His Message to the West: Vedanta

"I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East", said Swami Vivekananda. Did he think he was a second Buddha? Was the statement born of prophetic vision or ratiocinative ability? Did it reflect the sentimentality of an orator or the deep anguish of a reformer? All this leads one to ask: Was Swami Vivekananda a missionary a saint or a prophet?

A Missionary is one who attempts to persuade or convert others to his position or principles in the land of his birth or outside. Swami Vivekananda was not a missionary of the class in which we place Lord Shaftesbury, William Carey or Peter Parker. He remarked at many occasions that he did not go to the West to preach Hinduism. To Professor Wright he wrote: "I was never a missionary nor ever would be one—my place is in the Himalayas...." A press reporter of Memphis who confabulated

3. An English deist (1671-1713). In 1708 he published Letter on Enthusiasm; in 1709 Moralists, a philosophical Rhapsody and Sensus Communis or Essays on Wit and Humour; in 1710 Soliloquy or Advice to an Author; in 1711 Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times. In the last work he covertly attacked Christianity, 'saying that its only purpose was to advance morality'. The Dictionary of Religion, p.958.
4. A Baptist missionary of England (1761-1834) who pioneered the Christian missions to India in the latter part of 18th Century. Through his influence "The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen" was formed in 1792. He translated the Bible into 24 Indian dialects besides compiling grammars and dictionaries of several languages. Ibid, pp.206-7, 707.
5. The first American missionary to open a hospital and medical school at Canton in China. He lived between 1804-88.
6. Swami Vivekananda to Adhyapakji (Professor Wright), May 1894 (Date not given), Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p.97.
with him reported: "He is here not to propagate the doctrines of any religion of India and make converts to the same...." While reporting that "the Indian exponent of divine doctrines made many converts in the Windy City", The Detroit Free Press found 'an entire lack of the missionary spirit in the distinguished visitor'. When asked was it below the dignity of his religion to resort to any missionary effort he retorted by quoting from an Ashokan edict which indicted: "All people whatever their fate may be should be encouraged to promote the essential moral doctrines in each and mutual respect for all the sects". In most of his lectures in America and England he emphasized that he had no desire to convert Christians. "They were christians; it was well. He was a Hindu; that also was well. In his country different creeds were formulated for the needs of people of different grades of intelligence, all this marking the progress of spiritual evolution". He ridiculed the system of "bribing men to become Christians" and delineated the Hindu belief that conversion amounted to perversion.

9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
By conversion the Christians meant "the re-orientation of the soul of an individual... a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions...." In its essence it was regarded as "a turning away from a sense of present wrongness at least as much as a turning towards a positive ideal". During his tour of the mid-western parts of America Swami Vivekananda was often questioned whether he was going to convert the people. "I take this for an insult, he retorted I do not believe in this idea of conversion. To-day we have a sinful man; tomorrow according to your idea he is converted and by and by attains unto holiness. Whence comes this change?"

It may be noted that Christianity has throughout been a missionary religion. The first records of the Church, as contained in the Acts of the Apostles, are almost entirely a narrative of the first Christian mission. Baron Von Welz went to Dutch Guiana to rouse a missionary spirit among the Lutherans. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschof went to

17. First Lutheran missionary to India (1683-1719).
18. A German protestant missionary (1678-1747).
Tranquebar to spread the gospel of Christ. St. Columbinus of Leinster went to the mountainous region of the vosges, near Besancon, to found the monastries of Luxeuil and Fontaine. In England "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts" was founded in 1701 by Royal charter "for the religious instruction of the Queen's subjects beyond the seas". The Church Missionary Society was founded in 1799 to send missionaries to Asia and Africa. The United Congress of Missions which met on September 28, 1893 in the Columbus Hall of Chicago, appointed a committee to arrange an International Missionary Conference between the representatives of all the Evangelical churches, to devise means for evangelising the whole world. Ironically, Charles Carroll Bonney who was the Chief architect of the World's Parliament of Religions presided over it. In his paper entitled "Native Agencies—the Chief Hope of National Evangelization", Rev. J.T. Gracey of New York remarked that in India alone there were enough native christians to evangelize the entire empire. He prophesied that the day was not far off when Christianity would "demolish forever the old pagan religions".

Swami Vivekananda's opposition to missionary enterprise must have come as a response to such designs of some Christians. But he did not launch a counter proselyting movement, though at times he argued that Vedanta could be the only Universal religion. Does philosophy require missionaries? he

21. Ibid.
asked, "Darwin and Spencer employed no missionaries and yet the well known theories connected with their names have gained converts all the world over. The printer and the postman are the greatest missionaries of the present day. A philosophy which has an intrinsic conquering power wins its way in the world without any missionary help. Where eloquence and personal example are necessary to appeal to the feelings and influence the conduct, there you want a missionary. And Vedanta requires no more eloquence or personal influence, than do Bose's electric waves or Ray's mercurial compounds".

