CHAPTER IV
RA DH AKRISHNAN’S CRITIQUE OF
THE DOGMA OF THE CHURCH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

True religion, according to Radhakrishnan, need not be and cannot be
organized. For, if any religion is based on systematic organization, it tends to
become narrow and parochial, and it would act as though it is the ‘sole
custodian of faith’. Besides, any organized religion would grant unquestionable
importance to doctrines and doctrinization, which in turn makes the religion
dogmatic. On the contrary, any unorganized or open religion would have no
place for narrow sectarianism, as it would perpetually seek renewal and
reorientation. Open religion thus accommodates within itself any number of
faiths, provided they all believe that the Ultimate is indescribable and
inexhaustible, and that all human attempts to unravel the divine mysteries are
at best approximations of the Real.

Further, any organized religion tends to emphasize external elements
such as ritualism, doctrines, symbols, worship, etc. It would fail to recognize
that Truth is realized deep within the heart and mind of an individual,
Radhakrishnan makes this point beautifully clear:

Worship does not consist in fasts and prayers, but in the offering of a
pure and contrite heart. The musk is in the deer but it thinks that the
fragrance comes from outside and so hunts for it restlessly. God is in us
and we have only to turn within to realise the truth.¹

With such a conviction, Radhakrishnan strongly espouses the cause of open religions, particularly Hinduism, and strongly attacks organized religions, particularly Christianity. In the process, Radhakrishnan questions the basic features of organized religion, notably of Christianity, such as the infallibility of the scripture, the dogmas, the authority of the Church, worship of symbols, ritualism, proselytization, etc.

Radhakrishnan’s views on organized religion should be welcomed, though reservedly, by the Christian fraternity, and his criticisms taken seriously by every seeker of true Christianity, because, Radhakrishnan seems to echo Soren Kierkegaard’s famous sentiment that Christianity is not churchianity.

4.2 ORGANIZED RELIGION - ITS DRAWBACKS

Thomas Paul Urumpackal in an important book on Radhakrishnan points out that Christianity and Hinduism, according to Radhakrishnan stand at opposite poles in the matter of organization. If Christianity is the archetype of organized religion, Hinduism is the archetype of ‘open religion’. While organized religions stress external elements, Hinduism emphasize only internal experience.²

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² See T.P. Urumpackal, Organised Religion according to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. P.XVII. The author of this thesis owes much of the information for the first three sections of this chapter to this invaluable source which minutely assesses Radhakrishnan’s views on the organized religion.
Why does Radhakrishnan condemn the organized form of religion? Thomas Paul makes some pertinent points.³

4.2.1 ‘Failure in Social Obligations’

Organized religions have continually failed to fulfil their social obligations. They have supported oppressors and they

... bless our arms and comfort us with the belief that our policies are just and inevitable. In every stage religion adjusted itself to the follies and cruelties of men.⁴

Also, the main defect of organized religion is the erection of the barrier between the sacred and the secular.⁵

4.2.2 ‘It is a source of Intolerance’

Organized religions claim absolute authority. They insist that their doctrines are superior to all others. Thus, they have become

intolerant absolutions, condemning those who do not accept them to eternal perdition. Religious persecution, inquisition, tortures have darkened many pages of the history of religions.⁶

And also, organized religions invariably breed bigotry. Radhakrishnan declares categorically,

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⁵ S.R., R.F., P.23.
When our minds get incarcerated within the narrow confines of dogma, the spirit of free adventure is checked.\textsuperscript{12}

Radhakrishnan also laments the fact that the individual today is beaten down by organizations. He is imposed upon and brushed aside by his group or party, business or propaganda.\textsuperscript{13}

4.2.5 'Organized religion has lost all its sacredness'

Radhakrishnan is fully convinced that there is nothing sacrosanct about organized religions. They have departed from original purity, lost their dynamic vigour and degenerated into arrogant groups.\textsuperscript{14}

To a question what constitutes an organized religion? Radhakrishnan answers that it is superstitions and taboos, primitive myths and unhistorical traditions, unscientific dogmatisms and national idolatries.\textsuperscript{15}

4.3 \textsc{Dogma: its influence on the church}

No tenet of organized religion was more severely criticised by Radhakrishnan as was the Dogma. Radhakrishnan believes that the Dogma is a pervasive product of the Western mind, and that it is singularly absent in Eastern Religions. The theme that run through his early book \textit{The Reign of}

\textsuperscript{12} S.R., \textit{B.S.}, P.170.


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., P.294.

*Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* is that in the history of Western thought, religion or doctrine predominated and philosophy was accorded a secondary place. S.Gopal, the son and biographer of Radhakrishnan, makes a valid observation:

His thesis [in the R.R.] was that philosophy, taken to its logical conclusion, leads to absolute idealism and, if various forms of pluralistic theism were prevalent in the western world, it was because of the subconscious interference of dogmatic religion with the intellectual pursuit of philosophy. Though he did not say so, Radhakrishnan was in fact criticizing the influence of Christianity.\(^{16}\)

Radhakrishnan was not able altogether to disentangle himself from the view that the contemporary Western Philosophy was enveloped in religious dogma. However, interestingly, when E.S.Brightman, G.P.Conger, D.M.Datta, A.R.Wadia and C.C.J.Webb indict Radhakrishnan of falling into the same trap (of using religion in his philosophy) Radhakrishnan replied,

There does not seem to be any inconsistence between the criticism of interference of religious dogma with the pursuit of philosophy and the recognition of the value of religious experience for philosophical interpretation.\(^{17}\)

In other words, he feels that dogmas should be kept out of the pursuit of truth.

