*Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*. VI.1.2.12.). See Jurewicz, *Fire and Cognition in the Ṛgveda*, 125 and 220.

¹⁵ *Rig-Veda*. X.90.7.

¹⁶ *Rig-Veda*. X.90.15.

contrary to the opinion of Bhattacharji (1984, 129), is not "frankly polytheistic" ¹⁷ for these *devas* are "hither with creation."¹⁸ Thus they are forces of nature¹⁹ led by *Agni* (Fire), styled *purohita*, which means "placed foremost or in front,"²⁰ to open the way to Heaven.²¹ They emerged at the act of creation as attributes of time and space.

As indicated above the most important of them is *Agni*. The hymn addressed to him opens Rig-Veda, the "Vulgate" of the Vedic Revelation (*Śruti*). He is most important for he "gathers here heavenly beings."²² In other words, the emanation of fire in the Big Bang was an impulse that eventually brought into existence all forces of nature operating in concert. To underline the creative power of fire, he is also called "illuminer of gloom."²³ Thus, he fulfils the role of an agent who "divided the light from the darkness" to use the famous passage of the Bible. The Vedic vision of fire seems to link the idea of the Big Bang with the narration of the Bible very convincingly. The most fascinating thought to be found in this hymn is embedded in the very last stanza of it. It says, "So, O Agni, be easy of access to us, as a father to his son"²⁴ (Macdonell 1965, 9). Approximately one and half millennium BC there was voiced a longing for the fatherly character of the creative power. Certainly, the towering figure of the early Vedic exegesis, Person–Lord of Creatures (*Puruṣa-Prajāpati*), is implied here, but for a Christian, it sounds like an expression of hope for the incarnation, following the postulate that men are children of God.

There is one more passage that is important on two counts: first, because it makes clear why the cremation of dead bodies in Hinduism replaces burial, which until recently was strictly obligatory in all of the three monotheistic religions. Moreover, second, because it provides an entirely novel perspective for the interpretation of Christ's resurrection. The passage in question runs as follows: "O Agni, the worship and sacrifice that thou encompassed on every side that same

¹⁷ Bhattacharji (1984, 129) contradicts herself when she writes on the previous page that, "the gods were agents in the creative act."

¹⁸ *Rig-Veda*. X.129.6.

¹⁹ According to Praseed (2009, 56) not all agree with this interpretation of Aguilar (1976, 112--124).

²⁰ Definition from Monier-Williams (1899, 635).

²¹ Vesce (1985, 115) describes heaven as being accessible only after we shake off our bodies, which can only be completely done with the help of cremation fire.

²² *Rig-Veda*. I.1.2.

²³ *Rig-Veda*. I.1.7.

²⁴ *Rig-Veda*. I.1.9.

goes to the heavenly beings."²⁵ To grasp this problem properly we have to refer to the hymn addressed to the Universal Maker (*Viśvakarman*): "Who offered as oblation all beings, the sage and oblationist—our Father rested (subsided?)."²⁶ It is good to remember in this context that according to cosmologists, "after the Big Bang, the universe expanded all the time and was **cooling off** (*nyasīdat-* subsided?)" (Singh 2007, 420). According to the intuition of the Vedic sages, the entire reality encased in time and space is one huge sacrifice, i.e., the process of immolation or combustion. All beings and men in their number are also oblations offered at the time of birth in the fire of existence. Fire, termed here "our Father" and identified with the Universal Maker, had to subside and burn slowly first to grant us countless millennia. Hence, we could become humans in the long process of evolution and subsequently grant to each one of us approximately a hundred years so that we could complete our life-long ritual immolation. By ourselves we cannot make fire to "encompass us on every side" and so "make us go to the heavenly beings." This has to be done by our sons who have to light our cremation pile. For us Christians, there was apparently only one man who was capable of completing it by himself, and this is why his grave was found empty, which proved his identity with the Person--Lord of Creatures!²⁷

While the role of heavenly beings, who personify the forces of nature which bind beings within time and space, seems clear, that of the sages requires elucidation. They are the depositaries of the revealed consciousness in the garb of the Word (*Brahman*), i.e., the Vedas.²⁸ This is why they are called Brahmins (*brāhmaṇāḥ* - "possessing the Word of the Vedas"). Their anthropomorphisation, not unlike that of heavenly beings, is justified by the conviction that they had been brought into existence by consciousness, and they are its emanation as indeed the entire creation is, but with a very specific role to play. In the sacrifice of the Person--Lord of Creatures they are supposed to guard its proper sense, its logic and its correct interpretation. For it is from the same sacrifice of the Person that hymns were created, the liturgical chant, the rhythm of

²⁵ In Macdonell (1965, 9) the author translates *dēveṣu* (in *Rig-Veda*. I.1.9.) as gods.