Was Swami Vivekananda a Saint? The word is the gallicised form of the Latin sanctus which is the equivalent of the Greek hagios. The popular notion of the saint is that of a being of eminent holiness who is one of the immediate disciples of the Master. The phenomenon of saintliness is widespread in the religions of the World both ancient and contemporary. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica saints are believed to be connected in a special manner with what is viewed as sacred reality—gods, spiritual powers, mythical realms and other aspects of the sacred or holy. The religious person may have various relationships with the sacred: as seer, prophet, monk or other such personages, In the case of each of these, however, a specific kind of relationship to the holy is involved. Seers, for example, have an inspirational vision of the future; prophets proclaim a revelation, saviours are entrusted with
effecting redemption, liberation or other salvatory conditions; monks and nuns live religious life in accordance with ascetic regulations. Sainthood thus implies a special type of relationship to the holy, a relationship that is not automatically obtained by other religious personages through their performance of religious duties. However, Saint is not the English equivalent of the Sanskrit word Sannyasi. Both ought to be holy. Holiness, being a relative term is a matter of interpretation. The holiness of Jesus Christ might be an anathema to a jew. A Christian may not accept Lord Krishna as the incarnation of God on the earth. A Hajrat Mohammad might appear as a "tyrant" to a Hindu. A Laotse might be a charlatan for a muslim. And so on. The terms Saint and Sannyasi appear synonymous but they convey different meanings and point to two different varieties of holy beings nurtured in different environments. The former is a product of the orient, the latter that of the occident; the former must be renunciatory in worldly matters, the latter may or may not be; the former depends on his begging bowl, the latter thrives on a 'salary'; the former is a mendicant at one time, a recluse at another but never a house holder, the latter has no such binding. The essential traits of a Sannyasi are fearlessness, Sattva-Samsuddhi (purity) and a renounced order of life.

25. She Bhagvad-gita (9/28) says "समस्या-कृपानिन्द्रश पित निःस्माति अहं पुरुषप्रथिति "By this principle of renunciation you will be liberated and come to me."
26. In one of his class talks Swami Vivekananda classed Jesus Christ as a Sannyasi. "His religion is essentially fit for Sannyasins only", he said, "His teachings may be summed up as: "Give Up"; nothing more—being fit for the favoured few''. The Complete Works, Vol.VI, p.109.
A person in the divine consciousness, says the Bhagvad-gita, "although engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving about, sleeping and breathing always knows within himself that he actually does nothing at all. Because while speaking, evacuating, receiving, opening or closing his eyes, he always knows that only the material senses are engaged with their objects and that he is aloof from them."

On the other hand the criterion for sainthood are martyrdom, holiness of life, miracles in life and after death, and a popular cultus. A saint ought to go through the process of canonisation before being 'officially recognised'- a point which is not in vogue in the order of Sannyasis. Obviously the difference between a saint and a Sannyasi is not a matter of philosophical jargon or an elliptical dispute.

Swami Vivekananda never described himself as a saint but preferred to be called a Sannyasi. One may well argue that he was not so in the stricter sense of the term for he crossed the "Jambudwipa", partook beef, smoked and attended musical concerts. One may even accuse him of hob-nobbing with the female sex. But did not he say at one time: "I am as if were, a woman amongst woman". A holy man sees no distinction between

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27. The Bhagvad-gita V/8-9
man and woman. The contemporary accounts show that he addressed his female acquaintances as "Mother" or "Sister" and made them call him "father", "brother" or "son"). "If the missionaries tell you", he wrote to Alasinga, "that I have ever broken the two great vows of the Sannyasin—chastity and poverty—tell them that they are big liars". As regards the forbidden food he remarked: "If the people want me to keep strictly to any Hindu diet, please tell them to send me a cook and money enough to keep him". Few would understand the deep significance of a Sannyasin' undertaking a sea voyage who are unaware of the responsibilities which tradition ascribes to Sannyasis as guardians of the Hindu religion. It seemed unlikely that the West would welcome him in rags with his head smeared with ash, his right hand holding a stick (dand) and his left hand a bowl (kamandal). The need of the time was to rise above the cramping superstitions and work for the mankind without confining oneself to one part of the globe. "I know my mission in life", he wrote to Alasinga on September 9, 1895, "I belong...".

31. Ibid.
32. In a letter to Diwanji Saheb on November 15, 1894 Swami Vivekananda argued as to why a Sannyasin should go abroad. "The only claim you have to be recognised in the world is your religion", he wrote, "and good specimens of our religious men are required to be sent abroad to give other nations an idea that India is not dead. Some representative men must come out of India and go to all the nations of the earth to show at least that you are not savages. You may not feel the necessity of it from your Indian home, but believe me, much depends on that for your nation. And a Sannyasin who has no idea of doing good to his fellows is a brute, not a Sannyasin. I am neither a sightseer, nor an idle traveller; but you will see, if you live to see, and bless me all your life". The Complete Works, Vol.VII, p.315-26.
as much to India as to the World, no humbug about that.... What country has any special claim on me? Am I any nation's slave?"

