Chapter – 3

VIVEKANANDA’S CONCEPT OF ‘UNIVERSAL RELIGION’

Nature of Universal Religion

Religion, according to Vivekananda, is in essence man’s way of living in the name of truth. It is quite clear that every recognized religion has three concepts. First is philosophy, second, mythology and the third is rituals. Some gave more emphasis on one and some on other aspect. But, obviously, at the heart of every religion was its philosophy and metaphysics which, in the words of Vivekananda himself, “presents the whole scope of religion, setting forth its basic principles, its goal, and the means of reaching that goal”.¹ He says:

“Religion without philosophy runs into superstition; and philosophy without religion becomes a dry atheism”.²

He further says that,

“In every religion there are three parts: philosophy, mythology and rituals. Philosophy of course is the essence of every religion; mythology explains and illustrates it by means of more or less legendary lives of greatmen, stories and fables of wonderful things and ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form so that everyone may grasp it. Ritual is in fact a ‘concretized philosophy’”.³

Every religion has its own philosophy which is unique to itself and which enables it to differentiate it from the other religions. But the question is if each religion differs from the other at its most basic philosophical level, how can it be possible to have one universal philosophy? Moreover, it is
also observed that each one claims superiority on others in a very rigid manner. Sometimes the people say those who do not follow his religion, cannot attain salvation. They must go in hell because their way is not the true and right one. In the words of Vivekananda:

"Each religion brings out its own doctrines and insists upon them as being the only true ones. And not only does it do that, but it thinks that he who does not believe in them must go to some horrible place".

Such an attitude characterizes the minds not because of some evil thought but through a particular disease of human mind. It is called fanaticism. Fanaticism is a mental disease. It is hundred times more dangerous among all diseases. All the evils of human nature is aroused by it. Fanaticism is the main cause of religious conflict. All the evils of human nature are aroused by this religious zeal.

Philosophical aspects of religion are often presented in the form of myths and fables and these become often the source of mutual conflicts and antagonisms. Because each one claims that my stories are not mere myths. Vivekananda illustrates different religious mythologies and presents the true picture of human mind. He gave the example of Christian, Hindu and Jewish mythologies. He says that the Christian believes that God took the shape of a dove and came to earth. For Christian this is history, not mythology. Hindu believes that God is manifested in the cow. But the Christian rejects it saying that it is superstition. Now clearly what is at work here is one’s
fanatic bent of mind because if Christian mythology is his religious history then how others' history could be superstition. If one religion presents its philosophical view through a set of wonderful stories, why should he say other such stories to be myth or superstition.

"The Christian believes that God took the shape of a dove and came down to earth; to him this is history not mythology. The Hindu believes that God is manifested in the cow. Christians say that to believe so is mere mythology, and not history; that it is superstition. The Jews think that if an image is made in the form of a box or a chest, with an angel on either side, then it may be placed in the Holy of Holies, it is sacred to Jehovah. But if the image is made in the form of a beautiful man or woman, they say, "This is horrible idol; break it down!" This is our unity in mythology! Again if a man stands up and says, "My prophet did such and such wonderful things", other will say, "That is only superstition". But at the same time they say their own prophet did still more wonderful things, which they hold to be historical."^5

Like in the case of their philosophies and mythologies, each religion has also its own particular form of rituals and each of them again thinks that only its own rituals are holy and right. They consider the ritual of other religions simply as superstitions. Every religion prescribes the worship of a peculiar sort of symbol. These symbols are necessary in every religion. Because of lack of knowledge most people cannot understand the abstract spiritual things. Therefore symbols are of great help. In other words, we can say that at the lower point, symbols are helpful to understand the reality. Sometime we cannot think higher ideas about the reality but through symbols we can understand and access that reality. Everything in this world
is looked upon as a symbol and God is seen to be behind all this. Symbols are not the creation of man. "The symbols of religion", says Vivekananda, "have natural growth".

But there is no harmony in different religions because they do not understand the real nature and function of symbols. Therefore if one sect worships a peculiar sort of symbol, another objects to it saying that this particular symbol is horrible. For example, the phallus is the common symbol of Hindu community. Generally, phallus is a sex symbol but for Hindus it is the symbol of creator. Hindu believers cannot connect it with sex. For them it is just a symbol but for other religions it is horrible.

"To the Christian the phallus is horrible, and to the Hindus the Christian Sacrament is horrible. They say that the Christian sacrament, the killing of man and the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood to get the good qualities of courage and bravery possessed by that man, is cannibalism". So the phallus symbol of Hindus and the sacrament of Christian are horrible for each other. In that sense there is no symbol which can be universalized and be acceptable to all world religions.

Now, if the conflict of religions arises on account of the fact that different religions have different philosophy, mythology and rituals, the religious harmony can be attained only by having a universal religion that rises above these differences. But then the question arises if there is any universality in religion or if there can be any universal form of religion?
Vivekananda says that such a religion already exists but we have lost it because of external divergences of religions. These external conflicts affect the essence of religion. Behind the external differences there is essential sameness. Thus, though universal religion already exists, for example in the form of universal brotherhood of man, people fail to notice its presence in their own life. He explains the situation with the help of following parable:

“In India, wine drinking is considered very bad. There are two brothers who one night wished to drink wine secretly; and their uncle, who was a very orthodox man, was sleeping in a room quite close to theirs. So before they began to drink they said to each other, “We must be very quiet, or uncle will wake up”. When they were drinking they continued repeating to each other, “Silence! Uncle will wake up” each trying to shout the other down. And as the shouting increased, the uncle woke up, came into the room, and discovered the whole thing”.

So all the sects cry like these drunken brothers. No one tried to practice restraint in their belief and behaviour. Those who really feel the universal brotherhood, they do not try to make sects out of it but they try to spread out it in whole world. They have sympathy and love for all mankind.

Vivekananda is aware that it is a difficult task. Because different religions gave emphasis on different qualities of religion. So it is much difficult to find the common elements. For example, Islam gave emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification. It is difficult to compare these several elements of religions. It
is therefore difficult to find any universal element in religion. But we also know that they exist. If we explore we will find it within the differences but then our approach has to be not that of exclusion but inclusion. We must seek unity within the diversity.

We must first of all know that we all are human beings and that we are not equal. We are not equal in our physical strength because one man is stronger than other, some have more power and some have less power and some are men and some women. There are many differences between us. But along with these differences we have one element which is common in all of us. We all are human beings, we all belong to one humanity.

“We are all human beings, but are we all equal? Certainly not, who says we are equal? Only the lunatic. Are we all equal in our brains, in our power, in our bodies? One man is stronger than another; one man has more brain power than another. If we are all equal, why is there this inequality? Who made it? We ourselves. Because we have more or less powers, more or less brains, more or less physical strength, these must make a difference between us. Yet we know that the doctrine of equality appeals to our hearts. We are all human beings; but some are men and some are women. Here is a blackman, there is a white man; but all are men, all belong to one humanity. Various are our faces; I see no two alike, yet we are all human beings. Where is this one humanity? I find a man or a women either dark or fair; and among all these faces, I know that there is an abstract humanity common to all. I may not find it when I try to grasp it, perceive it, and actualize it, yet I know for certain that it is there. If I am sure of anything, it is of this humanity which is common to us all. It is through this common entity that I see you as a man or a woman”.

Vivekananda says that the universal element that runs through all the various religions of the world, which can be said as being common to all religions is in a general way the faith in God.

"I am the thread that runs through all these pearls", and each pearl is a religion or even a sect thereof. There are the different pearls, and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them; Only the majority of mankind are entirely unconscious of it".  

Vivekananda says that unity in diversity is the scheme of universe. Two different things are apparently different, but may be similar in a particular sense. Men and women are different with each other but as human being they are same. As living beings men, animals and plants are all one. In this manner different religions talk of different aspects of the same truth. They all are talking about the same God. In Him we are all one. God is the only one ultimate source of this universe. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling towards the realization of this unity that is God.

"We are all men, and yet we are all distinct from one another. As a part of humanity I am one with you, and as Mr. so and so I am different from you. As a man you are separate from woman; as human beings you are one with woman. As a human being you are separate from the animals; but as living being man, woman, and animal are all one. And as existence you are one with the whole universe. That universal existence is God, the ultimate unity in the universe. In Him we are all one".  

The idea of a universal religion does not mean that one doctrine should be followed by all mankind. It is impossible. There will not be one universal mythology or one set of rituals accepted by all religious. There can
never be a time when all will accept the same thought. If ever it happens that would mean the world is not progressing. Sameness and perfect balance will create an unmoving world. Because diversity is the first principle of progressive life. If we all think same thought it would be dangerous for the world. So the differences of thought always must remain, otherwise soul of our progress or the soul of our thought will cease. Vivekananda says:

"Perfect balance would be destruction. Take, for instance, the heat in this room, whose tendency is towards equal diffusion; suppose it gets that kind of diffusion; then for all practical purposes that heat will cease to be. What makes motion possible in this universe? Lost balance. Complete sameness can come only when this universe is destroyed, otherwise such a thing is impossible. Not only so, it would be dangerous to have it. We must not wish that all of us should think alike. There would then be no thought to think we should all be alike, as the Egyptian mummies in a museum are, looking at each other without a thought to think". 

But as we recognize the necessity of variation for the progress of world, we also recognize unity in nature. We must recognize variation because only through this variation we can learn about something from different angles and that this thing while being different from different points of view is nevertheless one and same.

Vivekananda gave the example of photographs saying that different photographs of a thing taken from different angles reveal different aspects of that one thing.