\(^{16}\) S.Gopal, op.cit., P.39.

\(^{17}\) S.R., "Reply to Critics", P.790.
4.3.1 The Nature of Dogma

Dogmas, according to Radhakrishnan, invariably conflict with reason and reasonableness. Therefore, true religion must have no place for dogmas. As he says, eloquently,

Religion is not magic or witchcraft, quackery or superstition, it is not to be confused with out-dated dogmas, incredible superstitions.\(^\text{18}\)

Dogmatic statements are always one-sided and unreasonable. Any religion built on dogma would be something foreign to the spirit of reason, intellectual freedom and tolerance.\(^\text{19}\) Dogmas are always opposed to Truth. Radhakrishnan eloquently notes,

Truth is opposed not to reason or the Greek spirit, but to dogma and to fossilized tradition.\(^\text{20}\)

Therefore, Radhakrishnan would prefer an agnostic to a dogmatist, as he says, "reverent agnosticism" of a seer is better than the "flippant vulgarity with which some dogmatists speak of divine mysteries."\(^\text{21}\)

A true seeker is averse to adopting a dogmatic posture, as he knows that the deepest truths are always inexpressible. He is free from all doctrinal prejudices. Radhakrishnan cites the eloquent example of the Buddha in this

\(^{18}\) S.R., O.S.W., Oct. 1952-Feb.1959, P.305.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., P.538.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., P.318.
regard, who did not indulge in any doctrinal controversies but denounced any
dogmatic theology which purports to unravel ineffable mysteries.22

4.3.2 ‘Freedom and Progress hindered under Dogma’

A devotee should enjoy unrestricted freedom to feel and experience the
ultimate. Unfortunately, Dogmas, according to Radhakrishnan, curtail one’s
freedom to understand the ultimate. Thus, if we blindly follow any one set of
doctrines or dogmas we are binding ourselves to it, renouncing our freedom of
inquiry.23 Then we are putting our minds in prison.24 The infinite spirit
in man is subjugated to the finite form of dogma.25

In his Fellowship of the Spirit, Radhakrishnan describes Dogmas as
dead forms.26 The dogmatists with their doubts of doctrine tend to become
conservative and disciplinary, not progressive and prophetic.27 Dogmatism
is also likened to a disease, which adversely affects human freedom and
progress.28

22 See S.R., G.B., P.43.
23 S.R., "Fragments", P.54.
26 P.6.
28 Ibid., P.325.
If our future is to be saved we must be awoken from our dogmatic slumbers. In his address to the University of Hawaii, Honolulu, on the 9th of July, 1959, Radhakrishnan observed:

We must be jolted out of our dogmatic slumbers if the future is to be saved... The dragon to be slain is the monster of status quo. The enemy is in the seat of power. He is the tyrant who uses to his own advantage his power and authority.\(^{29}\)

4.3.3 'Dogmas breed intolerance'

Radhakrishnan says countless times that dogmas invariably breed intolerance and fanaticism. In his "Reply to Critics", Radhakrishnan observes,

Truth bears many vestures and speaks in many tongues. The spirit of truth requires us to admit that others may also be in the right, as ourselves. To imagine that God's nature can be known with certainty and that our dogmas set them forth is the source of all fanaticism.\(^{30}\)

Thus, Radhakrishnan maintains that dogmas are the source of all conflicts, strife, crusades and religious wars throughout the history of religions.

In his speech at Annamalai University, Radhakrishnan bemoaned the fact that the world has bled and suffered from the disease of dogmatism, of conformity, of intolerance and that the crusading spirit has spoiled the records of religions.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\) S.R., O.S.W., July 59-May 62, P.214.

\(^{30}\) P.S.R., PP.811-812.

\(^{31}\) S.R., O.S.W., Oct.52-Feb.59, P.335.
Thus, Radhakrishnan is convinced that dogmatism is the source of all intolerance and fanaticism.

4.3.4 'Dogma is not essential for salvation'

Dogmas only fetter the spirit of man. They are not essential for our salvation, and should be removed in order to reach God. Dogmas are imposed through external force. A great majority of believers do not scrutinize religious dogmas, and they are quite content to blindly adhere to them. They never undergo 'the labour of being religious'. Radhakrishnan condemns any short cut routes to salvation. He argues,

we cannot get the intuition of God unless we strive for it with our whole being. The experience has to be earned with costing effort, passion and suffering, faith and struggle but the intellectuals wish to acquire it cheaply.

Again, while hitting out at dogmas, Radhakrishnan remarked that we would be judged not by the creeds we profess or labels we bear or the slogans we shout but by our sacrificial work and brotherly outlook.

The great seers are always opposed to mechanical conformity to a set of dogmas and doctrines, as it impairs our intellectual integrity and disturbs our

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conscience. The Buddha, Socrates, Jesus and other men with dynamic vision opposed individual truth to dogmatic tradition.  

