EXPRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY
CHAPTER TWO

EXPRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

0 THAT thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea I should not be despised...63

The culmination and fruit of literary artistic expression, and its final fields of pleasure for the human soul, are in metaphysics, including the mysteries of the spiritual world, the soul itself, and the question of the immortal continuation of our identity... the religious tone, the consciousness of mystery, the recognition of the future, of the unknown, of deity over and under all, and of the divine purpose, are never absent, but indirectly, give tone to all -- exhibit literature's real heights and elevations, towering up like the great mountains of the earth .... 64

The Bible is expressive literature. It is Logos, the Word of God, expressive of the experimend, the will of God. It is again, the expression of "the Word," which was "with God" and "was God". This is what St.John distils in his declaration at the beginning of his Gospel:

63 The Bible, The Song of Solomon, VIII:1.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....

While commenting on these words from the Gospel of St. John, Jaroslav Pelikan observes:

The opening words of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word," were evidently meant to be a paraphrase of the opening words of the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And God said [it was good]." That was, at any rate, how the early Christians were reading the two texts side by side. Because the speaking of God (which is one way to translate Logos) made the world possible, it was also the speaking of God that made the world intelligible: Jesus Christ as Logos was the Word of God revealing the way and the will of God to the world. As the medium of divine revelation, he was also the agent of divine revelation, specifically of revelation about the cosmos and its creation....

It is again of great relevance to read that Whitman's thought was greatly influenced by the concept of Logos:

... it is also clear that the Johannine Logos (God's self-revelation, in Christ -- whose

65 The Bible, St. John, I:1.

name is Word, as His Father's is I AM or Being) influenced Whitman's thought even more than his passion for grand opera.... 67

The expressors of the Word of God were many, who had been "intuited" by the Spirit of God in "making, forming, expressing." 68 The Bible magnificent on its own accord, is the artistic, inspired expression of the Triune God and His dealings with men. God is Transcendent. He is beyond the comprehension of mortal men. No man can see Him for He exists as the Unrevealed. When King Solomon built the temple for God, he wondered, "But will God dwell indeed on the earth?" 69 But God declared through the prophet Isaiah, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." 70 The Transcendent God thus becomes Immanent. The Psalmist is aware of this concept, when he sings, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I


69 The Bible, I Kings, VIII:27.

70 Ibid., Isaiah, LVII:15.
make up my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." \(^71\)

Whitman in his "Song of Myself" captures the truth of the Immanence of God admirably thus:

> I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
> In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass;
> I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
> And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
> Others will punctually come for ever and ever.... \(^72\)

Even when the Transcendent God had made Himself immanent in creation, there was separation between God and man because of sin. God could bear this no more and ultimately, when the time came, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.... full of grace and truth." \(^73\)

\(^71\) The Bible, Psalms, CXXXIX:8.
\(^73\) The Bible, St.John, I:14.
God condescending to live among men -- the concept of Incarnation -- is expressive of the unique, sacrificial love of God the Father for lost mankind. Swami Prabhavananda appreciably and inter-relatedly defines the nature and function of the avatar of Jesus Christ:

Just as the idea of one immutable God, personal and yet impersonal in his nature, pervades all advanced religions, so the conception of an avatar, the Supreme Being descending upon earth in human form seems also to be universal.... The Gita doctrine of the avatar is parallel and almost identical with the conception of the Word made flesh, "full of grace and truth" as we find it in the Gospel according to St. John, but with this difference that Jesus of Nazareth is alone identified with the Logos; He is called the only begotten Son of God.... 74

The avatar of Jesus Christ is thus unique. George Santayana pointedly asserts:

Love is the avowed motive for the incarnation of Christ and for His mission and Passion.... 75


God who is immaculate, immortal, incorruptible, invisible, ineffable and inaccessible reached the mortal beings by selflessly sending His only begotten son among the corruptible mankind with the purpose of redeeming them. C.G. Diehl comments in this regard:

The distance between the Creator and the creature and between the Holy God and the sinner is covered through the incarnation and the atonement whereby a new situation is created in which men are accepted by God. This new situation refers to all mankind. In order to complete the union, God, the Holy Spirit, offers to dwell in man... The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a mystery but not a merger of God and man in a mystic sense. The presence of Christ will effect in man a growing likeness to him in life and character, although man himself will know nothing but humble thankfulness and joy over the immeasurable grace and gift of God.... 76

Beginning with the Incarnation, each facet in the life of Christ corresponds with the life of a Christian in demonstrating the clear truth basic to all Christianity, which is the sacrificial love exemplified in the Godhead. Such love is preconditional if a man is to lead a fruitful life on earth and enjoy union with his

---

Creator. George, the Bishop of Edinburgh, refers to the experiential observation of a God-disposed soul thus:

... I became aware of the mighty and compelling force of Love which, as it were, compelled the Eternal Word to be made flesh, in order that we may be partakers of His health, His healing of body and soul and so be united to Him in Life and in Love....