²⁶ *Rig-Veda*. X.81.1.

²⁷ This intuition may find confirmation, if ever the authenticity of the so-called Turin Shroud will be confirmed. See Antonacci, *Resurrection of the Shroud: New Scientific, Medical, and Archaeological Evidence*, passim; Frale, *La sindone di Gesù Nazareno*, passim.

²⁸ *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*. IV.21.1.

prosody and the liturgy of words.²⁹ The phrase "ya evam veda,"³⁰ which means "he who knows thus" is the key to the role of the sages. Through the word that they have heard (*śruti*) and possessed, they make it possible for the *śrotriyas*, i.e., "hearers" to answer in the affirmative: yes, we know thus.

In this way the hymn addressed to *Viśvakarman* makes it clear that both heavenly beings and sages are Person's agents that signify the assumption by Him the role of *Viśvakarman*, i.e., Maker of the Universe, who is supposed to offer Himself and thus create the universe as his enlarged [mystic?] body: "O, Creator of Universe. . . of free will, sacrifice yourself--enlarging the body!"³¹ "Sacrifice!" here means "immolate!" in the self-generated heat (*tapas*), which is tantamount to suffering and pain. This aspect of the Vedic notion of sacrifice was never *expressis verbis* elucidated by the ancient sages. A hymn in which the pain of ribs is invoked is a notable exception: "Like rival wives on every side enclosing ribs oppress me sore."³² It is of course also implied when quoted in the above hymn, entitled "*The Person*" (*Puruṣasūkta*) that Person is spoken of as an animal to be slaughtered in the sacrificial act. Probably it was apparent for those sages that suffering and pain are the forms of uncontrolled heat that in living beings manifest itself as fever. This brings to the mind of a Christian the dramatic cry of Jesus on the cross to quench his thirst caused by the fever of his tortured body. The suffering and pain of the dying Person are life-giving for he is, "the Lord of immortality, who grows by bread."³³ Murdock (1983, 50) in his incisive study of the notion of *tapas* in the Rig-Veda shares this opinion stating that "it is both a destructive heat and a heat that creates." One would add, like a cooking fire! It is also thanks to Person's death in the sacrifice that "one part of Him remained here in beings and spread in that which feeds on food."³⁴ The same Person as the Lord of Creatures (*Prajāpati*) is the sacrifice and the first victim as well as the sacrificer (Lévi 1898, 29). The testimony of Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (II.4.2.1) from Lévi (1898, 28) is very meaningful here: "The beings approached the Lord of Creatures with respect; the beings are creatures. Supply us so that we may live [...]. He told them:

²⁹ Rigveda. 2013. "R̥gveda-Saṁhitā with Padapāṭha." Last modified April 14. <https://sites.google.com/site/detlef108/rvm10-withpadapatha-t-na-utf8>.

³⁰ Definition from Monier-Williams (1899, 232).

³¹ *Rig-Veda*. X.81.5.

³² *Rig-Veda*. I.105.8. from Griffith (1973, 67).

³³ *Rig-Veda*. X.90.2. The Sanskrit *anna* is the cultural equivalent of our bread.

³⁴ *Rig-Veda*. X.90.4.

sacrifice is your bread; is immortality for you? Is vigour for you?" We can readily subscribe to the opinion of Vescei (1985, 271) that "sacrifice is, therefore, simply the very source of the existence. . . of men and of all created in general." In this light the fact, "that Prajāpati creates by means of his self-immolation" should not be called a myth (174).

The basic difficulty now is to reconcile this idea of creative sacrifice with the Christian theology of *kosmos*. It may be construed that *kosmos* is the Person since he sacrificed himself for the sake of it, making it look like a pantheistic concept. However, Christian theology defines *kosmos* as such: "in Christian theology it is not proper to use the word 'cosmology' regarding creation. Likewise, the word 'world' (*kosmos*, in its Greek sense) when speaking dialectically of the God-world relationship, because without God the world ceases to be *kosmos*. . . The world has no obligatory link with God in it so as to be *kosmos*, whereas creation presupposes an act of God which brings into existence something other than and outside of himself, 'creation,' which is located not in him but vis-a-vis him" (Zizioulas 2006, 253).