4.3.5 ‘Spiritual experiences cannot be dogmatic’

Radhakrishnan strongly feels that spiritual experiences are ineffable and therefore any dogmatic language falls well short of describing the encounters with the Ultimate Reality. All our intellectual attempts to describe the experiences falsify the very endeavours, as the conceptual substitutes are wholly inadequate. Besides,

The profoundest being of man cannot be brought out by mental pictures of logical encounters. God is too great for words to explain. He is like light, making things luminous but himself invisible.

A religious seer never tries to force his doctrines on the minds of others. On the other hand, "The true teacher, like Socrates, plays the part of a midwife."

To the question - who are the people who quarrel over dogmas? Radhakrishnan replies that it is only the half-religious and the irreligious but

36 Ibid., P.76.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., P.161.
not the truly religious.\textsuperscript{39} The intuitive seers always speak in picture and allegory, parable and miracle.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{43.6 A Brief Evaluation}

Radhakrishnan's critique of the dogma is quite understandable, especially against his Hindu tradition, which is generally believed to be free from dogmatic theology. By and large, while a Hindu regards the dogmas to be alien, a Christian regard them to be inalienable.

The canonization of the scripture has inevitably given rise to dogmas in Christianity. Dogmas have been accepted by the Christian community with unflinching faith and reverence. While the Catholicism have regarded the divine word (\textit{fides divina}), and the church tradition (\textit{fides catholica}) as the sources for Christian Dogma, the Protestantism have reposed their knowledge of the Dogma only in the divine word.

Thus, Dogmas have been accorded a unique place in Christian theology right from the 4th century A.D. They have stood the test of time, and they still mean a lot to the Christian community. True, the language of the dogma may have become inappropriate or even quaint today, but it would be unwise and perilous to discard them in toto. Instead, a Christian can try to

\textsuperscript{39} S.R., \textit{H.V.L.}, P.44.

\textsuperscript{40} S.R., \textit{I.V.L.}, P.160.
appropriate for our time and in our own language the essential insight which the dogma sought to express.\textsuperscript{41}

Today the Christian theologians have indeed realized the urgency of forging a new understanding on the nature of dogmas in order that they, instead of incensing the other religious communities, would find acceptance and even approval of people of other faiths. This attempt is not so much to discard the age-old dogmas but to reorient them to the contemporary context. A discerning remark about the reorientation of dogmas is this:

It is (much more) a question of winning a new understanding (naturally preserving the substance of faith which has been handed down) of the one totality of faith in a non-Christian environment, in a new epoch of a global world civilization in which world cultures that were never Christian have appeared.\textsuperscript{42}

Unfortunately, Radhakrishnan sees only the negative side of the dogmas. Indeed, at times dogma have given rise to intolerance and dissension, but on the other hand they held the community together and sustained the belief of the Christian World for so many centuries. The doctrine of Trinity or the Virgin Birth or the Nicene Creed are all certainly dogmatic in nature. But a Christian cannot afford to compromise them, lest he may risk his very faith. On the contrary, a Hindu is not in a danger of risking his faith, if he were not to conform to any dogmatic beliefs, because for him, as Radhakrishnan said a countless times, the deepest truths are always ineffable and inexpressible, as they cannot be compressed or contained in human words.


\textsuperscript{42} Karl Rahner and Adolf Darlap, "Dogma", in Mircea Eliade (ed.) op.cit., Vol.V, P.392.
4.4 Ecclesiastical Authority: ITS FAILURES

Radhakrishnan condemns any authority that makes inroads into a religion. He was particularly critical of ecclesiastical authority reigning over religion. All the organized religions lay a great deal of importance on authority of man rather than the authority of God. Instead of serving as a bridge between God and man, authority could be an impediment in any God-man relationship. Therefore, Radhakrishnan mounts a virulent criticism of authority in organized religions, particularly in Christianity. On the contrary, he praises the unorganized religions such as Hinduism, which he believes, are free from the clutches of ecclesiastical authority.

The authority in Radhakrishnan’s opinion, could be that of a Pope, or a council or a sacred scripture or of a Church.\(^43\) It is possible that all these could claim their authority to be absolute, infallible and unquestionable. He hoped that only if every form of human authority is subordinated to that of Divine Authority, spiritual progress is possible. Otherwise mankind would continue to languish in spiritual poverty. Some of the views of Radhakrishnan against authority have been discussed below:

4.4.1 ‘Religion is a personal discovery’

One of the important reasons why Radhakrishnan was critical of any authority interfering in religious life is that religion has essentially an individualistic dimension. Religion is a personal adventure, a personal

\(^{43}\text{S.R., I.V.L., P.60.}\)
discovery. Since the divine is found in the innermost layers of our being, any divine encounter must be possible only in personal solitude and isolation. Radhakrishnan avers that God is to be existentially known, not literally described. Radhakrishnan writes in his book, An Idealist View of Life, that each individual has to blaze out his own trail into the Unknown, and the achievement is an individual one. Therefore, any external authority would only interfere and adversely effect one's religious life, because it imposes many barriers on individual freedom. Any outsiders would not be of much help for our religious life. Radhakrishnan remarks that reality should be known through one's own clear eye of understanding (bodhacākṣu) rather than with the help of scholar.