This observation enhances the value, significance and relevance of the Power and the Glory of Christ as the healer, nurse, helper, saviour, redeemer and the living source of all spiritual strength.

Moreover, the Incarnation establishes the union between God and man. Jesus Christ lived among men and ministered unto them and His ministry comprised the rendering of sermons, performing miracles, teaching through parables and emphasizing the efficacy of meditation and mantra [prayer]. Christ guided men to the right path through parable teaching and demonstrated His faith in God through the miracles He performed.

----------------

77 George, the Bishop of Edinburgh, *The Valley of Vision* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1919), pp.46, 47.
The images, comparisons and parables that Christ used are expressive of His concern for every atom of the created world. They reveal His observation of the natural world -- His eye for the subtleties of what He himself had created. Above all, they express the immense and ardent faith He had in the power of His Father. This is precisely what He wanted every human being to cultivate, if he has to inherit the Kingdom of God. Incidentally the viewpoint of William Neil on the parables is worth recording. He argues that the parables are the "imaginative stories which in one way or another illustrates Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God." 78

The simple, commonplace, easy-to-comprehend comparisons that Christ employed -- the fowls of the air, the grass of the field, the vine and its branches, the shepherd and the sheep -- speak volumes of the cosmic sense that Christ had, His power of embracing the whole created world, the animate and the inanimate. He compared Peter to a rock, on which He would build His Church. A running parallel from "The Wreck of the Deutschland" establishes

the importance of this Christian truth: "The Simon Peter of a soul!" Jesus warned His hearers that they should be good trees bringing out good fruits and not corrupt trees bringing forth evil fruits. They should be like the salt that has not lost its saltiness and like candles kept on candlesticks and not under a bushel.

Showing to the world the divine concern and sympathy that He had through the very act of Incarnation, Christ lived for about thirty years in domestic obedience, in absolute conformity to the will of His earthly parents. Bucke talks about this phase of the life of Jesus Christ in his *Cosmic Consciousness*:

... up to a certain age He [Jesus Christ] was very much as others,.... Those who knew Him at home, as a boy and young man, could not understand His superiority. "Is not this the carpenter's son" they ask. Or as elsewhere reported: "Is not this the carpenter the son of Mary?... and they were offended at Him"....

---


This facet of Christ's Life is expressive of His perfect submission to homely authority. He honoured family life and wished the world to understand that a happy home is the spring of all goodness and loveliness on earth. His first miracle was performed at a wedding house at Cana, where He converted the water into wine. This miracle is expressive of the importance that Christ attached to marital life marked by perfect compatibility, comfort and joy.

Jesus had the illumination, after the fruitful stay at home in wholesome obedience to His parents. Bucke quotes the verses from the Gospel of St. Mark as the "most authentic account of the illumination of Jesus".\(^{81}\)

\begin{quote}
And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the spirit like a dove descending upon Him:

And there came a voice from heaven saying Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness... \(^{82}\)
\end{quote}

---


\(^{82}\) *The Bible*, St. Mark, I:10-12.
The instance of this Baptism of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit marks the initiation of Christ into a life of service to mankind. The man-God who had been so far acting within the confines of homely life is now entering into a life of active fruitfulness. God's work, as symbolised and celebrated by the sacrament of Baptism, effectuates spiritual regeneration from evil. And this initiation through Baptism provides the scope to Christ to bring to the fore His essential humanity. It is of interest to record that when one is in the depths of one's spiritual struggles one consoles himself with the reminder Baptizatus sum. Bucke considers Jesus' decision to serve as a kind of natural outcome of illumination:

Jesus quickly decided,... that the power must be used for the benefit of the race...

Because the moral elevation, which is a part of cosmic consciousness, will not permit any other decision....

Christ's parables, again, are from a wide range of the various walks of life. Part of them are from nature, as in the parable of the sower, the mustard seed and the

83 Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness, p.100.
seed growing secretly. Some are from the familiar scenes of everyday life as in the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. They are also from well-known events from recent history and from occasional happenings. All these point to the fact that Christ wanted to make it explicit that God's love and concern are comprehensive and inclusive. They are thus expressive of the uniqueness of Christ as a selfless Karma Yogi.

If the parables are expressive of Christ's all-embracing optimism, which is expected in all His believers, the miracles are demonstrative of Christ's faith -- absolute faith -- in His Father. They have more to offer than their mere appearance. The New Bible Dictionary records:

The working of miracles is directed to a deepening of men's understanding of God. It is God's way of speaking dramatically to those who have ears to hear. The miracle stories are intimately concerned with the faith of observers or participants and with the faith of those who will hear or read them later. Jesus looked for faith as the right response to His saving presence and deeds; it was faith which "made whole": which made the difference between the mere creation of an impression and a saving communication of His revelation of God....

If the parables highlight the significance of the Kingdom of God, the miracles -- most of them connected with the feeding and healing processes -- signify Christ's concern for the physical wellbeing of the human kind. Physical health is equally important in the kingdom of God as the mental and the spiritual. Apostle John writes in his third epistle:

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth....  