"Suppose a man standing on the earth looks at the sun when it rises in the morning; he sees a big ball. Suppose
he starts on a journey towards the sun and takes a camera with him, taking photographs at every stage of his journey until he reaches the sun. The photographs of each stage will be seen to be different from those of the other stages; infact, when he gets back, he brings with him so many photographs of so many different suns, as it would appear; and yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at different stages of his progress”.

As these different photographs are of the same sun. Different religions are likewise different ways of reaching the same goal. It is a fact that in this world there have been various religious sects having different religious codes and beliefs. It is also historically true that these religious sects are constantly quarrelling with each other. Again, every religious sect considers that its own doctrines are true and its own sects is superior to any other. Thus, various religions are the main cause of man’s spiritual struggles.

“As our social struggles are represented, among different nations by different social organizations, so man’s spiritual struggles are represented by various religions. And as different social organizations are constantly quarrelling, are constantly at war with each other, so these spiritual organizations have been constantly at war with each other, constantly quarrelling. Men belonging to a particular social organization claim that the right to live belongs only to them, and so long as they can, they want to exercise that right at the cost of the weak”.

Religion has a great motivational force. Thus we find that religions breed peace, love, humanity, tolerance, blessing and brotherhood in the whole world. At the same time, it is also the religion that breeds hatred,
bloodshed, enmity between man and man. Nothing indeed has deluged the world with blood as religion did.

We find that every great religion of world has tremendous power. Sometime people say that they are unaware of this. But ignorance is not excuse. If anyone claims that only his religion is true and God has given certain truths only to him, he is wrong. If all the truths are given in one book, why would there be so many sects? And why will they be quarrelling with each other? What is the main cause of this difference? Answer is very clear that we have failed to understand the essence of religion.

"If the claim of any one religion that it has all the truth, and that God has given it all that truth in a certain book, be true, why then are there so many sects? Not fifty years pass before there are twenty sects founded upon the same book. If God has put all the truth in certain books, He does not give us those books in order that we may quarrel over texts".14

Each sect interpreted the Holy Book in its own way and each one claims that it alone can interpret that book. The other sects cannot understand it. Here is the reason behind all this variety and multiplicity.

"For instance, all the sects that exist among the Christians. Each one puts its own interpretation upon the same text, and each says that it alone understands that text and all the rest are wrong. So with every religion There are many sects among the Mohammedans and among the Buddhists, and hundreds among the Hindus".15

The variety and multiplicity are however not unnatural. For it is not possible that all men believe in one method of thinking. Indeed, if all people think the same thing, there would be no thought to think.
“It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakens thoughts. Now if all thoughts were alike, we should be like Egyptian mummies in a museum.... Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpool in stagnant, dead water”.

But while it is agreed that change and difference are the sign of life, the question still arises how can all the different thoughts be true at the same time?

Vivekananda says that internal soul of every religion cannot contradict each other. The contradiction takes place in the external forms of religions like rituals, books, languages. He says that religions do not contradict each other; they supplement each other. Each religion takes one part of truth and ignores the other part.

“Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great, universal truth and spends whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is therefore addition not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises each one embodying a great ideal, …”

Further, he says,

“Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth – from lesser truth to higher truth, but never from error to truth”.

There can be many contradictory points of view of a thing all depending upon our subjective conditions and situations:

“We are viewing truth, getting as much of it as these circumstances will permit, colouring it with our own feelings, understanding it with our own intellects, and grasping it with our own mind. We can only know as
much of truth as is revealed to us, as much of it as we are able to receive".19

Another question here is if at all there exists any ideal religion which can satisfy all minds. Vivekananda says that such type of religion does already exist, though we fail to notice it. Universal religion is founding faith and vision upon man’s true identity. Universal religion is beyond the political, national, geographical limits. It is regardless of caste, colour, community, religious creed, race and nationality. Universal religion is all-pervasive. It gives the essential unity of all great religions of the world. Vivekananda uses the one watchword for universal religion, that is ‘acceptance’. Acceptance does not mean tolerance. He recommended positive acceptance.

Universal religion provides a common platform for all religions. It lays stress upon the essential unity of all great world religions. It gives respect for them all as different spiritual pathways leading to the same goal. It accepts all the ruling principle of life. It does not mean that one has to give up one’s previous religious affiliation as a Jew, or a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist etc. There is no conflict or incompatibility between universal religion and different historical religions, for it is the common universal essence of them all.

Universal religion stresses the nonsectarian and non-discriminating spiritual values common to the great religions of the world. It goes to the
common roots of all religions. It seeks to appreciate their common
denominator. It cautions against the common enemy of man’s peace,
prosperity and progress. It identifies the common dangers and roadblocks
that obstruct the spiritual path of all mankind.

Furthermore, the nondiscriminating outlook of universal religion is
all-pervasive. In refusing to discriminate between man and man, it not only
transcends sectarian and theological differences, it also pulls down the
barriers between the religious and the nonreligious. It seeks to bridge the
gulf that separates theists and atheists, gnostics and agnostics, skeptics and
mystics. It affirms that the fundamental spiritual potentiality is same in all
human beings regardless of their superficial beliefs and tenets. Beliefs and
tenets are, in ultimate analysis, mental formations determined by the
accidental circumstances of history. So they reflect neither the deepest
essence of man’s being, nor the essential structure of the Supreme. They are
practically useful and pragmatically valid tools of man’s self-adjustment to
the changing environment. In his inmost essence, the individual man is a
spiritual entity, a center of creative freedom. He is neither a mere creature of
circumstances, nor a plaything of random forces. His essence lies much
deeper than ideas, dogmas and creeds. It is the abiding spirit in him that
ultimately counts.
Vedanta as the Basis of Religious Universalism

Vivekananda was an ardent follower of Hinduism. He recognized that Hinduism is a progressive spiritualistic religion. Hinduism is superior to all other religions. But he used the term Hinduism in a very wide sense. He did not mean by it the creed or rituals but the fundamentals of Hinduism. He says that Hinduism as religion is neither creed nor doctrine. It is only realization.

Hinduism for Vivekananda was Vedanta. The word Vedanta literally means the end part of each Vedas.

“The Hindus have received their religion through revelations, the Vedas: They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to the audience, how a book can be without beginning or end but by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery and would exist if all humanity forgot, so is it with the laws that govern spiritual world. The moral, ethical and spiritual relation between soul and soul and between individual spirits and father of all spirits were before their discovery, and would remain if we forgot them.”

Vivekananda asserts that the harmony and the unity of religions is interpreted in term of equality. He rejects the superiority of one religion over other religion. He also rejects the claim of exclusive truth of any religion. Vivekananda places various religions according to their growth in spirituality. On that basis, he places at the top the Vedantic Hinduism in its advaita form. It does not mean that Vedanta is a superior religion in
comparison to others but it means it is the absolute religion because it is a practical religion and it covers the whole life of man. It enters all parts of life in term of practice.

According to Vivekananda,

"Vedanta, therefore, as a religion, must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this. The fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish; for Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts and more and more into practice". 21

Further he says that it is absolute religion though that does not mean that it is one religion among other religions.

Vivekananda says that truth is one, called Brahman which is the substratum of the universe. This Truth or Reality is undifferentiated, indivisible and impersonal. It is not different from Atman, the self, the reality within each individual. The plurality and diversity that are noticed in the world and between persons are therefore not ultimately true. It is non-dual Brahman-Atman that appears as many and is characterized by many names and forms (namarupa). He says that the same reality exists in and behind all multiplicity.

The multiplicity, according to Vivekananda, "is at best only a hideous caricature, a shadow of Reality". 22 "It is "fictitious" and "mere self-
hypnotism”. It is the “projection” or “the reflection of that One Eternal Being, the Atman”.  

Vivekananda says that the Reality is “the Divinity within” each individual. Advaita Vedanta is absolute truth. Vedanta is the goal of all humanity. Through Vedantic idea we can realize this oneness of beings. In this manner he says religion is realization that means realization of God in soul. Oneness is the central idea of Vedanta.

“There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one world, one Existence, everything is that one, the difference is in degree not in kind”.

The goal of man lies in “realizing God in the soul” or “reunion with God which is every man’s true nature”. It may also be described as “realization of truth within which is oneness”.

It is the same life that runs through all beings, from Brahma to the amoeba; the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. It is not correct to say that we live two lives, one religious and the other worldly. It is the same life that we are religious and also engaged in ordinary worldly activities. According to Vivekananda, “the actual should be reconciled to the ideal; the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal”. He says that Vedanta should be carried into our daily life, the city life, country, national and the home life of every nation.

Vedanta is highly practical. It teaches us to have faith in ourselves and to find God in our self. God is in everything, in the earth, moon, sun,
fire water, heaven, animals etc. They are all the forms of Brahman. "The God of Vedantist is the most known of all, and is not outcome of imagination".27

Vivekananda says that it is not in symbols and images that we find God. It is the God in the sick, the poor, the miserable, the ignorant, and the downtrodden that we have to worship.

Vivekananda says that, what truth is there in any religion, it is the truth of Advaita. According to him,

"Advaita is the One Eternal Religion in which truth is realized and it is the goal of all particular religions towards which they all point. It is this Religion that is expressed and manifested in every existent religion. And it is this that is "the essence" and "the kernel of all religions".28

Thus all religions are related to one religion, the Advaita. There is harmony among all religions.

Vivekananda interpreted religious harmony in terms of equality. He says that all religions are equal, that means all religions are equal among themselves except the Advaita Religion which is the goal of all religions.