Radhakrishnan also emphasises the inner voice, which is bound to be stifled and silenced by any external authority. He calls it 'the inner tribunal of conscience' which is unviolated and inviolable by any intrusion of external powers. It has an inalienable inner sovereignty. Everything must be accepted only after being tested with this inner light.

47 P.62.
48 S.R., R.C.W., P.100.
50 S.R., O.S.W., May 62-May 64, P.178.
4.4.2 ‘A Priestless religion is desirable’

Radhakrishnan is particularly critical of the authority of priests in religion. He made no bones of the fact that he prefers a priestless religion to a religion where priests predominate. There is equality of all men before God.\textsuperscript{51} And, therefore, priests should not arrogate to themselves any kind of superiority over others, for that would be against the belief of God. If we believe that all human individuals are similar sparks of the divine, hierarchical distinctions are considered invalid and unjustifiable.\textsuperscript{52}

Radhakrishnan questions the necessity of a priest.\textsuperscript{53} He believes that priests have sufficiently contributed to the downfall of religions. He says that the moral abdication of religious leadership has contributed to the waning influence of religion.\textsuperscript{54} His condemnation of the priesthood is such that he shared Diderot’s cry of anger:

Man will never be free, until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{52} S.R., \textit{O.S.W.}, Oct.52-Feb.59, P.378.


\textsuperscript{54} S.R., \textit{R.C.W.}, P.46.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., P.50.
4.4.3 'Authority curbs the freedom of an individual'

The chief characteristic of religious pursuit is human freedom, which is absolute and inviolable. But the authorities in organized religions are tempted to impose their ideas on individuals. It is their desire that men should "go by the beaten track, like horses in blinkers, looking neither to the right nor to the left."\(^55\) Radhakrishnan is severely critical of the authority of the Catholic Church. He said,

A Catholic can never rescind the teachings and directives of the Church. In every sector of his activities he must inspire his private and public conduct by the laws, orientation and instruction of the hierarchy.\(^57\)

If freedom is denied to individuals and religious authority imposed on them, they became men of fanatical fervour and not free spirits of enquiry.\(^56\) It depersonalizes human beings.\(^50\) Radhakrishnan remarks that any authority, when it is most powerful, acts like a ruthless mechanism, and as such is opposed to the values of life and spirit.\(^60\) Yet another severe indictment of authority we come across in his book, *Religion in a Changing World*:

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\(^57\) S.R., *R.C.W.*, P.44.
Religions by upholding the authority of their organizations tend to crush the individuality of the people, debase their sense of moral responsibility, and corrupt the conscience of the community.61

4.4.4 'Authority distrusts reason'

Authoritarianism shuns free enquiry and it dictates beliefs to the people to follow. Fundamentalists ask people to shut their eyes to the facts of modern thought and inquiry.62

Radhakrishnan believes that authoritarianism engenders blind belief and not genuine faith. He laments that it is an unfortunate legacy of the Christian theology in Europe that faith has come to connote a mechanical adherence to authority.63 Authoritarianism also leaves room for superstition, fear and ignorance. When it distrusts religion, superstition grows stronger, with the result that men of real piety and integrity of mind are repelled by it.64 Also, Authoritarianism implies a sort of scepticism.65

4.4.5 'Radhakrishnan's philosophy of the unitary

Radhakrishnan also cautions that authoritarianism in religion inevitably gives rise to despotism and totalitarianism. He warns that when we repudiate

61 P.45.
64 S.R., I.V.L., P.62.
65 Ibid., P.63.
reason and demand faith, we play into the hands of dictators who profess to supply us with definite creeds for belief and codes for conduct. Those authoritarian creeds overlook the value of individual freedom, of personal integrity. Again, Radhakrishnan expresses the same sentiment elsewhere:

If the Roman Catholics accept the Pope's Encyclical on marriage, the National Socialists accept the decrees of Hitler as Holy Writ. Those who question the true faith are thrown into concentration camps.

Pointing out the nexus between despotism and religious authority, Radhakrishnan observed that Hitler and Mussolini had been brought up in Roman Catholic Societies, where it was blasphemous to criticize infallible authority.

446 'Authority fosters intolerance'

As long as there is a sense of infallibility, there is bound to be intolerance. Radhakrishnan asked:

Reason should teach us to doubt our own infallibility. Unless we do it there is no chance for toleration in the world. If we are convinced of the absolute truth of our revelation and falsity of others, how can we tolerate those who spread error and lead others astray?

66 Ibid., P.60 fn.
68 Ibid., P.172.
Radhakrishnan condemns the intolerant attitude of religious organizations, saying that many religious organizations become intolerant, condemning all those who do not accept them to eternal perdition. In the process, religious persecutions, inquisitions, torture have darkened many pages of the history of religions. Many defenders of faith were offenders against truth. In the name of our religion we have denied brotherhood with men of other faiths, who also hunger and thirst after rightousness.

Although organized religions have done great services to mankind, those services are

inconsiderable compared with their claim to absolute authority and they attempt to enforce that claim, by punishment, by torture and even death.