Since physical health is miraculously possible, it is an assured indication that the more stubborn spiritual shortcomings could be rectified by the Omnipotent God. According to Soria, "... every miracle is an effect of divine love."  

The miracles, once again, are the manifestations of the dual nature of the Unseen, who works through the Seen. In Whitman's words, "the unseen is proved by the

85 The Bible, III John:2.
The Unseen living God is at work through the seen God, who is an identification of the Unseen God.

St. John records the words of Christ:

... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father...

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works... 88

The same theory is reiterated by Stephen Neill in The Christians' God:

... everything that men can possibly know about God, everything that they need to know about God, is there present and visible in Jesus Christ Himself... 89

This truth leads one on to the prime aspect of Christ's life that He is wholly human and wholly divine. He was divine in that He was sinless. The prophet Isaiah asserts:

88 The Bible, St. John, XIV: 9,10.

* This bears repetition.
...He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth....

As a divine being, He knew men. He could read men's thoughts and at times when they wanted to do Him harm, He just disappeared.

The Bible records:

But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all Men,

And needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man....

Meanwhile, He felt sorrow, hunger, thirst and every other feeling that ordinary human beings experience. Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died. He sympathised with the multitudes of people tired and hungry and gave them food. He felt the agony of the lepers and healed them. He condescended to talk to the Samaritan woman, who was a social outcast. He did not mind being in the company of the stinking fishermen, sulking tax-collectors and lonely women. It is relevant to record

90 The Bible, Isaiah, LIII:9.
91 Ibid., St. John, II:24, 25.
here the observation of Stephen Neill that points to the very nature of Jesus Christ:

... the New Testament shows Jesus very plainly as a man, and ... Christian faith holds that He was "very man" as well as "very God." He shows us both what God is, and what man ought to be. He can do this because in Him both the commandments are fulfilled; we see in Him perfect love to God and perfect love to other men, even the evil ones; and so we see what it really means to be a man... 92

At this point it is of interest to dwell upon the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the instrument of the divine will, that made the life of Christ as a man possible on the earth. Her attitude and life are expressive of the great and cardinal human virtues -- patience, endurance and unquestioned surrender to the will of God. She remained unruffled throughout from the nativity to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the Cross. St.Luke observes: "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." 93 Her humility, obedience and obvious devotion to her son, Jesus are virtues to be emulated if one aspires to experience the Holy God in one's inwardness.

The stoic endurance and acceptance of suffering exemplified in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus leads one to another Christian theme -- the significance of martyrdom as exemplified in the life of God's messengers like John the Baptist. The Baptist should have been all the time aware that his frank condemnation of sin would not please everyone; but he stood courageously based on the foundation of pure conviction and deep-rooted faith in God. For him the loss of physical life resulted in the gain of spiritual power. It is significant that Jesus came to him to be baptised, while John confessed with humility his nothingness before Christ, the Lamb of God. With all his submissiveness, he was an unrelenting preacher who wanted to evoke the spirit of repentance in his listeners through prayer and meditation -- yet another facet necessary in the life of a spiritual quester. Again, Jesus Christ is a role model who spent a considerable part of His life in mantra and dhyana, the two important limbs of Raja marga. One reads in The Bible:

And when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray.... 94

94 The Bible, St. Mark, VI.46.
And He withdraw Himself into the wilderness, and prayed....\textsuperscript{95}

Jesus Christ knew and contemplated on the presence of God through prayer and meditation. \textit{Dhyana} equips a spiritual quester with strength, energy and power necessary for a fruitful spiritual life and \textit{mantra} helps in uplifting the soul. The efficacy of prayer can be realised by one who is sincere alone. According to George Santayana:

\begin{quote}
Prayer is at once the most childlike element in religion and the most spiritual: for it begins with a cry for help or a gesture of surrender and it ends with complete self-forgetfulness and absorption in the divine life.... \textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

Jesus Christ had realized the significance of prayer so much that He taught His disciples a prayer widely known as the Lord's prayer, which is expressive of the sense of gratefulness and adoration that mankind ought to have towards God for what He is. It makes one marvel at the goodness of God. It is expressive of the contentment

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{95} The Bible, St. Luke, V:16.
\textsuperscript{96} George Santayana, \textit{The Idea of Christ in the Gospels or God in Man}, p.126.
\end{flushright}
that is expected of a believer. Again it points to the aspiration one should have to enter the kingdom of God. George Santayana argues that in the Lord's prayer "mankind is seen as a unit, with identical needs and all in the same predicament." The Lord's prayer, thus, sets the standard of living for a Christian and here again one finds in Jesus Christ the embodiment of all the qualities expected of a believer as propounded in the universal prayer. He turns out to be the greatest example in revealing the path to the kingdom of God among men by serving others. It is paradoxical when He declares:

If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all....