Górka (2010, 106) is even more radical in his interpretation of *kosmos*. He writes: "Ruling universally in the exegesis identification of *kosmos* with the entire humanity has to be counted within the reservoir of systematic faults [...]. *Kosmos* is a metaphor of what? Certainly, it is not a metaphor of all humanity [...]. *Kosmos* is a metaphor of the community of Catechumens, who recognised Jesus as the Messiah." We may readily agree with this interpretation as far as it concerns the historical incarnation of Jesus, but the moment we take him as one with the Father, i.e., "as Cosmic Kyrios whose Body is the universe" (Rogowski 1980, 53), any such limitations will not be acceptable and even the term "metaphor" will have to be addressed specifically in an effort to describe physical processes prompted by consciousness.

Keeping all this in mind, we shall try to prove that the Vedic concept is not pantheistic and, therefore, is not contradictory to what Christian theology presupposes. To do that, we should take recourse to mathematics. Remembering that the creation started with the One who was at the beginning and because of an epistemic act of self-cognition heated Itself thus "dividing light from darkness" and consequently creating space as the third aspect of reality. We should carry a very simple arithmetical operation of dividing one by three. We shall see that although three—equals precisely to three-dimensional *kosmos*—emanates endlessly, the One as the "endless reminder" (*anantaśeṣa*) is unaffected in its integrity (Byrski 1997, 125–139). Thus according to the Vedic

thought *kosmos* is from God but it is not God, and *kosmos* does not concern humanity alone but signifies entire creation!

One more point must be addressed. The very same Vedic hymn entitled "*The Person*"³⁵ says that three-quarters of that Person rose into heaven, and one-quarter remained incarnate in beings. If we remember that *Puruṣa* is the Person, i.e., "self-conscious consciousness" that realised its "I" (*aham brahmāsmi*) then Its incarnation in beings will not mean Its incompleteness, as indeed the incarnation of God the Father of Christianity in Jesus Christ did not mean that the Father either remained incomplete in heaven or was absent from there for the time of incarnation. The Christian conviction that God dwells in the hearts of believers likewise does not mean that He, therefore, is incomplete in heaven or absent from there. Consciousness is like a living cell, which never gets divided into two halves but always into two or more complete cells. It is the secret of life! Parents also do not become incomplete when they give birth to a child. To sum up, the creation was born out of the self-sacrifice of the Person, and this became the paradigm of each and every birth, as it is formulated in the Vedic exegesis:

"Verily, of created things here earth is the essence; of earth, water; of water, plants; of plants, flowers; of flowers, fruits; of fruits, man (*purusa*); of man, semen.

" Prajâpati ('Lord of creatures') bethought himself: 'Come, let me provide him a firm basis!'

So he created woman. When he had created her, he revered her below. Therefore, one should revere woman below. He stretched out for himself that stone that projects. With that, he impregnated her.

"Her lap is a sacrificial altar; her hairs, the sacrificial grass; her skin, the soma-press. The two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle. Verily, indeed, as great as is the world of him who sacrifices with the Vâjapeya ('Strength-libation') sacrifice, so great is the world of him who practices sexual intercourse without knowing this-women turn his good deeds unto themselves."³⁶

What happens next signifies the beginning of the great debate that concerns the very concept of sacrifice. Initially, sacrifice was considered a "universal principle of life" (Lévi 1898, 81). Subsequent ritualisation of this idea was exaggerated beyond imagination by Brahmin priests, who turned it into a feat of magic involving the killing of animals and the loss of hectolitres of

³⁵ *Rig-Veda*. X.90.4.

³⁶ Sacred Texts. 1921. "Brihadâraṇyaka Upanishad." Translated by Robert Ernest Hume. Sec. 1--3. Accessed December 28, 2014. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15098.htm>.

milk. Its deepest import and message was obscured, so much so, that there appeared a powerful challenge to it in the form of the Buddhist doctrine of extinguishing the fire that was held responsible for the flaring up of desire, and subsequent suffering. This is how, broadly speaking, the concept of *nirvāṇa* was understood. Prince Siddhārtha (566-486 BC), the greatest rebel that the history of mankind has ever known, decided to challenge the logic of existence embedded in the Vedic doctrine of sacrifice. It was a challenge thrown to the ruthless Moloch of existence, which without our knowledge and will, condemns us to suffer. *Kāma* of the *Nāsadīya* hymn must have been wrongly³⁷ equated with avidity or desire (*tr̥ṣṇa*) and held responsible for generating that fire–*tapas*, which consequently brought forth the cosmos and creatures, which in turn fell prey to suffering and pain. Lord Buddha came to the conclusion that to liberate creatures from the shackles of suffering; the creative, sacrificial fire has to be extinguished (*aggi-nibbana*).³⁸ This interpretation apparently goes against a relatively common conviction that, "nirvāṇa is never compared to the extinguished fire or lamp" (Mejor 2007, 301). In his exhaustive review of the different interpretations of this concept, Mejor (2007, 303) adds, "nirvāṇa is beyond all categories of duality and relativism. Therefore, it is beyond our notions of good and evil, righteousness and injustice, being and non-being. Even the word happiness (*sukha*), which is used to describe nirvāṇa, has here an altogether different sense." Now, *tapas*–heat that is the prime mover of creation, together with *kāma*–love, handle the emergence of being and non-being. Obviously the Buddhist *nirvāṇa* is not aimed at extinguishing the universal fire keeping the universe going, nor any other physical fire. However, Lord Buddha apparently must have shared the Vedic viewpoint that it was consciousness that lit that fire and the entire effort of a Buddhist monk is to control his individual consciousness so that it may not participate in this universal combustion called sacrifice (*yajña*). It is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* 42.9-19, which says that in leaving the last sphere in the process of meditation, the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, one attains