4.4.7 'The Founders of Religions rejected authority'

Radhakrishnan constantly quotes the religious seers and founders who rejected authority, which helped the flourishing of religions. Radhakrishnan writes,

Each religion has sat at the feet of teachers that never bowed to its authority, and this process is taking place today on a scale unprecedented in the history of humanity and will have most profound effects upon religion.

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70 S.R., R.C.W., P.51.
71 Ibid., P.52.
72 S.R., R.C.W., P.44.
He expresses the hope that the future of religion rests with the 'left-wing liberals' who do not admit to the claims of absolute authority because they rightly feel that no religion in its present form is final.\textsuperscript{74}

Radhakrishnan cites the lives of so many religious seers who never yielded themselves to authority. The Buddha, for example, refused to accept the views on the authority of others.\textsuperscript{75} The Bhagavad-Gita also opens with Arjuna's refusal to conform to social codes.\textsuperscript{76} Lao Tzu in China fought for the abolition of governmental control of its peoples.\textsuperscript{77} Jesus Christ set aside all authorities.\textsuperscript{78} He never submitted to the authority of the High Priests and Pharisees.\textsuperscript{79}

4.5 SCRIPTURE: ITS PLACE AND ROLE IN RELIGION

4.5.1 'Worship of Scripture is greatest idolatry'

Radhakrishnan condemns the worship of any scripture, for he believes that "the greatest idolatry is the worship of the letter."\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{75} S.R., \textit{O.S.W.}, Oct.52-Feb.59, P.347.

\textsuperscript{76} S.R., \textit{B.G.}, P.44.

\textsuperscript{77} S.R., \textit{India and China}, P.70.


\textsuperscript{80} S.R., \textit{I.V.L.}, P.94.
He makes it abundantly clear that the doctrine of infallibility of the scripture does not carry conviction in our times, as it is inconsistent with the spirit of science. In his *Recovery of Faith*, Radhakrishnan points out,

Each religion claims that its scripture is, in a unique sense, the word of God and so infallible. The inerrancy of the scriptures is inconsistent with the spirit of science. Literal infallibility is not now insisted on except by a few fundamentalists.\(^{81}\)

Elsewhere he states that the elevation of the inerrancy of scripture to the level of dogma, led to considerable intellectual questioning.\(^{82}\)

Dwelling on the importance of higher criticism Radhakrishnan says, the scriptures such as the Vedas, the Tipitaka, the Bible, the Quran are all human documents written by human hands which are liable to error.\(^{83}\) The higher and lower criticism of the Christian scripture tells us that the Bible contains elements of myth, legend and floating tradition. It is not to be mistaken for a historical narrative. Similarly, a critical attitude is fairly common among thoughtful Hindus and Buddhists.\(^{84}\)

### 4.5.2 'Truth transcends scripture'

Truth, according to Radhakrishnan, is eternal and transcends scriptural boundaries. He says,

\(^{81}\) P.17, P.140.


\(^{84}\) Ibid.
Scriptures are not infallible in all they say. Truth is eternal in validity and is timeless apart from the texts which may be dated. The eternity of the Vedas, 'the timelessness of the dharma' of the Buddhist, the eternity of the 'Divine word' of the Christians refer not to the texts but to the truths enshrined in them.  

Elaborating the point that truth is only reflected in the scriptures, Radhakrishnan remarks that the scriptures do not demonstrate him (God) but only bear witness to him.  

Radhakrishnan criticises those who repose blind faith in their scriptures. They are those who have neither experience nor rational knowledge of God, neither sight nor proof. But they have faith in the scriptures.  

Radhakrishnan seems to favour a hermeneutic approach when he said that the scriptures of all religions, since they were written in different times need to be interpreted in the light of the present day knowledge, if at all we are to render them meaningful even today. Scriptures contain crude, imperfect and undeveloped images. These need to be refined and improved in the light of our present knowledge.  

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87 S.R., B.S., P.245.  
88 Ibid., PP.115-116.
4.5.3 Radhakrishnan and Demythologizing

David Brookman notices the method of Demythologizing in the writings of Radhakrishnan. He argues that Radhakrishnan's desire is to divest religion of myth and mythology in their literalness and render them meaningful in modern times.

It is doubtless true that Radhakrishnan applies demythologizing with regard to Christianity, as it is noticeable in a number of passages. For example, Radhakrishnan says,

We may cut out the harsher sayings of Jesus as unauthentic. The punishment of Dives may be interpreted as remedial. The weeping and gnashing of teeth in the parable of the drag-net as well as the assertion that the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven 'neither in this world nor in that to come' may be dismissed as eschatological exaggerations. And yet there seems to be an inconvenient amount of undisputed teaching that became exaggerated in the hands of the Apocalyptists.

Radhakrishnan elsewhere points out that

A more critical attitude towards the divinity of Jesus is growing among the Christian theologians of the West, who are tending to emphasize more and more His humanity. The claims to omniscience and the consciousness of having created the universe are not seriously pressed.

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89 David Brookman, *Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, pp. 238-243. Brookman compares Radhakrishnan and Bultmann at least on four counts. 1. Both wanted to bring out of scriptures the existential significance of man. 2. Both made the ancient wisdom meaningful to the modern world. 3. Both used the language of analogy in an unmythological sense and 4. Neither tried to eliminate myth, but tried to render it comprehensible.