Was he not something more than a Sannyasi— a prophet?

The theological definition of a prophet as being the anointer of God to teach the people— a soothsayer and a prognosticator of events— cannot be authenticated by the tools of any historian. Whether any prophet ever heard the voice of the Almighty to lift up mankind is difficult to ascertain. Swami Vivekananda never proclaimed him a prophet like Bahaullah nor he preached because he had a revelation. Could he be classed with Lord Krishna, Mahatma Buddha or Hārijat Mohammad? It would be pertinent to remark that Buddha's prophethood was established centuries after his death. The incarnations of Rama and Krishna were recognised only by a few in the epic age. Only Hārijat Mohammad became a prophet in his life time. A century has yet to elapse after the death of Swami Vivekananda.

The modern definition of a prophet as "a man who experiences a sudden and profound dissatisfaction with things as they are, is fired with a new idea and launches out on a new path in a sincere conviction that he has been led by something external and objective...." amply fits the life of Swami Vivekananda, "Every prophet has a message", says A.D.Knock, "which he feels an inward and instant impulse to deliver. He

34. Nock, pp.2-3.
To the West lost in the slough of materialism Swami Vivekananda's spiritual message came as a fitting antidote. At the time of his visit America had much of the gaud and glitter which Thomas Cole had painted into his Consummation of Empire. "It was an empire of business enterprise, worshipping its gods and parading its triumphs under a bland nonofday sky whose thunderheads were just below the horizon". American ingenuity shrank distances and changed the habits of thousands. "Brokers could exchange news in seconds through the telegraph which Morse had once demonstrated to Van Buren's doubtful cabinet....farmers had automatic reapers; sewing machines and bathrooms were no longer curiosities; and the descendants of those fire worshippers for whom Hawthorne had spoken, warmed themselves with that 'cheerless and uncongenial' enormity, the airtight stove. The citizen of the larger town could put his neck into the photographer's iron clamp and emerge with his image on a card tactfully retouched and feverishly coloured in Imperial size; or he could buy small cabinet-sized prints for twelve dollars a dozen which showed him lolling on cardboard rocks, or his wife sporting

35. Ibid. Arguing on the basis of the Vedic dictum: "I am He" Swami Vivekananda once remarked: "There were times in older days when prophets were many in every society. The time is to come when prophets will walk through every street in every city in the world.... The time is coming when we shall understand that to become religious means to become a prophet.... And the whole question devolves upon us: 'Do we want to be prophets?' If we want, we shall be". The Complete Works, Vol.VI, pp.10-11.

36. Larkin, Oliver W., Art and Life in America, p.235.
her furs in a paper snowstorm, or his daughter swinging on
a rustic gate among stuffed canaries and paper apple blossoms".

America displayed her Industrial triumphs at the World's
Fair in 1893—a feat which England had accomplished much
earlier at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851. When Queen
Victoria celebrated her Silver Jubilee in 1887, the English
trade in goods was more than the combined trade of France and
Germany. The average annual production of coal was 130 million
tons by 1880 which was nearly double the production of
Germany, France and Belgium put together. England led the
world in Iron and Steel, in medicine and agriculture and in
major scientific inventions such as the Camera, the Electric
light, the Telephone, the Penny-farthing Bicycle and the use
of administering chloroform. Wallowing in prosperity and pride
the British who were once "a Bible-reading, church-going
generation" became complacent. Venality in political life
became the counterpart of coarseness and profligacy of the
social life of the English governing classes and there went
with it a quality even more repulsive than venality—'the
quality of heartlessness'.

Swami Vivekananda who had initially showered rich encomi-
ums on the West for its "grit and power", its "strength", its
"practicality", its "manhood" and its achievements in science
and technology discovered to his dismay the symptoms of a
deep-seated malady which might totter the edifice of Western

39. Jarman T.L. A Short History of 20th Century England 1868-
1962, p. 87.
institutions. "What do I find in Europe and America?" he said, "The worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense gratification". "To them ministering to the body is a great thing....A thousand instruments for pairing nails, ten thousand for hair cutting and who can count the varieties of dress and toilet and perfumery? All is right with them but that enjoyment is their God".

Beneath the glowing prosperity of the West lay an undercurrent of materialism. On the crest of its wave, as it were, rose epicurean, sensualistic and individualistic tendencies in society which seemed to be turning into a storm, if not a tornado. Such a fear had been expressed before by the famous Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon. In a Sermon of 1891 he observed: "Among the dangers to Christian men, the greatest, perhaps, is accumulating wealth— the dangers of prosperity... You who are rich have no more liberty to sin than if you were poor". What would Horatio Greenough have said of an age whose Midas fingers turned to profit every product of man's inventiveness?