Vivekananda claims that Advaita Vedanta is the only absolute religion. He says that Hinduism is the most satisfactory religion in the world, and Advaita is "the cret-jewel of all spiritual thought". Secondly, he uses words Hinduism, Vedanta, Advaita etc., sometimes synonymously and sometimes differently. Thus Vedanta sometimes stands only for Advaita and
sometimes all Vedantic schools comprising Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita. Sometimes Hinduism is the totality of these three Vedantic schools and sometimes pure Hinduism is Advaita alone”.  

Vivekananda looked for a world completely free from the dualistic religion. According to him, “To attain the goal, Advaita should be taught to all everywhere, not only everywhere in India but also outside”.  

Thus it is clear that Vivekananda thought of Advaita as the only universal religion, a religion for all people in all places in all times. He says Advaita is not a new religion.  

Advaita alone is rational and compatible with science. No religious ideas other than Advaita can stand the test of reason. If a man wants to be religious and rational at the same time, “Advaita is the one system in the world for him”.  

The conception of a personal God who created the world out of nothing or out of some material cause, as taught in other religions, is rejected as irrational.  

According to Vivekananda, “Has ever your personal God, the Creator of world to whom you cry all your life, helped you – is the next challenge from modern science”. He says that on the other hand, “monistic theory.... is the most rational of all religious theories that we can conceive of. Every other theory, every other conception of God which is partial and little and personal is not rational”.  

Vivekananda says that, Vedanta alone is entirely in harmony with Science. According to him, “the conclusion of modern science are the very conclusions of Vedanta”. Vedanta has indeed already discovered the law of conservation of energy and matter.

“The cause is the same as the effect, and the effect is only the cause in another form. Therefore this whole universe cannot be produced out of nothing”.

He says that unity and oneness of all things, though they appear differently, is the basic truth of Advaita and this has been demonstrated by modern science. Science has discovered that all the forces, like heat, electricity etc. are but one force. They “are nothing but the variation of that unit energy”. So “in the midst of the variety of force, there is unity”.

He further says that, science and religion are not different. In that sense, “Vedanta is the only scientific religion”, incorporating within its teaching the law of evolution and the law of conservation of energy and “it is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people”.

Vivekananda gave another universal point of Vedanta. He says that all religions teach ethical precepts like, “do not kill”, “do not injure”, “love your neighbour as yourself”, etc. but not any religion gives the answer of this question why should I love my neighbour? He says Advaita alone gives the metaphysical explanation for it. It says that man must love others because those others are he himself.
“There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and would become finite. Also each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul, which is infinite”. In other words, he says that the I, self or Atman is not different from the self of all. Vedanta asks everyone to see his own self in all and all in his own self. He says it is the awareness of the oneness of all beings that can be the basis of ethical and all practical efforts of loving service. Vedanta removes the consciousness of duality.

Vivekananda says that “in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself”. This is the basis of all ethical code. All beings are one, and all are truly divine. In loving others one loves “God Himself”, the divinity within each being”. Vedanta teaches us universal oneness, not love your neighbour as your brother but love everyone as your very self.

“There is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. It is too often believed that a person in his progress towards perfection passes from error to truth; that when he passes on from one thought to another, he must necessarily reject the first. But no error can lead to truth. The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is true; it goes from lower truth to higher truth”.

“As manifested beings we appear to be separate, but our reality is one, and the less we think of ourselves as separate from the One, the better for us... from this monistic principle we get at the basis of ethics, and I venture to say that we cannot get any ethics from anywhere else”.

So Advaita alone provides a firm foundation for morality and ethics. Vedanta is all-inclusive and tolerant.
Vivekananda says that Vedanta does not reject any of the religions. Vedanta considers all religions as the necessary steps to preparation for Advaita.

The idea of a universal religion in the sense of a creed or ritual accepted to all is impossible. The only religion that is fit to be the universal religion is that which is broadminded and large enough to supply food for all.

“It must satisfy all the aspirations of all type of people in providing different yogas and paths for different people. In giving freedom to everyone to follow his own path, according to his nature and stage of growth, Vedanta also is fitted to be the universal religion. Anybody with any kind of belief, thus can find a place in it. It does not regard even the lower form of religious expression as wrong or unnecessary. On the other hand, it accepts them in their entirety, as necessary steps to reach the highest truth of Advaita”.^4^4

Vedanta alone can be universal religion because it alone is based on universal principles, unlike other religions which are based on religious experience of their founders. Being tied to a historical person as its founder and for its authority every other religion is confined to time and place. “No religion built upon a person can be taken up as a type by all the races of mankind”.^4^5

On that basis we can say that Advaita is the last and fairest flower of philosophy and religion. All religious thought in every part of the world are derived from the Vedas which is the true source of Hinduism.
‘God’ as the Common Basis for the Unity

All religions are based upon the concept of the oneness of God. God is indeed the one unifying principle of all religions. Different religions describe the same supreme being (God) in different ways.

The one supreme being is the substratum of all religions. God is the common source of inspiration. It is ultimate reality in so far as it is known and comprehended by the human mind. But since being is multidimensional and multifaceted, truth may be described as one infinite light that shines in various forms and colours.

Different conceptions of God found in different religions are different forms of expression of the same all-comprehensive being. They are divergent perspectives of the same reality, appropriate in different historical circumstances, and useful for different human societies at different stages of evaluation. God is the supreme being as revealed to the human soul.

God is the focal point of man’s religious sentiment. God may be defined in different ways and by different names. But his function is to satisfy the hunger of soul. God is related to every man as spirit in man. For example, water might be called by different names in different languages but its basic function is to quench the thirst of man. Vivekananda says:

“One time a number of thirsty people went to drink water at the same fountain. One of them spoke Hebrew and referred to the water of the fountain as mayim. He
remarked how cool and refreshing mayim was. A German referred to the same water as wasser. A Frenchman referred to it as leau. A Russian referred to it as boda. A Chinese referred to it as sui. A Japanese referred to it as mizu. An Indian referred to it as pani. Thus different people speaking different languages as they did designated in different ways, the same substance which quenched their thirst.  

In the same manner, God is the one supreme being that is called by different names. God serves all people of this universe without any distinction of religion, caste, colour, class, creed and culture.

The aim of all religions, Vivekanandta taught, was the spiritual integration of mankind. He said, “our minds are like these vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at the realization of God. God is like the water that fills the vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes the form of vessel. Yet he is one, he is God in every case.” His aim of attending the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1883 was to show that the apparent contradictions in different faiths were not real. It was for this catholic approach that he won the admiration of every delegate attending the parliament. After his address to the delegates, a man remarked, “Every delegate spoke of the God of his own religion. Vivekananda alone spoke of the God of all pleading for the unity of faiths.” Vivekananda said that human society would have made far greater advances, had there been no sectarianism, fanaticism and violence in the name of religion.”
Hinduism considered religion as the manifestation of the divinity in man. Hinduism stands for the belief

“that everybody is divine, is God. Every soul is a sun covered with clouds of ignorance, the difference between soul and soul is owing to the difference in density of these layers of clouds. We believe that this is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and that this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, intellectual or spiritual plane”*^49

Views on Hinduism

Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism as the mother of religions – a religion which had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. He often quoted the following two beautiful lines from Gita, the scripture of Hinduism to buttress this point:

“Whoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him”.^50
“All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me”.^51

The religion of Hinduism with its high spirituality absorbs all sects. It gave space to discoveries of science, the low ideas of idolatry with many mythologies, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains. They all grow and have place in Hinduism.

Vivekananda says that Hindus received their religion through revelation. They believe that Vedas are without beginning and without end. Just as gravitation existed before its discovery and always would exist if all humanity forgets it, in the same manner Vedas with their unique laws eternally govern the spiritual world.

“The moral, ethical, and spiritual relation between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the father of
all spirits were there before their discovery and would remain even if we forgot them".\textsuperscript{52}

Vivekananda says that Vedas teach that creation is without beginning or end. Science also proved that the total amount of cosmic energy is always the same. If at any time this energy did not exist then where did all energy manifest? Somebody says it was in a potential form in God. It meant God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic energy which would make God mutable. Every mutable thing has a compound and every compound must change and that change is called destruction. It means God would die because of destruction which is nonsense. So there never was time when there was no creation.

"Here I stand, and if I shut my eyes and try to conceive my existence – “I”, “I”, “I” – what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? No, the Vedas declare, I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here I am in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created; for creation means a certain future dissolution. If the soul was created, it must die".\textsuperscript{53}

Vivekananda says that spirit never dies. Soul is not the material substance. When one body dies the soul changes to another body. So the Hindu believes that he has the spirit in him which the sword cannot pierce, fire cannot burn, water cannot melt, and air cannot dry.

"The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. The soul is not bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter and thinks of itself as matter".\textsuperscript{54}
Now the question arises what is spirit’s nature? Vivekananda answered that it is everywhere, the pure and formless one, the Almighty and All merciful.

In this context, Vivekananda quoted the song sung by the rishis of the Vedas: “Thou art our Father, thou art Mother, thou art our beloved friend, thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe: help me bear the little burden of this life”.

According to Vivekananda, we can worship God through love. This doctrine of love is so declared in the Vedas:

“He is to be worshipped as the one Beloved, dearer than everything in this world and the next life”.

This doctrine of love was also taught by Lord Krishna. He says that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by the water. So man should live in this world but his heart should have the love of God and his hands busy to work good for other people of the world without any hope of reward in this world or next life. Love God for love’s sake.

“Lord, I do not want wealth or children or learning. If it is Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth; but grant me this – that I may love Thee without hope of reward, love unselfishly for love’s sake”.