He demonstrated this when He washed the feet of His disciples during the Last Supper. This is the highest mark of humility, and humility is the wise means of entering the Kingdom of God. Jesus was not after any reward. In spite of it, He encountered an ungrateful

97 George Santayana, The Ideal of Christ in the Gospels or God in Man, p.126.

98 The Bible, St. Mark, IX:35.
humanity that betrayed Him and crucified Him. It should be recorded that true love believes in giving and giving alone and never in taking or receiving. Christ lived up to this definition of love. Moreover, love for all the goodness done, it ultimately gets destroyed. This is again proved by the Crucifixion of Christ.

In this context, one realises the significance of the Passion of Christ. And Christ took upon Himself the sins of the world and bore it to Calvary. He was "accused, struck, insulted,... mocked, flogged, blasphemed, slain and buried." 99 The path was "shrouded in bitter agony," 100 and it was mysterious that the Son of God had to undergo such suffering. But the "wisdom" and "power" of God lay behind the unspeakable pain and passion. As St. Paul has clearly understood, "Christ the Crucified" is:

... unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;


But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God, and the wisdom of God.... 101

The Passion of Christ, thus, becomes expressive of the power behind the pain and the glory that is consequent upon it. Through His Passion, Christ has made suffering something of which one could be proud of, something which one could even cherish and seek. In this way, the power of Passion is closely linked with the power of Resurrection.

The Resurrection, "the central miracle of the whole history of Christ," 102 is essentially the life-giving power of the Church and the essence of Christianity. As E.J. Townroe would have it, "the Church exists now because Jesus Christ lives now." 103 St. John has recorded what Jesus has said:

...because I live, ye shall live also.... 104

102 George Santayana, The Idea of Christ in the Gospels or God in Man, p.159.
104 The Bible, St. John, XIV:19.
The resurrected Christ ascends to Heaven and this leaves one full of expectations. Far from being the end, the Resurrection and Ascension announce fresh trials and new promises and the cycle of death, resurrection and ascension has to be relived in the life of every believer to finally result in the union with God during the Second Coming of Christ and the life to be lived ever after.

The idea of Christ in the Gospels is an answer to the question how the union with God is possible. The answer is to imitate Christ. In fact to approximate Christ and to be like Him has been the chief endeavour of the many saints of the past and the present. Every incident in and around the life of Christ has added new dimensions to the life of those who came to Him and each incident gains significance in that it has a human, universal and a cardinal value about it. Viewed on these lines, the various happenings and concepts centring round Jesus Christ become tenets of universal value and of perennial interest and a constant source of energy.

It is of pertinent interest to record here that Solomon, the writer of the Old Testament foreshadows the Christ of the Gospels in his Song of Songs. Solomon lived long
before God took the form of man and dwelt among men as the Son of Joseph and Mary. But as the concept of Trinity would have it, Jesus existed from the beginning of beginnings and it is the Triune God who had been dealing with men throughout history. Though Solomon had no direct acquaintance with Christ, he was familiar with the various aspects of the Godhead and a result of the proper apprehension of the Godhead was The Song of Songs. Jaroslav Pelikan in his Jesus through the Centuries precisely points out the thread of continuity one can detect between the Christ of the Gospels and the implicit expression of the Godhead in The Song of Songs:

"Abide in Me, and I in you," Jesus says to His disciples in that Gospel (John 15:4); and in His high-priestly prayer on the night of His betrayal. He implored His Father for His followers, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21). When such sayings of Jesus were combined with the words of The Song of Songs... "My beloved is mine and I am His," the eternal union between Jesus and the Father in the mystery of the holy and indivisible Trinity became the ground for what Protestant devotion came to call the unio mystica, "the mystical union" between Bridegroom and bride, between Christ and the soul....

105 Jaroslav Pelikan, Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture, p.128.
As St. Augustine rightly points out:

In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament [it] is revealed.... 106

Therefore both the Testaments are of equal significance and The Song of Songs, as part of the Old Testament is "fine art"; it is divinely-inspired and is expressive of the will of God for the world that God intends and works for the union with man. Again, "Solomon in all his glory" 107 is a type of Christ.*

A type is some outward or sensible thing ordained of God under the Old Testament to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New.... 108


107 The Bible, St. Matthew, VI:29.


This bears repetition.

?
Christ refers to Himself as someone "greater than Solomon"\textsuperscript{109} and Solomon becomes a surrogate of Christ. According to Samuel Mather, Christ and Solomon are analogous in wisdom. The Bible records that Solomon was wiser than all men. St. Paul writes of Christ that in Him was "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."\textsuperscript{110} Again, Solomon is like Christ in that His kingdom had glorious peace and prosperity. The kingdom was peaceably settled in the hand of Solomon that he fell to the work of building the Temple, as Christ doth the Church. To Isaiah, Christ is "the Prince of Peace".\textsuperscript{111} St. Paul finds Christ as the Great Peace-maker, who "hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; /Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances,"\textsuperscript{112} thereby enabling the building up of "an holy temple in the Lord".\textsuperscript{113} Thirdly, Solomon is likened to Christ in his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. Just as Solomon took a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{109} The Bible, St. Matthew, XII:42.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid., Colossians, II:3.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid., Isaiah, IX:6.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., Ephesians, II:14, 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., II:21.
\end{itemize}
heathen princess to be his wife, "so Christ hath took us Gentiles to be a spouse unto him." 114