Swami Vivekananda likened the European civilisation to a piece of cloth— its loom was a vast temperate hilly country on the sea-shore; its cotton, a strong warlike mongrel race formed by the intermixture of various races; its warp was warfare in defence of one's self and one's religion. Its woof was commerce; the means to this civilisation was the sword; its

44. Larkin, p.236.
aim, enjoyment here and hereafter. In his view the advancement of civilisation did not simply mean the capacity to produce consumer goods with a view to increasing 'the comforts of material life by bringing into use lots of machinery and things of that sort'. "The more advanced a society or nation is in spirituality", he observed, "the more is that society or nation civilised". But he regretted that the Western civilisation was "multiplying day by day only the wants and distresses of man". While the East was trying to solve the problem on how little a man could live the West was endeavouring to find out: how much a man could possess. The Western nations had many occupations of life such as politics, social enjoyments or anything that could give "a little more whetting to the cloyed senses"—religion being one of them.

Both in his speeches and writings Swami Vivekananda stigmatised the West for worshipping the mammon. Touring the Midwestern parts of America he observed: "You make commerce your business. We make religion our business". His tone became harsh at Memphis when he remarked: "You Americans worship what? The dollar. In the mad rush for gold you forget the spiritual until you have become a nation of materialists. Even your preachers and churches are tainted with the all-pervading desire.... Your religion helps you to build Ferris Wheels and

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
Eiffel towers, but does it aid you in the development of your inner lives. The purport of his lectures at Detroit was that religion in the West was nothing but a hobby and fashion. "Infact" he declared, "the love of God appears to be based upon a theory of what I can get out of it?" During his "Eastern Tour" he censured the white races for their "luxury seeking", "self-seeking" attitude, their "greed for gain", their "dollar-caste sentiment" and remarked that the world would be better if some of India's surplus of religion could be sent over here. He was, however, aware that it would take a long time for the westerners to understand "the higher spirituality." In a letter to Alasinga he wrote: "Everything is S.D. for them. If a religion brings them money or health or beauty or long life they will all flock to it, otherwise not..."

Everything which exalts life adds at the same time to its absurdity, said Albert Camus. The chasing of pleasure for its own sake makes one sick of it after sometime. The 18th Century English clergyman, Robert Burns remarked: "Pleasures are like poppies spread; you seize the flower, its bloom is shed".

Swami Vivekananda felt that Europe was getting restless and did not know where to turn. He found that "a tide of world

58. The International Thesaurus of Quotations, p.698.
weariness" was engulfing the Western countries. The people were realising at long last that the race for "fold and power" was all "vanity of vanities". They were getting fed up of the "cruel, cold, heartless" competitive life which formed the backbone of "their commercial civilisation"—and looked forward to something better. He was convinced that "no amount of force or government or legislative cruelties" could change the conditions of a race. A metamorphosis of the spiritual and ethical values was essential to divest the society of its "hidden cankers". "The whole world requires light, he wrote to Alasinga on August 31, 1894 "It is expectant! India alone has that light not in magic mummeries and charlatanism, but in the teaching of the glories of the spirit of real religion..."

Swami Vivekananda forewarned that Europe—the centre of the manifestation of material energy would crumble into dust within fifty years if she was not mindful to change her position, "to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe was the religion of the Upanishadas".

Swami Vivekananda’s prognostication gave voice to Aldous Huxley’s doubts about the future of the Western nations. "Ours is an age of systematized irrelevances", he wrote, "and the imbecile within us has become one of the Titans upon whose shoulders rests the weight of the social and economic system".

60. Ibid., p.181.  
61. Ibid., p.182.  
62. Ibid.  
In his private world of "neon tubes and incendiaries" Man had built up a little catacomb of his own "constructed of a strange assortment of materials- interests and 'ideals', words and technologies, cravings and day dreams, artifacts and institutions, imaginary gods and demons". He cherished "the crazy ambitions that alone make sense in a mad house".

It was to curb these vicious tendencies in the Western society that Swami Vivekananda delivered the message of Vedanta.

Vedanta is not philosophy in the sense we speak of the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. It is not one book or the work of one man. The word Vedanta literally means 'the end of the Vedas'. Practically it constitutes all the scriptures of the Hindus- the Shrutis- and almost all schools of philosophy in India. Vedanta does not offer a plethora of dogmas and creeds, or 'a set of socio-political do's and don'ts' but attempts to metamorphose mankind by lifting the veil of Maya and projecting the Upanishadic doctrine evam evadvitiyam("one essence and no other"). It is neither religion, nor philosophy but an experience though "it accepts both as suited to the different levels of spiritual evolution".

Swami Vivekananda's exegesis of Vedanta philosophy encompassed three main precepts: First, man's real nature was divine; Secondly, the real purpose of human life was to manifest this divinity within 'by controlling nature, external and internal'; thirdly, all religions were in consonance with one another and

66. Ibid.,p.190.
68. Ibid.,pp.357-58.
constituted "so many pearls in a string". In his writings and discourses in the West Swami Vivekananda delineated these principles by using the rationale of a scientist, the mind of a psychologist and the vision of a mystic.