Vivekananda narrates the story of one of Krishna’s disciples, an emperor of India, who was driven from his kingdom by his enemies and had to take shelter, with his queen, in a forest in the Himalayas. And there one day the queen asked him how it was that he, the most virtuous of men, should suffer so much misery. The king answered: “Behold, my queen, the
Himalayas – how grand and beautiful they are. I love them. They do not give me anything; but it is my nature to love the grand, the beautiful; therefore I love them. Similarly, I love the Lord. He is the source of all beauty, of all sublimity. He is the only object to be loved. My nature is to love Him, and therefore I love. I do not pray for anything; I do not ask for anything. Let Him place me wherever He likes. I must love Him for love’s sake. I cannot trade in love”.  

The most important thing about Hinduism is that Hindus do not believe in any theories. They say if there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is a merciful Universal soul, a man can go to Him directly. Hindu says: “I have seen the soul, I have seen God”.  

Vivekananda says that Hinduism does not believe in dogmas or doctrines, it believes in realization.

“The religion of the Hindus does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realization - not in believing, but in being and becoming. Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God; and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus”.  

Now the question arises what a man becomes when he attains perfection. Vivekananda’s answer is when a man attains perfection he enjoys infinite and perfect bliss. He achieves God that is the only one thing which gave him pleasure and bliss. This is common religion of all the sects of India. And perfection is absolute as it cannot be two or three. When a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it becomes identical with Brahman. The soul realizes itself as absolute existence, absolute knowledge and absolute bliss.
"...But then perfection is absolute, and absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual. And so, when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it will then realize itself as Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute".  

Vivekananda says that there is no polytheism in India. A worshipper calls all the attributes of God as God himself. God has many qualities so we can call Him by any of his attributes. It is not polytheism. He says different names are not the names of different gods. God is one having many attributes.

"At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation. 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet'".

Another question is why the follower of Hinduism uses external symbol to worship or realize God. Vivekananda says that according to law of association the material image calls the mental idea and mental idea calls material image. That is why the Hindu uses an external symbol or idol when he worships.

"My brethren, if we can no more think about anything without a mental image then we can live without breathing. By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you that it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to most of the world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol".
Hindus have connected the ideas of holiness, purity, truth with different images and forms but because of this difference of forms and images people devote their whole life to their idol and never progress from lower stage to higher.

"The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and other such ideas with different images and forms – but with this difference, that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindus is centred in realization."  

Unity in variety is the scheme of nature and Hindus recognize it. Every other religion having certain fixed dogmas and principle, tries to force society to adopt them. According to Vivekananda, "It places before society only one coat, which must fit Jack and John and Henery all alike. If it does not fit John or Henery, he must go without a coat to cover his body".

In Hinduism those who wanted to realize divine nature through image or symbol can do so. But it is not necessary for everyone. And nobody has right to say that it is wrong to realize God through image or idol. Nor is it a compulsory factor in Hinduism. Hinduism states that Absolute can only be realized.

"To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a traveling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only the evolving of God out of the material man; and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth’s adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures."
Vivekananda says that all religions of the world are same though it is realized differently by various people in various conditions. Because of this contradictions arise between different religions. But ultimately every religion has same goal and same God inspires all of them. It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the Hindu, in his incarnation as Krishna:

“I am in every religion, like the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.”

The Concept of Practical Vedanta

Swami Vivekananda relates his religious principle to the daily affairs of life. He regarded Vedanta as source and guiding principle of whole field of human life. In his famous speech on Practical Vedanta in London on 10th November 1896, he said:

“Vedanta therefore, as a religion, must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this. The fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of world must vanish; for Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life; they must enter into all our thoughts, and more and more into practice”.

Vivekananda tried to present the practical aspects and implications of Vedanta philosophy. He gave emphasis on the fact that a man can seek salvation not only in the traditional way or in forest. A man can attain salvation without renouncing the world and taking to the life of a hermit.
Every human being can attain salvation by service to humanity and serving God in man. Wisdom is not the exclusive possession of hermits; it can be possessed by the kings as well who run the affairs of society. In this context, he gave the example of Svetaketu, a Brahman lad and the king Pravahana Jaivali.

“Svetaketu was the son of Aruni, a sage, most probably a recluse. He was brought up in the forest, but he went to the city of the Panchalas and appeared at the court of king Pravahana Jaivali. The king asked him, “Do you knew how beings depart hence at death?”, “No, Sir”, “Do you know how they return hither?”, “No, Sir”, “Do you know the way of the fathers and the way of the God’s?”, “No, Sir”. Then the king asked other questions. Svetaketu could not answer them. So the king told him that he know nothing. The boy went back to his father and the father admitted that he himself could not answer these questions. It was not that he was unwilling to answer these questions; it was not that he was unwilling to teach the boy. But he did not know these things. So Svetaketu returned to the king with his father and they both asked to be taught these secrets. The king said that these things had hitherto been known only among kings; the priests never knew them. He proceeded, however, to teach them what they desired to know”.

According to Vivekananda, there are many stories in various Upanisads that proved that Vedanta philosophy is not only produced by meditation in forests but also by remaining busy in the daily affairs of life.

“Vedanta philosophy is not the outcome of meditation in forest only, but the very best parts of it were thought out and expressed by those brains which were busiest in the everyday affairs of lifes. We cannot conceive of any man busier than an absolute monarch, a man who rules over millions of people; and yet some of these rulers were deep thinkers”.
Now the question arises how can the Vedanta philosophy have practical application? Vivekananda says that there are many historical facts which show that the Vedanta has practical application. He gives the example of Bhagavad Gita (which is the most essential part of Vedanta philosophy) in which Sri Krishna taught to Arjun in the battle field of Kurukshetra.

"We come to the Bhagvat Gita — most of you, perhaps, have read it; it is the best commentary we have on the Vedanta philosophy — curiously enough, the scene is laid on battlefield, where Krishna teaches this philosophy to Arjuna. And the doctrine which stands out luminously on every page of the Gita is that of intense activity, but in the midst of it, eternal calmness".71

Vivekananda says that there are many Vedantic ideas that proved that a man who lived in the worldly life can attain wisdom and salvation. A life of intense activity with eternal calmness is indeed the goal of Vedanta. Inactivity in the sense of passive action is like clouds of earth. Real activity is that which is combined with eternal calmness. Eternal calmness cannot be agitated. In any situation, the work done with balance of mind and with eternal calmness is the best work and this is the secret of work to attain as a goal by Vedanta.

"This is the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of Vedanta. Inactivity as we understand it, in the sense of passivity, certainly cannot be the goal of Vedanta. Were it so, then the walls around us would be the wisest of things; for they are inactive. Clouds of earth, stumps of trees, would be the greatest sages in the world; for they are inactive".72

Vivekananda says that man should work without passion. If a man has less passion he can work well because passion disturbs our mind and we cannot use as much energy as we can for better work. When the mind is
collected with calmness the whole energy of mind would be doing good work. An angry man never does better work. And who gives way to anger or hatred cannot be practical. He will break himself and do nothing practical. It is the eternal calm, balanced mind that does better work.

“I have been told many times that we can not work if we do not have passion which men generally feel for work. I also thought in that way years ago, but as I’m growing older, getting more experienced, I find its not true. The less passion there is, the better we work”.

Vivekananda said that Vedanta always insists that every ideal can be realized by every one. There is not any restriction to the realization of this ideal because it is already realized that all the power of this universe are ours. There is no darkness of ignorance around you. Darkness never existed and body is weak. Those who are fools always cry that we are weak and ignorant and impure. Vedanta recognized faith in oneself. This is the reality of our nature.

“Vedanta insists not only that the ideal is practical, but that it has been so always, and that this ideal, this Reality, is our own nature. Everything else that you see is false, untrue. As soon as you say, “I am a little mortal being” you are saying something which is not true, you are giving the lie to yourselves, you are hypnotizing yourself into something vile and weak and wretched”.

Vedanta recognizes no sin but only error. If a man thinks that he/she is weak, that he is sinner and a miserable creature, that is not true. We must not think we have no power to do this or that work.

According to Vivekananda, the Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. It does not give us advice to negate the world.
“You can have your wife; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you see God in the wife. So also you are to see God in your children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery, the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what the Vedanta teaches”.

Vivekananda says that oneness includes everything. If a man is mortal, an animal is also mortal. It is the same life from Brahman to amoeba. He says it is not right to say that we live two lives - one religious and the other, worldly. It is the same life where a man is religious and also engaged in ordinary worldly work. If he believes in that ideal, an ordinary man can live his worldly life and fulfill the ideal of religion, too. Religion enters into all his thoughts and shapes his practical conduct. According to Vivekananda:

“We should not also think that to make the ideal of the Vedanta practical means to drag the ideal down to the level of our life of blind passions and animal impulses. It is just the other way about. It really means that we are to make our ordinary life conform to the ideal, to elevate it to the level of ideal”.

Vedanta philosophy is highly practical. It should be carried into our daily life, national life and the home life. It should be realized in working for poor, weak and sick. For Vedanta says: “He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva, and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary”. The God of Vedanta is the God in the sick, poor and weak. It is not the God in symbol and images and not the God that we find in temple or church.
Vedanta philosophy is also practical in the sense that it promotes morality. It means Vedanta teaches that you all are prophets and you all must be prophets.

"Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God". 

Vivekananda says that, there are many systems or philosophies built by persons such as Buddha, Mohammed and Christ. Vedanta philosophy stands as the background of all these different religions. There is no fight between Vedanta and other religious systems in the world.