One, thus, wonders at the inter-twinkling facets of Christianity that shine like many-coloured spirals. There is no end to the comparative levels that can be detected among the various books and concepts of The Bible. And The Bible talks of various kinds of relationships between God and man. In the Genesis it is one of friendship between the Creator and the created. God gave Adam all authority over everything on the earth and He used to come "walking in the garden in the cool of the day." 115 But, then the diabolic conspiracy brought about the fall of man and the friendly relationship was marred. Thenceforth, the friendly familiarity gave way to that of the sovereign and the subjects. Rules and regulations in the form of the Ten Commandments had to be strictly adhered to, if the chosen of the Lord had to please Him. It really pained God, when the Israelites asked for a king of their own

115 The Bible, Genesis, III:8.
to rule them like the other nations around them, and He told Samuel:

...for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.... 116

The earthly kings could not bring about the kind of kingdom that God desired and He wanted to have more intimate relationship with man and make him fruitful on the earth. King David foresees such a kind of relationship, when he says in one of his psalms:

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;

So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him.... 117

But, unfortunately, in spite of God wooing man through various means of goodness, grace and love, He found mankind fickle, disloyal and infidel. He laments through

-----------------------
117 Ibid., Psalms, XLV:10, 11.
Hosea:

... for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.... 118

After trying several means to redeem man, God decided to send His own Son to carry the sins of the world and then die as a lamb of sacrifice. The Gospels testify to the fact that the mission was accomplished by Jesus Christ and now He is waiting in Heaven "by the right hand of God," 119 just as a bridegroom is waiting for the bride.

King Solomon is prophetic in the sense that even thousands of years before the time of Christ, he had highlighted Jesus as the Bridegroom of the soul or the Church. St. Bernard makes a pointed observation in this regard:

By inspiration from above [Solomon] sang the praises of Christ and His church, the grace of holy love, and the sacraments of eternal marriage; and at the same time he gave expression to the deepest desires of the holy soul.... 120

118 The Bible, Hosea, I:2.
120 St. Bernard, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture, p.126.
It is rightly termed The Song of Songs because what it sings about is indeed the supreme kind of relationship possible and necessary between God and the believer or the individual soul or the Church. The relationship between the bride and bridegroom or the husband and the wife is one of great mystery.* St. Paul writes in Ephesians:

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church:

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.... 121

It is a unique relationship, which is entirely different from that of a friend to a friend, a sovereign to a subject or a parent to a child. It is a relationship that demands perfect compatibility between the partners. Otherwise, the relationship cannot endure. On the

121 The Bible, Ephesians, V:29-32.
* This bears repetition.
spiritual level, as St. Paul asserts, "Christ... loved the church and gave Himself for it."\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, God demands perfect love from man to Himself:

\textit{And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might}....\textsuperscript{123}

It is this kind of mutual love that is foreshadowed in \textit{The Song of Songs}.

The bridegroom finds his bride among the daughters of Jerusalem and singles her out as the fairest among them. He tells her, "Behold thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair."\textsuperscript{124} The King finds in her both physical and spiritual beauty and therefore the reiteration of the phrase, "thou art fair". The bride finds him equally attractive and replies, "Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea pleasant."\textsuperscript{125} He is not only fair in her eyes, but also most enjoyable in this intimate nearness. It is mutual admiration, acceptance

\textsuperscript{122} The Bible, Ephesians, V:25.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., Deuteronomy, VI:5.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., The Song of Solomon, I:15.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., The Song of Solomon, I:16.
and appreciation of each other, which is the basis of love-relationship. Again, to the beloved, his love is "as the lily among thorns." He indicates that she alone of all mankind has the purity and simplicity of the lily, while the rest of the unconverted mankind are the thorns. The maiden considers the bridegroom "as the apple tree among the trees of the wood." He is the unique and glorious apple tree with its evergreen of lovely foliage and rare fragrance, unlike the other trees that spring out of the corrupt natural life.

Both of them are assured of the love for each other and the bride makes the greatest of declarations:

My beloved is mine, and I am His....

It is clear that the Beloved's attitude towards her is assured. He loves her dearly and she belongs to the Beloved One. This kind of understanding that is mutual and certain is essential in the human level in order to

126 The Bible, The Song of Solomon, II:2.
127 Ibid., II:3.
128 Ibid., II:16.
understand the spiritual. It is worth quoting Emerson in this regard:

The goodness of God is not known, the powers of the human mind are not known, until these deep and holy affections have kindled their flame therein. What work of God is so beautiful as this fellowship He has established among His creatures, this mutual relation of man to man? We speak and are understood, heart to heart, and find our attachments knit closer in proportion to the measure of virtue, and so are drawn onward to the love of God by admiring the fragments of His perfections that appear in men.