91 S.R., *H.H.*, p. 104. While referring to the fall of man in Genesis, Radhakrishnan says, "The narrative in Genesis is not to be understood as a literal account of what happened. It is a myth, a symbol of contrasting the state of Adam before the fall and his state after it". (*R.F.*, p. 88).
However, whether Radhakrishnan uses demythologizing in the same breath with regard to the Hindu scriptures is a question which crop up in this context. It is apparent that he is definitely not as critical of Hindu scriptures as he is of Christian scriptures. And certainly he did not seem to appreciate the Christian scriptures as much as he did the Hindu texts. It is clear in the following passage where he glorifies the Vedanta as against other scriptures:

It is said that other scriptures sink into silence when the Vedanta appears, even as foxes do not raise their voices in the forest when the lion appears.\(^{92}\)

Radhakrishnan praises the authority of the Vedas in innumerable passages. In *The Brahma Sutra*, Radhakrishnan remarks that the Vedas have remained for centuries the highest religious authority for all sections of Hindus. The interpretations of the Upanishads may vary, but their truth stands, even as "the astronomies change but the stars abide".\(^{93}\)

However, it is gravely erroneous for anyone to argue that Radhakrishnan accepted and expounded the Hindu texts in their literalness. Many times he tried to demythologize Hinduism as whole. For instance, in the words of Klostermaier,

In a manner typical of modern enlightened Hinduism, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan demythologized Hinduism in a speech before the Visva Hindu Sammelan in New Delhi, stating that there was nothing


sectarian or dogmatic about Hinduism, which was but the reconciliation of all paths to God.  

4.5.4 A Brief Evaluation

Radhakrishnan rightly points out that the worship of scripture is the greatest idolatry, and that scriptures are instruments which guide us towards the reality. This does not, however, mean that scripture has only a secondary role to play.

Christians regard the scripture as the 'Word of God'. It is through this medium that God speaks to mankind. To quote Karl Barth:

The Word of God is the Word that God spoke, speaks and will speak in the midst of all men. Regardless of whether it is heard or not, it is, in itself, directed to all men. It is the Word of God's work upon men, for men, and with men.  

However man needs to recognize the Word of God within the scripture and allow God to speak to him. 'There is a BIBLE within the bible'. However, it is God who enlightens men, sharpen their intellect through the scripture. Karl Barth, although he is against infallibility or deification of the Bible, makes a valid point when he said:

The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it.

95 Evangelical Theology, PP.18-19.
96 Church Dogmatics, I/1, P.123.
Thus, scripture has a positive and even a decisive role to play for the Christians. While for a Hindu, notions like God speaking or revealing himself through the scripture do not mean much. For him, eternal truths are enshrined in every scripture, which by human effort and not by God's aid, can be understood and made good use of for the betterment of one's life, and for the society at large.

4.6 RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS HAVE NO INTRINSIC VALUE

Radhakrishnan attaches considerable importance to the role of symbols in religion. So important is the topic that he allocates one entire chapter - "Religious Truth and Symbolism" in his Recovery of Faith. Throughout his writings, we come across innumerable definitions of symbolism, what it is and what it is not, its uses and misuses. Some of these features are addressed below:

4.6.1 'Symbols have only instrumental value'

Radhakrishnan declares that all religion is symbolic, and any religion perishes when symbolism is excluded from it. However, symbols have only instrumental value and

the function is to aid the growth of the spirit by supplying supports for a task that is strictly personal.

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Symbolism is very much an integral part of human nature, and we cannot help making use of symbolic objects.\textsuperscript{100}

The Absolute Reality cannot be fully expressed in symbols or words. "The formless blaze of spiritual life cannot be expressed in human words."\textsuperscript{101} Again, "The mystery of the divine reality eludes the machinery of speech and symbol".\textsuperscript{102} However, Myth and symbols enable us to partially understand the nature of ultimate being.\textsuperscript{103} Thus symbols have instrumental rather than intrinsic value. They are vehicles which take us nearer to Reality.

\textbf{4.6.2 'A symbol is a signpost, not destination'}

Radhakrishnan condemns the practice of worshipping the symbols per se. He says

Symbols and images are used as aids to the worship of God, though they are not objects of worship themselves.\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Again,

Every word, every concept is a pointer which points beyond itself. The sign should not be mistaken for the thing signified. The signpost is not the destination.\(^{105}\)

Thus, truth is conveyed through symbols, and symbols themselves cannot take the place of truth. Radhakrishnan remarks that those who have the vision of truth convey it through symbols to ordinary people who cannot look upon its naked intensity. "Name and form are used to reach the formless".\(^{106}\) Thus, even the personal Gods are only symbols to comprehend the Absolute. Says Radhakrishnan,

Gods retain their anthropomorphic personifications of the natural forces and serve to assist the mind in its attempt to comprehend that what is regarded as manifested through them. They are useful symbols which serve as bearers of the divine power or mystery.\(^{107}\)

Radhakrishnan contrasts the symbolic representation of the Eastern forms with the Western forms of religion, and suggests that the accommodative nature of the former is preferable to the dogmatic nature of the latter. In a similar vein, Radhakrishnan says that Eastern forms of religion hold that differences of interpretation do not affect the one universal truth. Western forms of religion are inclined to hold that one definition is final and absolute and others are false.\(^{108}\) Radhakrishnan also points out that symbols must

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\(^{106}\) S.R., B.G., P.158.