Swami Vivekananda regretted that the Western civilisation had reduced man to a machine. He was being looked as merely "a biological organism seeking organic satisfactions and organic survival". This tendency had given to the West "its wonderful prosperity" but "driven away all religion from its doors". Man was merely regarded as a conglomeration of chemicals which could be bought from a Chemist's shop for less than ten Shillings. Like Meursault, the hero of Camus' The Outsider he had come to feel that life was meaningless. The Christian theologians dubbed him as "a born sinner" because he was a heir to Adam who wantonly transgressed the light command that had been laid upon him by the Almighty as a test of his fidelity and gratitude. Since then he was cut off from the friendship of God and cast out from an inheritance of countless benedictions. "Original Justice was forfeited and, as its opposite, succeeded original Sin, which thereby, became the heritage of mankind".

As against these disparaging conceptions of Man which dominated the Western mind in the 19th Century, Swami Vivekananda delineated the Upanishadic philosophy which regarded him

70. Ranganathananda, Swami, "Swami Vivekananda: India's emissary to the West" in Chandra, Lokesh(ed.)India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture, p.672.
73. Camus, Albert, The Outsider, p.112.
as essentially divine. He was not the body, nor the senses—these were but "the instruments of his manifestation and action in the spatio-temporal world". He was the Soul—indestructible, eternal, unborn and changeless.

Vedanta holds that the external phenomena perceived by our senses has merely an apparitional existence. "The universe is other than its outward aspect". Beneath this appearance, this flux, there is an essential unchanging Reality which it calls Brahman or the Godhead. Behind "man the known" is "man the unknown". Tat tvam asi—"That thou art", say the Upanishadas. He seems to be "limited" because he views himself through the limitations of the body and the senses. In his essential nature however, he is pure being, pure consciousness and bliss—Sat-cit-ananda.

At the Chicago Parliament Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that human beings were "the children of God" and "the sharers of immortal bliss". At Minneapolis he described religion as the manifestation of divinity already existing in man. At Memphis he remarked that nothing was baser than "calling our brother a sinner". Like a Vedic seer he prognosticated that the time will come when man will know the truth—"I am God". He argued that it was irrational to teach that God was far away in some distant corner of the Universe "when our real

75. Ranganathananda, Swami, _The Message of the Upanisads_, p. 50.
76. Isherwood, Christopher, p. 9.
77. Ranganathananda, Swami, p. 105.
81. Ibid.
nature, our immortal principle is God". At Detroit he observed that those who called themselves Sinners were like lions masquerading as sheep. They demeaned themselves "in every imaginable fashion, not yet seeing the perfection which lies in self". Swami Vivekananda spoke in a similar vein at Boston, New York and other cities of America. At the Thousand Islands Park he extolled the splendour of existence in an imitable expression: "Never forget the glory of human nature! We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christ and Buddha are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am".

It would be pertinent to observe that Man forms the perennial theme of Hindu scriptures. While Confucius described him as the heart of heaven and earth, the union of the active and passive principles, a conjunction of the soul and spirit and the ethereal essence of the five elements, the Vedic seers raised him to divinity. The Upanishadas represent him as "the sole doorway to the mystery of existence". The Aitareya Aranyaka describes him as *ayam puruso brahmano lokah-"the abode of Brahmana"*(II,1.3). The Bhagavad-gita speaks of his eternal glory. The Srimad-Bhagavatam hails him as the crown of creation. It was through the human body that the Vedic sages discovered the Purusha- "the immortal behind the mortal, the Infinite behind the finite". Man is instinctively

82. Ibid.
supernatural in his capacities and powers, his attitudes and cravings, his aspirations and aims. A particle of gold is also gold, a drop of water from the ocean is also saltish. Similarly the living entities being part and parcel of the supreme controller have all the qualities of the Supreme Lord. Man is trying to control Nature, Space and Planets—"and this tendency to control is there" because it is in God.

Swami Vivekananda argued that man was not like "a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions—a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect". He was a soul caught in the manacles of Maya—the veil concealing from his vision the nature of the true reality.

This brings into focus the second principle of Vedanta: how to break the shackles of illusion (Maya) and realise one's essential nature. "Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details", counselled the Swami.