But neither is this pleasure perfect until that consecration of the affections is made when the soul has learned to love God supremely, to regard all things as only manifestations of His love to it and so becomes reconciled to adversity and finds a pleasure in the darkest events, because in them God's will is done.... 129

The Song of Songs is thus a manifestation of the right kind of understanding between the bride and the bridegroom that is symbolic of the union between Christ and the individual or Christ and the Church. If that is so, Whitman's "Song of Myself" talks about a mystical union that the poet consummates with his soul. Whitman

is a true son of America and "... it would be hard to imagine a nation more thoroughly biblical than the United States between the American Revolution and the Civil War. The cadences of the Authorized Version informed the writing of the elite and the speech of the humble."130 Rightly, Whitman's biographers and critics agree that The Bible is at the root of the Whitman compositions.

"Whitman was at his core a religious man"131 and the influence of the The Bible and his quite emphatic stance in religion are pronounced in "Song of Myself". Whitman, being a great observer and a lover of his country, was dissatisfied, rather, dismayed with the religious practices of America, "which left out of account the Christ in man."132 Very eloquently, he bemoans the state


132 Ibid., p.139.
of his country:

Really what has America to do with all this mummerly of prayer and rituals and the rant of the exhorters and priests? We are not at all deceived by this great show that confronts us of Churches, priests and rituals -- for piercing beneath, we find there is no life, no faith, no reality of belief, but that is all essentially a pretense, a sham.... 133

It is obvious that Whitman was dissatisfied with the received religion without the essential spirit of Christ and felt that "priests, churches, ritual, prayer ... all this stands in the way of real religion." 134 It was his endeavour to devise a new path and the right way for his country and it is noteworthy that he called his Leaves of Grass the "New Bible". 135 Robin B. Hoople contends:

The revelation of its "scriptures" was the ordained Union of States, in themselves a new type of answer to the eternal cry of mankind for the messiah and for the millennium.... 136


134 Ibid., p.143.


In his attempt to find a new type of answer, that would bring about the redemption of the individual and his country, Whitman found his inspiration, his model and his sustenance in Christ. Crawley observes that, "... the pervading spirit of *Leaves of Grass* is religious and that the Christ-symbol is the most significant symbol in the book as a whole." 137

Whitman always refers to Christ in terms of affection and admiration. He found Him holy, just, loving, peaceful, beautiful and divine and he found the very name Christ thrilling and invigorating. He uttered:

> One word can pour such a flood through the soul -- Today I will mention Christ's before all other names ... Out of Christ are divine words -- out of this savior. Some words are fresh-smelling, like lilies, roses, to the soul, blooming without failure. -- The name of Christ -- all words that have arisen from the life and death of Christ, the divine son, who went about speaking perfect words, no patois -- whose life was perfect, -- the touch of whose hands and feet was miracles -- who was crucified -- his flesh laid in a shroud, in the grave.... 138


138 Walt Whitman, quoted in Crawley, *The Structure of Leaves of Grass*, p.60.
The name of Christ has charmed ever so many over the years, who have loved and served Him and Solomon records the same kind of experience:

Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee....\textsuperscript{139}

As Crawley suggests, there is a single personality strikingly like the Christ of \textit{The Hebrew Bible} at the centre of "Song of Myself". One finds the expression of this personality in the very first lines of the poem:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you....\textsuperscript{140}

About these lines, Justin Kaplan says that they function as "the stunning introit" at the opening of a service, "in spirit and structure a secular Mass."\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} The Bible, \textit{The Song of Solomon}, I:3.
\textsuperscript{140} Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in \textit{L G}, p.28.
This personality expressed through the "I" of the poem, according to the analysis of D. Romig, is expressed in an egotism of three kinds: first, there is the autobiographical I; second, there is the ego which recognizes itself as part of God, the transcendental ego; and thirdly, there is the ego that is keenly aware of innumerable social identities, the social ego. Crawley argues that this "analysis is applicable to the presentation of Christ in the New Testament." One becomes aware of Whitman's attitude to God, which is quite dissimilar to accepted, orthodox views and the major corpus of contemporary poetry. As Whitman himself claims:

One main contrast of the ideas behind every page of my verses, compared with establish'd poems, is their different relative attitude towards God, towards the objective universe, and still more (by reflection, confession, assumption, & C.) the quite changed attitude of the ego, the one chanting or talking, towards himself and towards his fellow-humanity....