One principle that Vedanta teaches and that is found in every religion is that man is divine and whatever we perceive through consciousness is divine. There is no difference between man and man. All are alike divine.

According to Vivekananda, "There is, as it were, an infinite ocean behind, and you and I are so many waves, coming out of that infinite ocean, and each one of us is trying his best to manifest that infinite outside. So potentially, each one of us has that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss as our birth right, our real nature: and the difference between us is caused by the greater or lesser power to manifest that divine".

Vivekananda says that according to Vedanta every human being stands testimony to the divine, and every teacher or prophet is helpful to every people. By helping him to move onward, the divinity is aroused that is within him. Vedanta has no quarrel even with those who do not understand
the divinity of man because every man consciously or unconsciously is trying to relate with that divinity.

According to Vivekananda there are many religions in this world that say that man who does not believe in any personal God is an atheist, but it is only in Vedanta where it is said that a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist.

"Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world say that man who does not believe in personal God outside himself is an atheist, so Vedanta says that man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what Vedanta calls atheism." 80

Vivekananda says that Vedanta is to be found in all religions. In India or out of India, this idea has been expressed through mythology or symbology. Vedanta says that there has not been one religious inspiration. The divine nature has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human being and we all call it ethics or morality, which exists in every man.

According to Vivekananda, "there are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality". 81

The whole philosophy of Vedanta is summed up in Tat Tvam Asi, "Thou art that". 82

Vedanta teaches that every man of religion is one with the Universal Being. That means every soul exists in your soul. If you hurt anyone you hurt yourself. If you love others you love yourself.
Vivekananda says that as soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, and whomsoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself; and if love comes out from you, it is bound to come back to you. For I am the universe, this Universe is my body. I am the infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this infinite comes.

According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta must allow this infinite change in religious thought, and try to bring every one to the same opinion because goal is one and same in every religion.

“As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight and at last come in the ocean – so, all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different stand points and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come unto THEE”.

Vivekananda says that Buddhism, Christianity etc. are missionary religions and undoubtedly they civilized the world. Three hundred years before Christ, a Buddhist inscription says that all religions are same wherever they exist and no one should try to injure them or hurt them.

“In Buddhism, one of the most missionary religions of the world, we find inscription remaining of the great Emperor Ashoka – recording how missionaries were sent to Alexandria, to Antioch, to Persia, to China and to various other countries of the then civilized world. Three hundred years before Christ, instructions were given them not to revile other religions; ‘the basis of all religion is the same, wherever they are; try to help them all you can, teach them all you can, but do not try to injure them’.

Vivekananda says that Hindus never reject any religion and there never was any religious persecution by the Hindu. It is only in Hinduism
that we have a wonderful reference for all religions of world. Hindus welcomed those who were persecuted in their own countries.

“They sheltered a portion of the Hebrews, when they were driven out of their country; and the Malabar Jews remain as a result. They received at another time the remnant of the Persians, when they were almost annihilated; and they remain to this day, as a part of us and loved by us, as the modern Parsees of Bombay. There were Christians who claimed to have come with St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ; and they were allowed to settle in India and hold their own opinions; and a colony of them is even now in existence in India.”

This is the great lesson taught by Vedanta. Every human being is struggling to reach the same goal. Why we reject the struggle of other if he is slower than others. There is no need to reject him and no need to revile him.

“When our eyes are opened and the heart is purified, the work of the same divine influence, the unfolding of the same divinity in every human heart will become manifest; and then alone we shall be in a position to claim the brotherhood of man”.

Views on Visistadvaita and Dvaita

Vivekananda recognizes three stages in spiritual growth: Dvaita (dualism), Visistadvaita (qualified non-dualism) and Advaita (non-dualism). According to Vivekananda,

“that growth is gradual, step by step, and the recognition of this led them to harmonise all the preceding systems”.

The spiritual growth of a man consists of a movement from lower to higher religious ideas. These stages of spiritual growth are progressive and
depend upon one's subjective abilities. Each individual is not having same power. The religious progress of different individuals is not equal. They are at different stages of growth and they are all ultimately to reach the same goal of Advaita. According to Vivekananda,

“All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man”.88

Vivekananda says it is not only Madhva who prached the dualistic Vedanta but Christianity and Islam also belong to the same stage of Dvaita.

“This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creed of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism”.89

Vivekananda says that dualism is the first stage of religious evolution.

“This is first stage in religion, it is called dualism, the stage when man sees himself and God eternally separate, when God is a separate entity by himself and nature is a separate entity by itself”.90

Vivekananda says that dualist believes that God is also entirely separate from man.

“They believe in a God who is entirely separate from them, a great king, a high, mighty monarch, as it were. At the same time they make Him purer than the monarchs of the earth; they give Him all good qualities and remove the evil qualities from Him. As if it were ever possible for good to exist without evil; as if there could be any conception of light without a conception of darkness”.91

The dualist believes that God is the creator of the Universe and the universe is governed by Him. He is eternally separate from nature, separate from the human soul. God is eternal, nature is eternal and all souls are
eternal. Nature and souls are manifested and change but God remains same.

According to dualists,

“This God is personal in that He has qualities, not that He has a body, He has human attributes; He is merciful, He is just, He is powerful, He is almighty, He can be approached, He can be prayed to, He can be loved, He loves in return, and so forth. In one word, He is a human God, only infinitely greater than man; he has none of the evil qualities which men have. ‘He is the repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities’.

Vivekananda says that, dualist cannot explain the problem of evil, because there can be so many evils in this world? How it is possible that under the rule of a merciful God, repository of an infinite number of good qualities, so much evil prevails. According to Vivekananda,

“This question arose in all dualistic religions, but the Hindus never invented a Satan as an answer to it. The Hindus with one accord laid the blame on man, and it was easy for them to do so”.

Vivekananda says that the evils that existed in this world are because of our sins. We have caused all these evils. We see misery in this world because of man’s bad actions. It is the result of past wickedness of man. Man alone is responsible for this.

“The evils that are in the world are caused by none else but ourselves. We have caused all this evil; and just as we constantly see misery resulting from evil action, so can we also see that much of the existing misery in the world is the effect e.g. the past wickedness of man. Man alone, therefore, according to this theory, is responsible. God is not to blame. He, the eternally merciful father, is not to blame at all”. We reap what we sow”.

The second doctrine of dualists is that every soul has to attain salvation. Every soul reaches the eternal happiness. Soul would be free from
death and birth, good and evil and every soul in the presence of God enjoys Him forever.

"The one common idea of all Hindu sects is that all souls have to get out of this universe. Neither the universe which we see and feel, nor even an imaginary one, can be right, the real one, because both are mixed up with good and evil. According to dualists, there is beyond this universe a place full of happiness and good only; and when that place is reached, there will be no more necessity of being born and reborn, of living and dying; and this idea is very dear to them. No more disease there, and no more death. There will be eternal happiness, and they will be in the presence of God for all time and enjoy Him forever."

According to Vivekananda, dualism holds that there are three infinities, namely, God, matter and soul. Each of these is eternal and separate. But it is self-contradictory. Vivekananda argues that if there is God, that God must be both the efficient and material cause of the universe.

The second stage of spiritual journey is the Visistadvaita. It is based on the principle of unity. It accepts the view that Reality is one. It constituted three things: God, nature and soul. Matter and souls are considered as the body of God, and God their soul. Matter and God are not external to God but in God. In other words we can say that world (nature) and soul depend on God but God is independent and soul and matter are related to Him as body is related to soul. So nature and soul are the parts of God (ansa). Good creates the world of the matter which is His body.

According to Visistadvaita,

"The effect is never different from the cause; the effect is but the cause reproduced in another form. If the universe is the effect and God the cause, it must be God Himself—it cannot be anything but that. They start with the assertion
that God is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe; He Himself is the creator, and He Himself is the material out of which the whole of nature is projected.\textsuperscript{96}

Visistadvaitins say that these three existences, God, nature and soul are one.

"God is, as it were, the soul, and nature and souls are the body of God. Just as I have a body and I have a soul, so the whole universe and all souls are the body of God, and God is the Soul of souls".\textsuperscript{97}

So the God is material cause of this universe. World is the body of God. The body may be changed but it cannot affect the soul.

"Bodies come and go, but the soul does not change. Even so the whole universe is the body of God, and in that sense it is God. But the change in the universe does not affect the God. Out of this material He creates the universe, and at the end of a cycle His body becomes finer, it contracts; at the beginning of another cycle it becomes expanded again, and out of it evolves all these different worlds."\textsuperscript{98}

Visistadvaita also holds that God is personal.

"The God of the qualified non-dualists is also personal God, the repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities, only He is interpenetrating everything in the universe. He is immanent in everything and everywhere; when the scriptures say that God is every thing, it means God is interpenetrating everything".\textsuperscript{99}

Vivekananda says that, like dualism, Visistadvaita also becomes insufficient in furthering man's spiritual growth. It fails to solve the problem of evil in this whole world. Because if everything is the body of God and everything is interpenetrated by God then how can there be evil and misery in this world. He says if the world is body of God and evil and misery exist in this world it means God cannot be perfect and absolute.

"If the universe and the soul are parts of God who is the whole, God ceases to be the Infinite and ultimate, because
Vivekananda says that idea of a personal God upheld by dualists and Visistadvaitins is unsatisfactory because the existence of such a personal God can never be proved. According to him:

“It can be almost disproved. There is not a shadow of proof for his existence, and there are very strange arguments to the contrary”.

In Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, the world is believed to be unreal. It is an appearance, an illusion. The world appears to be real because of Maya. The appearance of this world taken as real is due to ignorance. Shankara said: “Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory and the individual soul is non-different from Brahman”.

Vivekananda says that Brahman is present everywhere and in everything. According to him,

“The world of objects is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not as in Sankara’s Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is real and the world is false or illusory. (Brahma Satyam, jagan mithya), but that in a sense the world also is real.”

According to nondualist, God must be both the material and the efficient cause of this universe. But this is nonsense. For God can never be the material cause of this universe.

Nondualist also said that the universe is illusion. “This universe does not exist at all; it is all illusion. The whole of this Universe, these Devas, gods, angels, and all the other beings born and dying, all this infinite member of souls coming up and going down, are all dreams.” But Vivekananda does not agree with this view.
Advaitins believe in a higher phase of personal God, which is impersonal.

"Advaitists believe something more. They believe in a still higher phase of this personal God, which is personal impersonal. No adjective can illustrate where there is no qualification, and the Advaitist would not give Him any qualities except three – Sat, Chit, Ananda, (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute). This is what Shankara did".\(^{105}\)

Vivekananda says that UpnIsads themselves accept it in their pronouncement of Neti, Neti. "Not this, Not this".

It must be clear that Hinduism for Vivekananda was Vedanta. Vedanta is based on the teachings of Upanisads which are regarded as the goal, the end of the Vedas.

Vivekananda considered it wrong to interpret the Upanisads as if they wholly teach either Dvaita, Visistadvaita or Advaita.

"This was a mistake committed even by great classical bhasyakaras (commentators) including Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva and they did it by text torturing".\(^{106}\)

According to Vivekananda, Upanisads do not have any one system of thought. He says Upanisads show that there are grades beginning with Dvaita, moving to Visistadvaita and finally reaching to Advaita. All the three Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita have place in Hinduism.

**Views on Buddhism and Jainism**

Buddhism is one of the most important religions of the world. It was a great spiritual movement that arose in India but that spirituality affected the civilization of the whole world.
When Buddha was born, India was in need of a spiritual leader. He was a prophet born among the priests. Priests prescribed the way of worship by which they could dominate the people. Prophets, on the other hand, taught the right way and asked the people to refrain from superstition.

“Buddha was the triumph in the struggle that had been going on between the priests and the prophets in India. One thing can be said for these Indian priests: they were not and never are intolerant of religions; they never have persecuted religion. Any man was allowed to preach against them – such was their catholicity”.  

Vivekananda says that the Buddha was great preacher of equality. He was liberal in his thought and never persecuted any religion. The most tremendous truths preached by Buddha was the equality of men of whole world. He said that all human beings are equal and that there is no distinction between different human beings. Men and women have equal right to live and attain spirituality, whether he or she belongs to any caste, religion, community and nation etc. He removed the difference between priests and the people of other castes.

“He taught the very gist of the philosophy of Vedas to one and all without distinction; he taught it to the world at large, because one of his great messages was the equality of man. Men are all equal. No concession there to anybody. Buddha was great preacher of equality. Every man and woman has same right to attain spirituality”.  

According to Vivekananda, Buddha always said every one has right to get salvation. Buddha opened the door of salvation for whole humanity. Buddha was the great Indian philosopher who never recognized caste.

“The difference between the priests and the other caste he abolished. Even the lowest were entitled to the highest
attainments; he opened the door of Nirvana to one and all”.109

Vivekananda does not accept the split ideology of the Hindu priest who argued that Jainism and Buddhism did not belong to the Hinduism.

“Whether you take the Vaidika, the Jaina, or the Buddha, the Advaita, the Vishishtaadvaita or the Dvaita – there, they are all of one mind”.110

Vivekananda says the ideal of Hinduism can be only Brahmanism. It does not mean the Brahmanism by birth but by spirituality. Same thought also exists in Buddhism.

“I mean the ideal for the Brahminness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of Hindu race”.111

Vivekananda says that the caste system is not a divine order but it is the invention of human mind. It is not eternal. Caste system has split the true spirit of Hinduism. When the world cycle turns, the evil of caste system will vanish and all the people become Brahmans again.

Vivekananda certainly disagreed with Buddhism in so far as Buddha was preaching only the importance of Moksha in human life. Buddha preached “Nothing is more desirable in life than Moksha; whoever you are, come one and all to take it” .112

Vivekananda said that Buddhism did not respect ‘Svadharma’ that is the necessary duties, which everybody has to fulfil in his life. He asked asked the Buddists if to follow moksha path it was necessary to avoid the worldly duties? In Hinduism, Svadharma meaning natural duties does not refer to worldliness but selfless realization of Dharma.
“You are a householder, you must not concern yourself much with things of that sort; you do your Svadharma” (natural duty).\textsuperscript{113}

Vivekananda strictly argues against the escapism of Buddhist creed. Buddhist pretends the ignorance about the Dharma. But the Hindu scriptures say:

“No doubt, Moksha is far superior to Dharma; but Dharma should be finished first of all”.\textsuperscript{114}

Vivekananda said the Buddhist monks make Dharma and Moksha alternative life styles. In this way, they are diverting people from their duties. But this apart, there was complete convergence of Buddhism and Vedic religion in contradiction to Hindu orthodoxy.

“The aims of the Buddhistic and Vedic religion are the same”, but the means adopted by the Buddhist are not right”.\textsuperscript{115}

In his famous speech before the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the 26\textsuperscript{th} September 1893, Vivekananda confessed he was a Hindu but as a Hindu he has equal reverence for Buddha.

“I am not a Buddhist, as you have heard, and yet I am. If China, or Japan, or Ceylon follow the teachings of the Great Master, India worships him as God incarnate on earth”.\textsuperscript{116}

Vivekananda explains the relation between Buddhism and Hinduism:

“The relation between Hinduism (by Hinduism, I mean the religion of Vedas) and what is called Buddhism at the present day is nearly the same as between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Sakya Muni was a Hindu. The Jews rejected Jesus Christ, nay, crucified him, and the Hindus have accepted Sakya Muni as God and worship him”.\textsuperscript{117}
Buddha never preached transmigration of the soul. According to Vivekananda, Buddha believed in one soul.

“except he believed one soul was to its successor like the wave of the ocean that grew and died away, leaving naught to the succeeding wave but its force. He never preached that there was a God, nor did he deny there was a God”. 118

But Vivekananda says that God exists, as a pure spirit. He is nearer to you as yourself. He is a soul. God is not separate from yourself. He is within you. In his lecture “Buddha’s Message to the World” delivered in San Francisco, on March 18, 1900 he said:

“The more you approach your real self, the more quickly delusion vanishes. The more all difference and division disappear, the more you realize all as the one Divinity. God exists; but He is not a man sitting upon a cloud. He is pure spirit. Where does He reside? Nearer to you than your very self. He is the soul. How can you perceive God as separate and different from yourself? When you think of him as someone separate from yourself, you do not know Him. He is you yourself”.119

In the teachings of Buddha, there is no God and no soul, simply work. Buddha preached work for work’s sake and for others not for one’s own self because self is a delusion. But Vivekananda said that Hindus can give up everything but they can never give up God and devotion. Hindus remain faithful to God and devotion.

“The Hindus can give up everything except their God. To deny God is to cut the very ground from under the feet of devotion. Devotion and God the Hindus must cling to. They can never relinquish these. And here, in the teaching of Buddha, are no God and no soul - simply work. What for? Not for the self. For the self is a delusion. We shall be ourselves when this delusion has vanished. Very few are there in the world that can rise to that height and work for the work sake”.120
Vivekananda said that Buddhism spread fast because Buddha was the first man in history of humanity who devoted himself to the service not only for all human beings but all living beings. His intense love of all humanity or living beings makes him a unique figure in the history.

Vivekananda said that like Jesus the people did not understand him. The followers of Buddha did not follow the teaching of Buddha. There is no contradiction between the Hinduism and Buddhism. But there is contradiction with the lessons of Buddhism which was spread by his followers. He said that Buddha never preached against Hinduism.

“Only in the case of Jesus, it was the old people, the Jews, who did not understand him, while in the case of Buddha, it was his own followers who did not realise the import of his teachings. As the Jew did not understand the fulfilment of the Old Testament, so the Buddhist did not understand the fulfilment of the truth of the Hindu religion.”

Vivekananda said that Hinduism and Buddhism are not separate with each other because Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism live without Hinduism. Contradiction of thought exists in only the Buddhists and Brahmins.

“Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism. Then realize what the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist”.

Vivekananda said that Buddha’s doctrine was about why is there misery in this world? His own answer was because we are selfish. We desire things for ourselves, that is the cause of misery. Now the question arises how we can vanish misery in our life, what is the way out? The giving up of the self. He says souls do not exist. Whatever we perceive is all that exists.
He says in the cycle of life and death there is nothing like soul, only a stream of thoughts.

“There is a stream of thought, one thought following another in succession, each thought coming into existence and becoming non-existent at the same moment, that is all; there is no thinker of the thought, no soul. The body is changing all the time; so is mind, consciousness. The self therefore is a delusion. All selfishness comes of holding on to the self, to this illusory self.”

Vivekananda claims that there is another way to look at the truth. In Upanisad there a great doctrine of Atman and Brahman. Atman, the self and Brahman, the God, are only one Reality. Because of Maya we make difference between self and God. There is only one self, not many. We perceive this self in many forms. For example, one man is another man’s self because all men are one. If a man hurts any other man, he hurts himself.