"Realise that all this is illusion" admonishes Buddhism. "Realise that in illusion is the real", says the Vedanta. Buddhism endeavours to release man from the net work of Maya by

86. Prabhupada, Swami, Bhagavad-gita as it is, p.8.
88. Ibid., p.124.
89. Rolland, p.178.
totally denying it. Vedanta—"in the light of the poignant joys and tragic sorrows without which life would be poor indeed"—accepts its existence but says it is a snare. "Maya is to Brahman what the snake in motion is to the snake at rest", said Sri Ramakrishna. "The snake is not affected by the poison in its fangs; but when it bites, the poison kills the creature bitten. Likewise Maya is in the Lord but does not affect Him while the same Maya deludes the whole world". What we call creation was conceived by the Upanishadic seers, as a kind of phenomenal emanation; or illusory manifestation of the one great reality. "This whole universe is filled by this Person (Purusha), to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing, smaller or larger; who stands alone, fixed like a tree in the sky". "That incarnate self, according to his own qualities, assumes many shapes, coarse or subtle; and having himself caused his Union with them, he is seen as another and another, through the qualities of his acts, and through the qualities of his body".

Human body thus forms a part of the Cosmic body; human mind forms a part of the Cosmic ocean of mind; human consciousness is a part of the Cosmic consciousness. "As from a blazing fire, says the Mundaka Upanishad, "sparks of like form issue forth by the thousands, even so, 0 beloved, many kinds of beings issue forth from the immutable and they return thither..."
too. The macrocosm is like the ocean and the microcosm is like the wave. Tiny bubbles that were, we find it difficult to understand even a full-wave consciousness. Only by dropping the limiting adjuncts man could hope to get a new and purer sense of existence. In trying to separate itself from the ocean the bubble runs the risk of bursting its bubble form. But man behaves like an ignoramus and considers himself a separate entity. Sri Rama Krishna used to remark that the idea of an individual ego was just like enclosing a portion of the water of the Ganges and "calling the enclosed portion one's own Ganges". Man's ego itself was "Maya". The individual soul and the Universal Being were separated because "I-hood" acted as a barrier between the two. To use Aldous Huxley's words:

Union with God could never be achieved by the old Adam who must lose the life of self-will in order to gain the life of divine will. "The old Adam's restless curiosities must be checked and his foolishness, his dissipation of spirit turned to wisdom and one-pointedness".

Religion amounted to a struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses. It did not consist in doctrines, dogmas or pedagoguish knowledge. It was being and becoming. He who studied books on religion with a pedantic outlook reminded one

95. *Muni Kraka Upanishad*, II/1.
96. Yatiswarananda Swami, "Realize the Truth" in Isherwood, p.115.
97. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid, p.54.
102. Ibid., p.108.
of the fable of the Ass who carried a heavy load of sugar on its back but did not know the sweetness of it. Books never made religions, argued the Swami, but religions made books. "No book ever created God but God inspired all the great books". Churches, ceremonies and symbols were good for 'children' but 'when the child is grown, he must burst the church or himself. It is good to be born a child but bad to remain a child'. The Vedic seers declared: "Look not for the truth in any religion; it is here in the human soul, the miracle of all miracles... the emporium of all knowledge, the mine of existence. Seek here".

So long as one fails to realise the Soul "the self behind the non-self", "the one behind the many" one cannot hope to rise above the state of delusion. The sense of ego emanates in the person who identifies himself with body, mind and senses. With the birth of this "ego-sense", he forgets his transcendent nature and becomes a prey to time and causation, Karma and re-birth. "All this manifested Universe is Brahman, the Supreme", says the Mundaka Upanishad(II.2.12). "All this (manifested Universe) is this Ataman", says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad(II.4.6). "Know nature to be Maya and the Great God to be the Lord of Maya", says the Svetasvatara Upanishad(IV/60).

104. Ibid., p.324.
105. Ibid., p.325.
106. Ibid., p.355.
108. Another verse of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (II.1.20) reads: "As a spider moves along the thread, as small sparks come forth all breaths, all worlds, all divinities, all beings. Its secret meaning is the truth of truth. Vital breaths are the truth, and their truth is It(self)". Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanisads, p.190.

from the fire, even so from this self come forth
"This whole Universe is pervaded by Him through beings which form his parts."

Keeping in view the four broad divisions of human mind, Swami Vivekananda taught four kinds of Yoga to suit different natures and temperament. One could realise the Self through work and duty (Karma Yoga), through devotion to and love of personal God (Bhakti Yoga) through control of mind (Raja Yoga) and through attaining knowledge (Jnana Yoga). The Sruti describes the realisation of the Divine as the summum bonum of all human pursuits. Says the Mundaka Upanishad (II.2.5) "Know ye that one immanent and all pervasive Being in whom the three Worlds together with the entire world of mind and senses, function for ever. Give up all talks about the transitory phases of life. The realisation of the Immanent-Transcendent Absolute or the Atman is the only bridge that leads to immortality".