³⁷ Panikkar (1977, 56--7) notes from *Rig-Veda*. X.129.4. that: "The process, according to the intuition of the Vedic ṛ̥ṣi, is one of concentration, of condensation, of emergence by the power of love. This love cannot be desire toward 'something' that does not exist, or even desire coming out of nonexisting Being. . . . Primordial love is neither a transitive nor an intrasitive act; it is neither an act directed towards another. . . .but it is the constitutive act by which existence comes into being."

³⁸ There cannot be any doubt that the basic meaning of the term *nirvāṇa*, which is derived from the root *√vā plus* the prefix "*nir*" and means "to extinguish" or "to put out", as in the following sentence: *mṛ̥tānāmāpi jantunām śraddham cet tṛ̥ptikāraṇam / nirvāṇasya pradīpasya snehaḥ samvārdhāyecchikham* // "Were the offerings for the dead the cause of satiation of the dead creatures, then the oil would augment the flame of the extinguished lamp" (Bhattacharya 2003, 30--37).

annihilation of perception and sensation (304).

What happened approximately 500 years later, far away from India, could be construed as an act of polemics, with the Buddhist attitude aiming at what could be termed as the "zeroing" of existence.³⁹ In the Middle East, in Judea precisely, a man was born, believed by us Christians to be God incarnate, whose mission was to offer himself in sacrifice as a paschal lamb. According to Christian theology, this is a redemptive sacrifice of the Son offered to the Father for the sins of the world. This could be accepted unreservedly were it not for the words spoken by Jesus himself that, "the Father and I are one,"⁴⁰ as well as the words, "'Very truly I tell you,' and, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'"⁴¹ Meaningful in this context is also the text of the Catholic creed, "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, born of the Father *before all ages*. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, *consubstantial with the Father*."⁴² If Jesus was born before all ages and if he is consubstantial with the Father it would be only natural to assume that whatever he did during his earthly sojourn also has a supra-temporal dimension, including his sacrifice. This seems to be very forcefully confirmed by Saint John: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it [...]. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*"⁴³ Most obviously these words cannot refer exclusively to the historical coming of Christ, but before all, to the very beginning, where all things were made through him! All the more so if we remember that his sacrifice is believed to last forever and to be perpetually recreated in the ritual of the Holy Mass. Then it will be most natural to consider it

³⁹ I would hesitate to say that, "the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively 'negative soteriology'" (Pope John Paul II 1994, 85).

⁴⁰ In John 10:30, Father is being equated with the *Purusha* of the *Rig-Veda*.

⁴¹ Bible Gateway. 2014. "John 8:58 New International Version (NIV)." Accessed December 6.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+8:58>.

⁴² Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. 2014. "The Profession of Faith – The Nicene Creed." Accessed December 21. <http://www.cam.org.au/Catholic-Faith/Prayers/Prayers/Article/753/The-Profession-of-Faith-The-Nicene-Creed>.

⁴³ Bible Gateway. 2014. "John 1 New International Version (NIV)." Accessed December 27.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1>.

as an indispensable aspect of God's very nature, not bound by time and space, but as a means of measuring them out! Consequently, his self-sacrifice was very similar to that of *Puruṣa*, made also out of his free will, since he "entered willingly into his Passion"⁴⁴ which could also be understood as a sacrifice tantamount to that of the Father. The Father, in that case, would be identical with the *Puruṣa* of the Vedas, but repeated in time and space in order to dispel ignorance as to the divine nature of food – thanks to which its eaters, all beings, become conscious creatures able to perceive, while men exclusively become able to recognise the godly nature of their souls and their filial rapport through Jesus Christ with God the Father, i.e., with the Person (*Puruṣa*). **In that way, we may construe it as a redemptive repetition of the primordial creative sacrifice.** It reveals the fact that it has been the death of the Person that made it possible for *Him* to become in beings the eater of food and to become *Himself* food for them⁴⁵ and thus enable them to know themselves and to know Him. All the time we have to remember that it has been the epistemic urge of pan-consciousness, which is the prime mover responsible for creation.