\(^{107}\) S.R., B.S., P.134.

\(^{108}\) S.R., R.F., P.143.
be freely chosen by the worshipper, and if symbols are imposed on them they become intolerable.\textsuperscript{109}

4.6.3 A Brief Evaluation

Radhakrishnan’s contention that religious symbols have an instrumental value finds favour with many Christian philosophers and theologians. His warning that symbols might be converted into idols is also shared by Paul Tillich. Tillich aptly puts it thus:

Religious symbols point symbolically to that which transcends all of them. But since, as symbols they participate in that to which they point, they always have the tendency to replace that to which they are supposed to point, and to become ultimate in themselves. And in the moment in which they do this, they become idols.\textsuperscript{110}

Tillich also differentiates between signs and symbols. Both of these point beyond themselves. However, signs can be changed and replaced as they do not participate in the reality they stand for. On the other hand, symbols participate in reality, and the more we enter into the meaning of symbols, the more we become aware of the reality which they represent. This view of Tillich on symbols is essentially the same as that of Radhakrishnan.

However, some like John Macquarrie would disagree with Radhakrishnan’s effort of treating all religious symbols on par. Macquarrie feels that the same symbol may mean different things in different cultures. For instance, the wheel has often been used as a symbol of industry in the west.

\textsuperscript{109} S.R., B.G., P.142.

\textsuperscript{110} Theology of Culture, P.80.
while in the East it symbolizes the cycle of existence. Therefore, one must always consider the historical and cultural background against which religious symbols emerge. To quote Macquarrie:

Religious symbols belong to a community of faith. The cross speaks to the Christian, the crescent to the Muslims, but without a participation in the history of the community, no one could recognize what is conveyed by these symbols. 111

Radhakrishnan, however, might answer Macquarrie, saying that although indeed the religious symbols are best understood in their respective historical and cultural milieu, ultimately all of them would connote and stand for the same Reality, as these are all the ‘Strange tongues’ of one Reality in different times, and in different historical and cultural settings.

4.7 PROSELYTIZING IN ORGANIZED RELIGIONS

Religious conversions are abhorrent to Radhakrishnan. It is mainly because conversions are built up on the false premise that one religion alone is true and the rest of them are false. Radhakrishnan denounces the attempts of pulling down one’s faith as ‘spiritual vandalism’. 112 He is certainly proud of his Hindu heritage because it does not encourage converting people from other folds. Hinduism is unlike Judaism, which has its chosen people, laws and taboos, and it is a great sin to desert their God to go after others. On the contrary,

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John Macquarrie, op.cit., P.124.

For a religion like Hinduism, which emphasizes Divine Immanence, the chosen people embraces all mankind. If we have something to teach our neighbours we have also something to learn from them.\textsuperscript{113}

And, therefore, our aim should be not to make converts, Christians into Buddhists, or Buddhists into Christians, but enable both Buddhists and Christians to rediscover the basic principles of their own religions and live upto them.\textsuperscript{114}

4.7.1 'A Convert feels like an illegitimate child'

Radhakrishnan denounced the attempts of dragging the people from one faith to another. He observes,

... a convert to a new religion feels an utter stranger to himself. He feels like an illegitimate child with no heritage, no link with the man who preceded him.\textsuperscript{115}

Also, "If we tear up the individual from his traditional roots he becomes abstract and aberrant".\textsuperscript{116}

The essential human nature cannot be changed easily by way of religious conversions. Radhakrishnan metaphorically observes,

Human nature is not a clean slate, a blackboard on which we can scribble anything with a piece of chalk and then wipe it off with a sponge.\textsuperscript{117}


\textsuperscript{114} S.R., "Fragments", P.74.


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., P.328.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
He also asserts that an outrage on others' convictions cannot be taken to be a triumph for any religion.\textsuperscript{118}

Radhakrishnan compares religious conversions to compulsory conscription into army. He writes in his work, \textit{Hindu View of Life}, that Hinduism hates the compulsory conscription of men into the house of truth, but insists on the development of his intellectual conscience and sensibility to truth. Radhakrishnan also is highly critical of the notion of chosen people or chosen race. He declares,

\begin{quote}
It is not fair to God or man to assume that one people are the chosen of God, that their religion occupies a central place in the religious development of mankind, and that all others should borrow from them or suffer spiritual destitution.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

And to obliterate every other religion is a sort of bolshevism in religion.\textsuperscript{120} Even if the people of other religions grope in superstition and savagery they must not be disturbed.

To shatter the superstitions of the savage is to destroy his morality, his social code and mental peace.\textsuperscript{121}


\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., P.42.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., P.31.
4.7.2 'Proselytizing endangers the spirit of religion'

Radhakrishnan condemns the attempts of forcefully converting people from one fold to the other. He is particularly critical of Christianity, which he feels openly professes proselytization. In its proselytizing zeal, Christianity not only donned the color of pagans but it distorted the simple life and faith of Jesus Christ.  