Vedanta's third proposition that all religions are essentially in harmony with one another springs from the famous Upanishadic saying: ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti (There is only one Real, but the wise speaks of it variously). According to Swami Vivekananda the varying systems of religion were at bottom founded on the same ideas. He did not mean, however, that they were homogeneous in matter of their hierography, hierology or hierophasty. To discern the ground of Unity among

109. About the middle of 1895 Swami Vivekananda completed his famous book Kaja-Yoga. It attracted the attention of the great American philosopher, Professor William James and later kindled the interest of Count Leo Tolstoy of Russia. In December 1895 the Swami delivered talks on Karma-Yoga and Bhakti Yoga in the city of New York. These were, later, published in book-form. During his second visit to England Swami Vivekananda gave various talks on Jnana Yoga.
hierology or hierosophy. To discern the ground of Unity among religions, one must not look to the forms, symbols, mythologies or rituals but to the sacred purpose which underlied them. "Every religion", said Swami Vivekananda, "Consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward towards God... This is the only recognition of Universality that we can get".

Swami Vivekananda saw the idea of Unity running through all "religious doctrines", "metaphysical conceptions", "ethical ideals" and "scientific truths". The forms differed but the substance remained the same. "If you go below the surface", he remarked, "you find that unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough, all will be seen as only variations of the One and he who has attained to this conception of oneness has no more delusion".

Swami Vivekananda argued that each religion had a distinctive role to play as it met the requirements of persons of different capabilities and dispositions. During his lectures in America and England he held that religious unity must not be taken to mean the Uniformity of religious ideas. Unity in variety was the plan of the Universe. At the Chicago Parliament Swami Vivekananda observed that the multiple of external phenomena reflected the infinite variety of Unity. It was not right to lay down "certain fixed dogmas" and try to force

society to adopt them. All religions, except Hinduism placed before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. "If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body". At Memphis he stressed that the difference in opinions were essential for human progress. "Kill the difference in opinions, and it is the death of thought. Motion is necessity. Thought is the motion of mind, and when that ceases, death begins".

Swami Vivekananda often observed that the Soul struggled through various mediums for the attainment of the individual infinity. "The little streams that ripple down a thousand mountain sides are destined to come at last to the mighty ocean. So with the different religions. They are destined to come at last to the mighty ocean". During his tour of the Eastern parts of America Swami Vivekananda argued that if there were not different religions, "no one religion would survive". "Why take a single instrument from the great religious orchestra of the earth? Let the grand symphony go on", he argued. In his view only the realisation of spiritual oneness of mankind could usher in an era of love in the world. All religions preached: "Love one another". What for? he asked. "Because they and I are one. Why should I love my brother? Because he..."

and I am one. There is this oneness, this solidarity of the whole universe. From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings that ever lived all have various bodies but are the one Soul.

It would be worthwhile to observe that during the second half of the 19th Century the study of religions on a cross-cultural basis was being metamorphosed into a scientific discipline by scholars such as the German philologist Max Muellner and the Dutch theologians, P.D.Chavtepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920) and C.P.Tiele (1830-1902). Those who regarded Christianity as being synonymous with Religion did not quite appreciate the nature of such study. In Germany, there was strong resistance, notably from Adolf Von Harnack who thought that theology should avoid what he regarded as dilettantism and that the subject was sufficiently covered in the study of Biblical religion. Even those who took up the study of comparative religions gave an upper hand to Christianity over other faiths. Nathan Soderblom contended in Introduction to the History of Religion that Christianity was the central point of the entire history of religion. He classified religion according to the historical order in which they came into contact with Christianity. A somewhat similar approach was adopted by Albert Schweitzer in Christianity and the Religions of the World in which he grouped...

118. Ibid., p.633.
religions as rivals or non-rivals of Christianity. The Archbishop of Canterbury asked the English clergy to boycott the World's Parliament of Religions because it would divest Christianity of its higher status. Some apprehended that the Chicago Parliament would prove as the Falls of Niagara-"a gigantic and barren effort". Such misapprehensions were belied. Nevertheless some speakers contended that Christianity had the elements of an "ultimate religion". Rev. John Henry Barrows remarked at one occasion that only a representative of the Hebrew race had a right to speak on "Universal religion". The climax was reached when Rev. Dr George Dana Boardman of Philadelphia placed Jesus Christ above the prophets of the East and called him 'the sole unifier of mankind'. "Buddha was in many respects very noble", he remarked, "but he and his religion are Asiatic. What has Buddha done for the unity of mankind? Mohammed taught some very noble truths, but Mohammedanism is fragmental and antithetic. Why have not his followers invited us to meet at Mecca? Jesus Christ is the one Universal man, and therefore it is that the first Parliament of Religions is meeting in a Christian land, under Christian auspices. Jesus Christ is the sole bond of the human race; the one nexus of the nations, the great vertebral column of the one body of mankind....".