142 Crawley, The Structure of Leaves of Grass, p. 68.
Therefore, one agrees that Whitman is basically religious. After the introduction, the poet invites his soul for a walk and they observe "a spear of summer grass."\textsuperscript{144} Crawley observes: "As Christ considered the lilies of the field, so Whitman observed the more democratic spear of grass and saw it as 'the scented gift and remembrancer' of the Lord 'designedly deropt'."\textsuperscript{145}

Interestingly enough, the grass is the first created flora, according to the Book of\textsuperscript{146} Genesis. "And the earth brought forth grass... and God saw that it was good."\textsuperscript{146} The grass, thereby, becomes expressive of the initiation of life on the earth. The authors of the various other books of\textsuperscript{147} The Bible and Jesus Himself make ample use of the grass as a symbol. In the book of Job, the grass is a symbol of fertility and prosperity: "Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth."\textsuperscript{147} But the Psalmist finds the grass a symbol of brevity of life: "... they are

\textsuperscript{144} Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in L G, p.28.
\textsuperscript{145} Crawley, The Structure of Leaves of Grass, p.69.
\textsuperscript{146} The Bible, Genesis, I:12.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., Job, V:25.
like grass which groweth up./ In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." 148 Jesus Christ makes use of the same symbol as an evidence of God's loving care and the sustenance He provides for human beings. He asks: "...if God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" 149 Though there is no explicit reference to grass as such in The Song of Songs, when the maiden asks her Beloved, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" 150 the vernal, grassy, pasture lands where the sheep feed flash upon one's imagination, symbolising nourishment and rest for the flock. Rudolf Schmidt, a perceptive Danish critic looks at Whitman's grass as a symbol of new spiritual life, as found in the Book of Genesis:

[Whitman] dwells upon [grass] everywhere with peculiar fondness as nature's Democracy -- it

-------------

148 The Bible, Psalms, XC:5, 6.
149 Ibid., St. Matthew, VI:30.
150 Ibid., The Song of Solomon, I:7.
being, as it were the first child of the vegetable kingdom -- the symbol of the new spiritual life which the poet very well knows is to proceed from himself.... 151

Once the poet invites his soul, they start loafing and observe "a spear of summer grass". Then he decides that he would not allow himself to be intoxicated by anything artificial or man-made, but would allow "the atmosphere" to be "in contact" with him. This atmosphere is what traditional Christian mystics call "the all-sustaining love of God." 152

According to Denis Donoghue, this life of contact is:

Whitman's ideal human image. It will blur the distinctions between man and God, thus setting up yet another equation, the largest in intention ... This divinity flows and sanctifies, by contact, everything it sees, hears, touches, tastes, or smells; it is Whitman's 153 version of the laying on of hands....


152 Ibid., p.52.

153 Denis Donoghue, quoted in A Mosaic of Interpretations, p.52.
The contact results in the realization of various life-giving phenomena that finally ends up with "the feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun."154 Here Whitman sounds like the Psalmist who exultantly sings: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."155

The poet, thus gradually sets the scene for the forthcoming mystical union. He is satisfied with the present -- "now."156 The Bible warns one against the folly of boasting about the future: "BOAST not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."157 Neither should one worry over the past or say, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?"158 Whitman reiterates that the present is thoroughly satisfactory to him:

I am satisfied--I see, dance, laugh, sing;

155 The Bible, Psalms, V:3.
157 The Bible, Proverbs, XXVII:1.
158 Ibid., Ecclesiastes, VII:10.
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread,

Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty.... 159

The Psalmist echoes a similar sentiment:

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.... 160

One, therefore, finds Whitman's poetic experience of the divine similar to that of the Psalmist. Hyde testifies to this fact when he says:

It is God who shares the poet's bed and leaves the baskets of rising dough. In an early notebook, Whitman, thinking of various heroes (Homer, Columbus, Washington), writes that "after none of them... does my stomach say enough and satisfied.-- Except Christ; He alone brings the perfumed bread, ever vivifying to me, ever fresh and plenty, ever welcome and to spare".... 161

---------------------

160 The Bible, Psalms, XVII:15.
161 Hyde, quoted in A Mosaic of Interpretations, p.57.
Having established a relationship with the deity, the poet finds the strength and sustenance to get through the milling realities of the world.

The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,

Battles, the horrors of fratricidal wars, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;

These come to me days and nights and go from me again

But they are not the Me myself... 162

Whitman's spiritual self attains to that level where he is seen to be living up to the expectation of Christ when He says:

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world... 163

Whitman rises to this level of being in the world, but not of the world, and is able to objectively view the happenings around him. He looks down, he looks back at

---------------------

163 The Bible, St. John, XVII: 16.
his own past, views all things and says, "I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait," which seems to be an echo of the words of Moses to the Israelites when they were about to cross the Red sea with the Pharaoh and his army behind them: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." As the Israelites stood still and waited, the Red sea divided and the people passed through dry land and reached safety and it was nothing short of a miracle. Similarly when Whitman "witnesses" and "waits", the miracle of the union of the body and soul takes place. As David Cavitch has observed, the fusion of the body and the soul does not occur in the lines that follow. The moment of union is not part of the dramatic action. It is a remembered experience, that had happened sometime ago. Loaflag on the grass, he holds a parley with his soul: "I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning," and the narration goes on.