“In the Upanisads there is already the great doctrine of the Atman and Brahman. Atman, the self, is the same as Brahman, the Lord. This self is all that is; It is the only reality. Maya, delusion, makes us see it as different. There is one Self, not many”. Buddha aroused the feeling of intense love for all. It was the universal message taught by Buddha to whole humanity.

Vivekananda said the Buddha rejected the ceremonies and ritual as for him doing good to men and animals was the only way to get salvation. But, according to Brahmins, all ceremonies were equally work and a way to get salvation.

“Buddhists said that doing good to men and to animals were the only works; the Brahmins said the worship and all ceremonials were equally work and purified the mind”.

Somebody asked Vivekananda if Buddhists do not believe in any God or soul, how can their religion be derived from Vedas. Vivekananda
answered to him saying that Buddha found an eternal Moral law in a supersensuous state.

"Buddha was more brave and sincere than any teacher. He said: believe no book; the Vedas are all humbug. If they agree with me, so much the better for the books. I am the greatest book; sacrifice and prayer are useless."

Vivekananda said that Buddha gave to the world complete system of morality. "He was good for good's sake, he loved for love sake." Buddha was the only one who actually carried this teaching of Karma yoga into practice.

"He is the one man who ever carried this into perfect practice. All the prophets of the world, except Buddha, had external motives to move them to unselfish action. The prophets of the world, with this single exception, may be divided into two sects, one set holding that they are incarnation of God come down on earth, and the other holding that they are only messengers from God; and both draw their impetus for work from outside, expect reward from outside, however highly spiritual may be the language they use."

Buddha is the only prophet who said:

"I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is."

Vivekananda said that Buddha, in the conduct of his life, acted absolutely without any personal motives. He was the greatest philosopher.

He preached the highest philosophy of life.

"The whole human race has produced but one such character, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. This great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet had the deepest sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never put forth any claims for himself."
He is ideal Karma yogi. He worked throughout his life entirely without motive. He is the greatest reformer the world has seen. He had the greatest combination of heart and brain.

"He is the ideal karma yogi, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born, beyond compare the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed, the greatest soul power that has ever been manifested."131

Vivekananda said that Buddha was the first man who said:

"Believe not because some old manuscripts are produced, believe not because it is your national belief, because you have been made to believe it from your childhood; but reason it all out, and after you have analysed it, then, if you find that it will do good to one and all, believe it, live up to it and help others to live up to it".132

Vivekananda said that Buddhism did not try to prove anything about the Absolute Entity. In a stream water is changing. One wave goes, another comes; so we have no right to say that the stream is one. "Buddhists deny the one, and say, it is many".133 According to Vivekananda what Buddhists call karma, we call the soul. According to Buddhism:

"Man is a series of waves. Every wave dies, but somehow the first wave causes the second. That the second wave is identical with the first is illusion. To get rid of illusion good karma is necessary. Buddhists do not postulate anything beyond the world".134

But Vivekananda says that beyond the relative there is the Absolute. He said that Buddhism accepts that there is misery and we get it because of wrong action. Our aim should therefore be to get rid of misery. Whether we get happiness or not, we do not know.

"Buddhism accepts that there is misery, and sufficient it is that we can get rid of this Dukha (misery); whether we get sukha (happiness) or not, we do not know. Buddha preached not the soul preached by others".135
But according to Hindus, soul is substance, and God is Absolute. In this manner, both Buddhism and Hinduism destroy the relative.

He says that present day Buddhism and Hinduism were growth from same roots though Buddha denied the authority of Vedas.

“Buddha is said to have denied the Vedas because there is so much Himsa (killing) and other things. Every page of Buddhism is a fight with the Vedas (the ritualistic aspect). But he had no authority to do so.”

Vivekananda says that in Buddhism there is no authority of God. In Hinduism God is everywhere. Vedas teach the God, both personal and impersonal. Hinduism cannot exist without God. This is the only way to get salvation.

“Buddha is expressly agnostic about God; but God is everywhere preached in our religion. The Vedas teach God – both personal and impersonal. God is everywhere preached in the Gita. Hinduism is nothing without God. The Vedas are nothing without Him. That is the only way to salvation. Sannyasins have to repeat the following, several times: I, wishing for Mukti, take refuge in God, who created the world, who breathed out the Vedas.”

Buddha ought to have understood the harmony of religions. He himself did not introduce the sectarianism. Modern Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism have branched off at the same time.

Besides Buddhism, Swami Vivekananda viewed Jainism, too, in its true perspective. He told that Jainism was a great religion which put forth the concept of Ahimsa and Truth as its main principles.

The philosophy of Jainism is based on the fact that there is no existence of ‘God’. However one should not consider Jainism as atheistic. It believes in the existence of a supernatural power controlling the universe. It
does not call it in terms of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara as in Hinduism. The priesthood has created the concept of God referring to creation and begetting some reward in heaven. It is really meaningless.

According to Jainism, there exist only the nature and living being.

"The Buddhists and Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion - to evolve a God out of man".  

Vivekananda says that Jains were highly praiseworthy. They preached non-violence and doing good to all to the extent possible. This is the real meaning of Karma which one should acknowledge. They spread out and followed this principle widely in practice and percepts. Jains never confined to their own welfare; instead they tried to protect other creatures even at the cost of their life.

Buddhists and Jains are not dependent on God but their religion had the supreme power of diverting the attention and concentration of people towards truth and converting human being into superhumans. Jainism paved the way for nonviolence and the religion stood on the basis of chastity and purity which flourished in the Indian subcontinent through the centuries.

Views on Christianity and Islam

Vivekananda, in his lecture "The Vedanta Philosophy and Christianity", delivered at the Unitarian Church in Oakland, California, on February 28, 1900, said:

"Religion is fundamental in the very soul of humanity; and all life is the evolution of that which is within it, of necessity, expresses itself through various peoples and nation."
Vivekananda says that the language of the soul is one. In this world there are many nations which are having many languages. People have different customs and principles of life and yet they are united in having some or other kind of religion. Religion is about soul which is common to all humanity.

"Religion is of the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages, and customs. Hence it follows that difference between the religions of the world is one of expression and not of substance; and their point of similarity and unity are of the soul, are intrinsic, as the language of the soul is one, in whatever peoples and under whatever circumstances it manifests itself".  

One thing is common in all religions and that is the belief in the authority of an authentic book. Each religion claims that its own book is the only authentic word of God and the sacred books of other religions are false. The orthodox followers of the Vedas, for example, claim that Vedas are the only authentic word of God in the world. Whatever God spoke to human being and all creature of this world was through Vedas. Everything in the world exists because it is in the Vedas. The language of Vedas is the original language of God.

"The language of Vedas is the original language of God, all other languages are mere dialects and not of God. Every word and syllable in the Vedas must be pronounced correctly, each sound must be given its true vibration, and every departure from this rigid exactness is a terrible sin and unpardonable".

Vivekananda says that this type of rigidity is predominant in all orthodox religions, but this fight over books is indulged in by the ignorants
who are all same. The real nature of all religions is same, though it is expressed in different forms and in different languages.

Vivekananda says that Christians claim to believe in Jesus Christ but at the same time they reject the greater part of his teachings.

“It is an irrational claim to believe in the teaching of Jesus Christ and at the same time to hold that the greater part of his teachings have no application at the present time. If you say that the reason why the powers do not follow them that believe (as Christ saint they would) is because you have not faith enough and are not pure enough – that will be all right. But to say that they have no application at the present time is to be ridiculous”.

Vivekananda says that some Christians are so silly that they try to save the soul of hungry people but they do not try to save their body from hunger. In this regard, he said in his lecture, “Religion Not the Crying Need of India” delivered on 20th September, 1893.

“Christians must always be ready for good criticism, and I hardly think you will mind if I make a little criticism. You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen – why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying need in the East is not religion – they have religion enough, it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics”… I fully realized how difficult it was to get help for the heathen from Christians in a Christian land.”
Vivekananda said that like Christ Buddha too taught the universal brotherhood of man but while Buddhists practice this principle, the Christians only preach it but do not practice it. According to Vivekananda,

"The Buddhists have no place for future torment for men. In that they differ from the Christians who will forgive a man for five minutes in this world and condemn him to everlasting punishment in the next. Buddha was the first to teach the universal brotherhood of man. It is the cardinal principle of the Buddhist faith today. The Christian preaches it, but does not practice its own teaching".  

Vivekananda was however a great admirer of the teaching of Jesus Christ, though he would like this kind of reverence for other’s teacher to be reciprocated by Christians.

"I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ’s character. I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ".

Vivekananda said that the Christianity was dualistic Vedanta adapted to the people of Europe. There was indeed very little difference between the pure religion of Christ and that of Vedanta. Jesus Christ himself was an advaitin who realized the oneness of all existence, identified with his own self. So the religion of Christ should not be considered as Dvaita, though it is true that the religion taught by Jesus to common people gives the appearance of being Dvaita.

"In the religion of Christ there was little of crudeness; there is very little difference between the pure religion of Christ and that of Vedanta. You find there the idea of oneness; but Christ also preached dualistic ideas to the people in order to give them something tangible to take hold of, to lead them up to the highest ideal."
The dualism, as seen already is the first stage of spiritual growth. It is implied in the saying “Our Father which art is in heaven”. But Advaita is implied in, “I and my father are one”. According to Vivekananda,

“The same Prophet who preached, “Our Father which art in heaven”, also preached, “I and my father are one”, and the same Prophet knew that through the “Father in heaven” lies the way to the “I and my Father are one”. There was only blessing and love in the religion of Christ; but as soon as crudeness crept in, it was degraded into something not much better than the religion of the Prophet of Arabia”.