According to him, proselytization is based on the erroneous impression that one religion or one Saviour alone is true and worthy of following. Moreover, proselytizing zeal naturally breeds coercion, friction and intolerance. For him, proselytization is only an external process, which could never bring about internal transformation. Therefore, Radhakrishnan makes mockery of the rituals such as baptism and chanting of prayers which are part of a conversion process. He writes with biting sarcasm:  

A sprinkling of holy water and muttering of a formula will put to flight all the agonies and cruelties of the world. The difficulties of the situation are due to the substitution of religion for God, of an infallible church or book for personal effort.

4.7.3 The Missionary Zeal

The proselytizing zeal of a missionary is severely condemned by Radhakrishnan and he compares it to the aggressive propaganda of a communist. Radhakrishnan observes,

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The logic which drives a missionary cause to aggressive propaganda is nothing new in history. 'Go ye unto all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature'. Communism seems to be secularized Christianity. 124

Radhakrishnan points out that the early Indian Christians regarded themselves as an integral part of the general Hindu community and they discouraged proselytism. However, the missionary propaganda of converting peoples to Christianity started with the establishment of European settlements in India. Christian Educational Institutions were established in chief centres in India, and the British Government became quite sympathetic to Christian evangelisation. He laments these developments:

The attempts of the western powers to impose their culture on India through the Government and its Educational Institutions have stirred the huge inertia of the Indian people and ruffled the surface of Indian Society, but deep down the immemorial tradition of India has not been greatly disturbed. 125

Radhakrishnan at many places condemned the missionary propaganda, especially in India.

The Christian missionaries of that day did not recognize anything vital or valuable in the Indian religions. For them, the native faiths were a mass of unredeemed darkness and error. They had supreme contempt for the heathen religions and wished to sort them out lock, stock and barrel. It is a natural tendency of the human mind to suppose that its own God is God of all the earth, while all other gods are "mumbo jumbo" made with human hands. 126

125 Ibid., P.42.
However, at a second stage missionaries realized the futility of their aggressive propaganda and regarded Indian faiths as possessing some virtues of their own. But still they believed that Christianity is the crown and completion of them all.\textsuperscript{127}

4.7.4 Brief Evaluation

Many Christian leaders concur with Radhakrishnan's views on the demerits of proselytization, i.e., forcefully converting people into the fold of Christianity. Bishop Leslie Newbigin wrote,

It is rightly felt that there is something contemptible about any use of material means to persuade or coerce people into changing their religious affiliation, and a person who resists such tactics will always earn the approval of decent men.\textsuperscript{128}

Stephen Neill also observes,

The Christian must be prepared to recognize that the task of Christian witness in India is likely in the future to be more difficult than it has been in the past.\textsuperscript{129}

Therefore, some feel that any Christian embarking on the great commission of Jesus Christ would first have to identify himself with other religious cultures and customs if he were to make any effort to preach the Gospel. A radical opinion to this effect is expressed by Dr. Kaj Baago thus:

The Christian religion, to a large extent a product of the west, cannot and shall not become the religion of all nations and races .... The missionary task today cannot, therefore, be to draw men out of their religions into another, but rather to leave Christianity (the organized


\textsuperscript{128} Leslie Newbigin, \textit{The Finality of Christ}, P.88.

Thus, Radhakrishnan’s critique of proselytism is an eyeopener to the zealous missionaries in India and elsewhere. Missionaries had indeed revised their strategies of implementing their Great Commission. Most of them, if not all, have learnt the lesson that in a country like India, people’s hearts and minds should be won, before their souls. Some of them have recognised the futility of using force, material or otherwise.

Although Radhakrishnan’s approach to religious conversions is generally laudable, critics find fault with him in one respect. T.P. Urumpackal points out that Radhakrishnan adopted ‘double standard’ with respect to religious conversions. For, while he is bitterly critical of the proselytism of the Christian missionaries, Radhakrishnan describes the spreading of Hinduism and Buddhism to various parts of the world as ‘religious reform and growth’. According to Urumpackal, Radhakrishnan defends himself by drawing a distinction, saying

Hinduism and Buddhism do not work from outward to inward, but work from within outwards. They do not change the label and wait for change in life, but change the life while retaining the labels.


31 See T.P. Urumpackal, op.cit., P.221.

4.8 CONCLUSION

As it is evident from the above, Radhakrishnan adopted a critical attitude towards the Dogma of the Church, and the various tenets of its organization. Many of these tenets appeared to him totally alien, because he was born and brought up in a religion, which was free from any ecclesiastical organisation and authority. Therefore, when the Christian missionaries tried to disturb the unorganized set up of Hinduism, Radhakrishnan took strong exception to it. He brought to the fore the drawbacks and failures of ecclesiastical organization. However, Christian critics might dispute Radhakrishnan's formulation that an organizational set up is always detrimental to the interests of a religion, and an unorganized form always fosters the interests of a religion. At least two of them, T.P. Urumpackal and I.C. Harris, point out that the ecclesiastical tenets like dogma, authority, ritualism, etc. are all-pervasive in every religion, organized or unorganized. The only difference is that they are explicit in a religion like Christianity, whereas they are implicit in a religion like Hinduism.¹³³

Radhakrishnan himself acknowledges this when he says:

Every religion has its popes and crusades, idolatry and heresy-hunting. The cards and the game are the same, only the names are different.¹³⁴

¹³³ Details given in the concluding chapter.