165 The Bible, Exodus, XIV:13.
Bucke is of the opinion that this experience or the illumination came to him one June morning in 1853 or 1854 and took absolute possession of Him. Henceforth his life received its inspiration from the newcomer, the new self, whose tongue, as he expresses it, was plunged to his bare stripped heart. "The remebering occurs as part of an apostrophe to the soul, as if Whitman is cajoling his lover into a sentimental reverie over a sweet episode in the past."167 He declares perfect faith in the soul:

> I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,

> And you must not be abased to the other....168

This declaration of Whitman's faith in his soul is similar to the kind of mutual understanding found between the Bride and the Groom in The Song of Solomon. The union of the body and the soul is necessary according to St. Paul, who envisages a fight between the spirit and the flesh -- the soul and the body:


But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.... 169

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.... 170

One understands from this context that if one has to walk after the spirit, the body -- the flesh -- has to be subjected to the will of the spirit. In other words the body and the soul should walk together in perfect agreement. And to achieve this, illumination becomes imperative. It is worth quoting Whitman in this context:

I should say, indeed, that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here and on such terms, the meditation, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight. Only here communion with the mysteries, the eternal problems, whence? whither? Alone and identity and the mood -- and the soul emerges, and all statements, churches, sermons, melt away like vapors. Alone, and silent thought, and awe, and aspiration -- and then the interior consciousness, like a hitherto unseen inscription, in magic ink, beams out its wondrous lines to the sense. Bibles may

169 The Bible, Romans, VII:23.
170 Ibid., VIII:4.
convey and priests expound, but it is exclusively for the noiseless operation of one's isolated Self to enter the pure ether of veneration, reach the divine levels, and commune with the unutterable.... 171

All these point to the fact that Whitman was essentially a Christian Mystic and his expression of mysticism is based on the Christian concept of the union of man with God. As Geoffrey Dutton describes, this section is:

... one of the greatest mystical visions in all poetry; and yet one hesitates to use the word "mystical" about a vision that is also precise and compassionate, and so perfectly, after the earlier strut ting and exaltation, introduces the theme of humility.... 172

Once "the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth," 173 fills his soul, he becomes humble. He acknowledges that "all the men ever born are also my brothers." 174 David Cavitch, comments on the same section:

171 Walt Whitman, quoted in Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness, p.229.
172 Geoffrey Dutton, quoted in The Mosaic of Interpretations, p.61..
174 Idem.
This moment of internal union led Whitman to a beatific recognition of his personal value and of the intrinsic loveliness of all existence. His new vision is expressed with the biblical language of supernatural wonder. Like the transport of saints and mystics, Whitman's illumination includes his definitive moral assent to the vocation of a dedicated visionary and poet. The combination of sexual and spiritual ecstasy that he recalls resembles the holy passion of a Christian conversion or the transfiguration of a mystic; including a preliminary descent to mortification and to feeling "abased"... 175

One is, therefore, convinced that the mystical union of the body and the soul has led to its essential fruitfulness -- humility. And humility was amply exemplified in the life of Christ.* George Santayana quoted the incident of Christ washing the feet of His disciples before the Last Supper and comments:

And there was more than an example of humility and service; there was a symbol of purification... 176

Humility and service lead essentially to purification. One finds humility in the life of Walt Whitman, who

175 David Cavitch, My Soul and I: The Inner Life of Walt Whitman, p. 49.


* This bears repetition.
found the greatest model in the life of Jesus Christ. Everyone who knew him testified to his quiet, gentle, courteous nature. He was accustomed to living on a very modest scale. In addition to sharing his meagre salary with his mother and other members of the family when they were in need, he also used to buy little gifts for the wounded men who lingered on in the Washington hospitals for several years after the end of the civil war. Moreover, Whitman loved children like Christ, who was humble and loving enough to let the little children come to Him. He taught humility to His disciples giving them the example of a child:

\[\text{Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me...}^{177}\]

Whitman loved and received children. Bucke testifies to the love that Whitman had for children:

He was especially fond of children, and all children liked and trusted him at once. Often the little ones, if tired and fretful the

\[\text{177 The Bible, St. Mark, IX:37.}\]
moment he took them up and caressed them, would cease crying, and perhaps go to sleep in his arms.... 178

After the mystical experience or illumination, it is a child that encounters him immediately:

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;

How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.... 179

It is more than humility to acknowledge openly that he did not know any more than the child. Whitman's "Song of Myself" is thus expressive of the various truths of Christianity. It is strongly founded on the basic tenets of Christianity, and consequently, the great truths of religion. Therefore, it is basically religious and as Crawley asserts, "great poetry is always religious." 180

Horace Traubel has a similar opinion:

The highest poetic expression demands a

---------------------

178 Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, p.221.
180 Crawley, *The Structure of Leaves of Grass*, p.54.
certain element of the religious -- indeed, should be transfused with it....181

Whitman's poetry is undoubtedly suffused with the elements of religion and is therefore "highest poetry" and in turn "fine art". As Lawrence Templin puts it, it is "by a miracle of sublimation" he has "translated the inspiration of the Inner Light into poetry."182

It can be argued that both Solomon's Song of Songs and Whitman's "Song of Myself," when viewed from the proper perspectives stand out as "fine art" and both are literature designed to a regular pattern with a definite purpose and they highlight Christianity in its expressive form and detail.

---------------------

181 Horace Traubel, quoted in Crawley, The Structure of Leaves of Grass, p.54.