“The life of Christ is the life of all the past. The life of every man is, in a manner, the life of the past. It comes to him through heredity, through his surroundings, through education, through his own reincarnation – the past of the whole race. In a way the past of the earth, the past of the whole world, stands impressed upon every soul”.

Vivekananda quoted the saying of Jesus Christ: “No man hath seen God at any time, but through the son” and says that it is true. Now the question arises where should we see God but in the son? He says that the man you and I, the poorest of us, include that. He says that the light is everywhere but we see it most clearly in lamp. God is also omnipresent. So He can be seen when it is reflected in someone on the earth, that means the Prophet, the messenger of God. Vivekandna says that according to Christianity the Prophet means the man-God, God personified into man.

Vivekananda said that there are three ways in which man can perceive God. All forms of religion whether it is high or low, are just stages in the journey towards God. These three stages are taught by the great Teacher of New Testament (Jesus Christ).
Jesus taught: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, and so on; a simple prayer, mark you, a child prayer. It is indeed the “common prayer” because it is intended for the uneducated masses. To a higher circle, to those who had advanced a little more, He gave a more elevated teaching: “I am in my Father, and ye in me and I in you”.\textsuperscript{150}

Vivekananda said that same thing had been taught by the Jewish Prophet who said, “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High”.\textsuperscript{151} This same stages you will find in Hinduism. It is easier for people to begin with first and end with last stage.

Vivekananda said that India needs help from Christ not from antichrist because antichrist does not act like Jesus Christ. Hindus would welcome the Christians very gladly, because the Christ’s disciples would do good work in India as many Hindu saints do.

“India requires help from Christ, but not from antichrist; these men are not Christ-like. They do not act like Christ; they are married and come over and settle down comfortably and make a fair livelihood. Christ and his disciples would accomplish much good in India, just as many of the Hindu saints do; but these men are not of that sacred character. The Hindus would welcome the Christ of the Christians gladly, because his life was holy and beautiful; but they cannot and will not receive the narrow utterances of ignorant, hypocritical, or self-deceiving men”.\textsuperscript{152}

Vivekananda says that all men are different, having different mentality. So there are different religions for different men. If there were not different religions, religion would not survive. Every man requires his religion for his salvation. There is no need to look for others religion for one’s salvation. But historically religions struggled against each other for
superiority. He says why should one convert to another’s religion. In this regard, he said in his lecture “Christianity in India” delivered at Detroit on March 11, 1894:

“The Christian requires his religion; the Hindu needs his own creed. All religions have struggled against one another for years. Those which were founded on a book, still stand. Why could not the Christians convert the Jews? Why could they not make the Persians Christians? Why could they not convert Mohammedans? Why cannot any impression be made upon China and Japan? Buddhism, the first missionary religion, numbers double the number of converts of any other religion, and they did not use the sword”.

In comparison to Mohammedans and Christianity, Buddhism did not use sword to convert peoples.

“The Mohammedans used the greatest violence. They number the least of three great missionary religions. The Mohammedans have had their day. Every day you read of Christian nations acquiring land by bloodshed. What missionaries preach against this? Why should the most blood thirsty nation exalt on alleged religion which is not the religion of Christ? The Jews and the Arabs were the fathers of Christianity, and how they have been persecuted by the Christians? The Christians have been weighed in balance in India and have been found wanting. I do not mean to be unkind, but I want to show the Christians how they look in others’ eyes. The missionaries who preached burning pit are regarded with horror”.

Vivekananda said that if all religions focus on spirituality, no religion would clash with other religion. Every religion has the essential truth. It is possible that circumstance are changed but the central truth always remains same. Those who are educated people of community retain the essential.

“If you ask a Christian what his essentials are, he should reply, ‘The teaching of Lord Jesus.’ Much of the rest is nonsense. But the non-essential part is right; it forms the
receptacle. The shell of the oyster is not attractive, but the pearl is within it”.

Vivekananda says that Hindu never attacks the life of Jesus. He respects the teaching of Lord Jesus, but Christians do not know about Hindus, have not heard the teachings of Hinduism.

"Of the different philosophies, the tendency of the Hindu is not to destroy, but to harmonise everything. If any new idea comes into India, we do not antagonize it, but simply try to take it in to harmonise it, because this method was taught first by our Prophet, God-incarnate on earth, Shri Krishna. This incarnation of God preached himself first: “I am the God Incarnate, I am the inspirer of all books, I am the inspirer of all religions”. Thus we do not reject any”.

Vivekananda says that all religions are good as they are having the same essence. One thing however that is dissimilar between Hinduism and Christianity is the idea of salvation through Jesus’ blood.

“There is one thing which is very dissimilar between us and Christians, something which we never taught. The idea of salvation through Jesus’ blood, or cleansing by any man’s blood. We had our sacrifice as the Jews had. Our sacrifices means simply this: here is some food I am going to eat, and until some portion is offered to God, it is bad, so I offer the food. This is pure and simple idea. But with the Jew the idea is that his sin be upon the lamb, and let the lamb be sacrificed and him go scot-free”.

This doctrine was never popular with us. Our Prophet says whenever evil prevails on earth, He will come and save human being. It is because He cares for humanity. That is the main reason why we never fight against any religion. We never say that only our way leads to salvation. Because we can see the holy people in all over world, whether he is Hindu or not. So it is not right to say that only our’s way leads to salvation.
"We never developed this beautiful idea in India, and I am glad we did not. I for one, would not come to be saved by such doctrine. If anybody would come and say, "Be saved by my blood", I would say to him, "My brother, go away; I will go to hell; I am not a coward to take innocent blood to go to heaven; I am ready for hell". So that doctrine never cropped up amongst us, and our prophet says that whenever evil and immorality prevail on earth, He will come down and support this children; and this He is doing from time to time and from place to place. And wherever on earth you see an extraordinary holy man trying to uplift humanity, know that He is in him".158

Further he said –

"Like so many rivers flowing from different mountains, all coming and mingling their waters in the sea, all the different religions, taking their births from different standpoints of fact, come unto Thee".159

Like in the case of Christianity, Vivekananda’s attitude towards Islam was also that of appreciation of many of its good points. He was especially attracted by the message of equality and brotherhood in Islam.

In his lecture “The Great Teachers of the World”, delivered at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, on February 3, 1900, he said about the religion of Mohammed:

“What good can there be in his religion?” If there were no good, how could it live? The good alone lives, that alone survives; because the good alone is strong, therefore it survives. How long is the life of an impure man, even in this life? Is not the life of the pure man much longer? Without doubt, for purity is strength, goodness is strength. How could Mohammedanism have lived, had there been nothing good in its teaching? There is much good. Mohammed was the Prophet of equality, of the brotherhood of man, the brotherhood of all mussulmans”.160

Vivekananda said that Mohammed by his life showed that there should be perfect equality and brotherhood. There was no distinction of
caste, creed, colour, sex, religion, community, nation. All people have equal place. In Mohammedanism there is one merit that is sufficient for man. If a slave should become Mohammedan even he can marry the daughter of Sultan.

"The Sultan of Turkey may buy a Negro from the mart of Africa, and bring him in chains to Turkey; but should he become a Mohammedan and have sufficient merit and abilities, he might even marry the daughter of the Sultan".161

Vivekananda compares this attitude with the way the Negros and the American Indians are treated in America. He said that same kind of inequality prevails in India. If a missionary touches the food of an orthodox person what would a Hindu do? He will throw it away because for him it will be impure. It is our grand philosophy that we show off to the world but you can see our weakness in practice. The greatness of Mohammedans lies in the fact that they have perfect equality without any discrimination of class or caste.

Further Vivekananda says that Mohammedanism came with a message for the masses, that is the message to believe in one God.

"...The first message was equality..... There is one religion – love. No more question of race, colour, (or) anything else. Join it! The practical quality carried the day..... The great message was perfectly simple! Believe in one God, the creator of heaven and earth. All was created out of nothing by Him".162

Vivekananda was impressed by Mohammedanism also because in Islam the women have equal right like men.

"When Mohammed had become emperor over the large part of the world, the Roman and Persian empires were all under his feet, and he had a number of wives. When one day he was asked which wife he liked best, he
pointed to his first wife: “Because she believed (in) me first.” Women have faith... Gain independence, gain everything, but do not lose the characteristic of women!...”

Vivekananda says that the message of Islam was perfectly simple; believe in one God, and be united as one nation, one community.

“God is God. There is no philosophy, no complicated code of ethics. “Our God is one without a second, and Mohammed is the Prophet”. Mohammed began to preach it in the streets of Mecca... They began to persecute him, and he fled into the city of (Medina). He began to fight, and the whole race became united. (Mohammedanism) deluged the world in the name of the Lord. The tremendous conquering power!...”

Vivekananda said that if a man wants to do great work there must be great preparation for it. He gave the example of Prophet Mohammed. He says that after much prayer Mohammed got vision. About this Vivekananda said in his lecture, “Mohammed”, delivered on March 25, 1900, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“We are always in hurry [But] if any great work is to be done, there must be great preparation....After much praying, day and night, Mohammed began to have dreams and visions. Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and told him that he was the messenger of truth. He told him that the message of Jesus, of Moses, and all the prophets would be lost and asked him to go and preach. Seeing the Christians preaching politics in the name of Jesus, seeing the Persians preaching dualism, Mohammed said: “Our God is one God. He is the Lord of all that exists. There is no comparison between Him and any other”.

Vivekananda recommends a synthesis of Islam and Vedanta. He said,

“Therefore, I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind.”