CONCLUSION

Praseed (2009, 320) in his conclusion of the "brief confrontation of the Vedic concept of sacrifice with the Eucharist," finds more homological convergences than divergences. One such divergence is derived from the fact that the Vedic sacrifice is the link between creation and immortality while the Christian sacrifice is the connection between redemption and immortality. We would insist in this case that the two perfectly complement each other. After all, how can a sacrifice that is tantamount to the act of creation be at the same time redemptive? Only its repetition in time could acquire such character because earlier the world could not recognize this fact and when men became ready to receive it, it was revealed to Vedic sages. However, soon it was forgotten, even in India. There, people by and large not aware of the fact that *Puruṣa* is the bread of life and that the bond of Being with Non-Being was created from love, not from desire or lust (Panikkar 1977, 57–58). Another most striking difference Praseed (2009, 322) finds is, "the Vedic notion of sacrifice as food to the gods and the Eucharist as the thanksgiving sacrifice." First of all we would like to add to the description of the Eucharist that food was certainly not so much for gods, whom we would prefer to call heavenly beings, but for men, thanks to which men may have eternal life!

⁴⁴ Dublin Diocesan Liturgical Resource Centre. 2012. "Eucharistic Prayer II." Last modified January 16. <http://litmus.dublindiocese.ie/2012/01/eucharistic-prayer-ii-2/>.

⁴⁵ John 6:35; Matt. 26:26.

Besides Vedic sacrifice, as we noted earlier, food is for creatures and men in their number. The question is how do creatures absorb food? The answer is by feeding the *Vaiśvanara Agni*—digestive "fire," which, "must function as Annāda, i.e., assimilating food from the outside world" (Agrawala 1963, 53). It is precisely because a digestive fire is burning in each and every creature and for it to burn, it needs food tantamount to fuel. That fuel to burn, i.e., to digest, needs water (*Varuna and Parjanya*) and it also needs oxygen--air (*Vayu*). Besides, *Agni* is the mouth of all heavenly beings! Consequently, we do not share Praseed's view that we have insurmountable differences, since the basic function of both is the same, and the act of feeding *per se* carries an import of thanksgiving. We would readily endorse his view that Christianity falls short of the vision of "the great cosmic metabolism" implied by the Vedas. However, we do not see any serious impediment in enriching Christianity with that vision, especially in the Judaic tradition, where there is the following notion: who saves one life, saves the world. So, who feeds one life, feeds the world. We would also like to endorse the opinion of Praseed (2009, 322) that *Puruṣa* and Christ, "hold the keys to understanding the respective world views on creation, redemption and sacrifice," but in the light of what he calls Christ-Event we would object to call *Puruṣa* a myth and to omit in the notation of this term capital "P."

To strengthen this position, I quote Saint Paul's letter to the Hebrews: "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets" (Society of St. Paul 1979, 272). The message of Christ – true, He was a Jew – is for all of humanity. Can we be sure that God never spoke to the ancestors through the prophets of other nations? Especially when, according to those prophets, the act of the creation of cosmos seems to be God the Father's paradigm of Eucharist?⁴⁶

Before closing, I would like to acknowledge my predecessors, especially Raimundo Pannikar, whose studies have blazed the trail for me to follow, and whose friendship I have had the privilege to enjoy. Mitra (1987, 132) in concluding his analysis of Pannikar's attempt at bridge-building writes, "...that he does not claim that he has solved all the intellectual problems of universality and correctness, [or] that he has deciphered the Ultimate Mystery. He believes in growth and development. He offers a relational view of reality that can accommodate the modern

⁴⁶ Got Questions. 2014. "What is the Catholic Sacrament of Holy Eucharist?" Accessed December 4. <http://www.gotquestions.org/Holy-Eucharist.html>.

findings of physics, can do justice to Einstein and has certain advantages in dealing with the perennial problem of universality and correctness, although all difficulties have not been resolved." This diagnosis remains fully intact, and since we also believe in growth and development, we dare to insist that Christians treat the task of recognising the Vedic doctrine of creative sacrifice as part and parcel of the Old Testament's heritage. Let it be their challenge for the 21st Century, and let it become a means of making the prospect of the clash of civilisations less probable.

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