119. Ibid.,p.633.
121. Ibid.,p.412.
122. Bishop John J. Keane of Washington, for example, read a paper entitled "The Ultimate Religion" at the Chicago Parliament on September 27, 1893. It concluded with the words: Jesus Christ is the ultimate centre of religion. He has declared that His one Organic Church is equally ultimate. Because I believe Him, here must be my stand forever. Houghton(ed.),p.841.
123. Ibid.,p.816.
124. Ibid.,p.845.
Swami Vivekananda was aware that such an insularity of religious outlook had fomented intolerance among mankind, made beasts of men and drenched the earth with human blood. Swami Vivekananda often lashed at the "Infallibilists" of the domain of religion. "With all your brags and boasted where has your Christianity succeeded without the Sword? Show me one place in the whole world. One, I say..., I do not want too". "For 2900 years you have been trying to crush the Jews. Why could you not crush them? Echo answers: Ignorance and bigotry can never crush Truth". "Why could not you make the Persians Christians? Why is it that to every African who becomes a Christian, 100 become followers of Mohammed? Why cannot you make an impression on India and China and Japan? Because oneness of mental temperament all over the World would be death. Nature too wise to allow such things".

Swami Vivekananda exhorted the West to recognise the underlying unity between all religions and accept the axiom: Live and let live. "Help and not fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension"—This was his message. At times he was harsh, if not rude to his audiences. But his harshness was born out of a genuine concern for mankind. It was as if a physician was prescribing bitter pill to a patient or a Surgeon amputating certain decrepit limbs of

the human body. When Mary Hale asked him to be polite and refrain from calling a spade a spade in matter of the evils of Western society, he remarked: "I am so, so sorry, Sinner, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood.... I am too old to change now into milk and honey. Allow me to remain as I am". In a Socratic vein he observed that a Sannyasi must hold on to Truth whatever the consequences. "Go alone. Walk alone". This was Manu's admonition to the Sannyasis. Truth is always bitter. "I have no time to be sweet to the World", he said, "and every attempt at sweetness makes me a hypocrite. I will die a thousand deaths rather than lead a jelly-fish existence and yield to every requirement of this foolish world, no matter whether it be my own country or a foreign country. You are mistaken... if you think I have a work, as Mrs. Bull thinks; I have no work under or beyond the Sun, I have a message and I will give it after my own fashion".

Marie Louise Burke believed that the idea of teaching Vedanta to the West did not fully evolve in the Swami's mind until the later part of 1894. "It was a complex and profound idea, involving an intimate and mature knowledge of the characteristics and needs of the Western mind. As Swamiji later conceived it, Vedanta was the one unifying force of all the diverse religious, philosophical and cultural outlooks of

130. Ibid., p.72.
man. He made it the philosophy of all religions, the ultimate goal of science, the justification of all social, moral, psychic and philosophical efforts of man to realize his own glory, and he made it also the method by which that glory might be fully attained". Burke held that Swami Vivekananda thought of Vedanta as India's gift to the world but adds: "In the early part of Swamiji's American visit one does not find this conception of the function of Vedanta in the modern world worked out in his mind and put into practical form. It was a development that required time".

If by "teaching Vedanta to the West" Burke meant "giving intensive spiritual training to Americans" she may be right for the Swami did not hold any class in monistic Vedanta till he attended the Greenacre conferences in July-August, 1894. But to argue that he was not conscious of his mission 'in the last part of 1893 and a large part of 1894' is to make a travesty of facts. One may say that he did not get an opportunity to start with, or that he was to cope with financial problems or that he wanted to stabilise his position before embarking on a mission of propping up the West on spiritual foundations. But to say to the contrary would tantamount to ignoring the Summum bonum of Swami Vivekananda's sojourns in the West.

Theory must precede practice. For more than a year after his arrival in America Swami Vivekananda preached the quintessence of Vedanta to his audiences. Was not he preparing the ground for more than a year after his arrival in America Swami Vivekananda preached the quintessence of Vedanta to his audiences. Was not he preparing the ground

132. Ibid.
for his future work when he gave practical lessons in spirituality at the Thousand Island Park and later in England?

Swami Vivekananda's claim that Vedanta alone could be the Universal religion of man was based on four propositions:

1. First, it was perfectly impersonal. It was based "upon principles and not upon persons", as was the case with other religions which apotheosised their prophets. If the rock of historicity built round the founders of these religions was shaken they would stagger and stumble. But it was not so with Vedanta. "Just as our God is an Impersonal and yet a Personal God, so is our religion a most intensely impersonal one--a religion based upon principles--and yet with an infinite scope for the play of persons; for what religion gives you more incarnations, more prophets and seers and still waits for infinitely more", he asked. The Bhagvata says that incarnations are Infinite, "leaving ample scope for as many as you like to come". Therefore, he argued, if any one or more of these incarnations or prophets were proved not to have been historical, it did not injure the religion of Vedanta.

2. Secondly, the fault with all religions was that they had one set of rules for all. But Vedanta was suited to all grades of religious aspirations and progress. In recent times William Sheldon has made a three fold classification of human temperament: Cerebro-tonic, and Somato-tonic. The Jnana Yoga

135. Ibid., p.83.
136. Ibid., p.183-84.
137. The Complete Works, Vol.VI, p.120.
would suit the first for such a man would be "predominantly intellectual and rational having little use for symbols, or conscious need for psycho-physical aids to concentration"; The Bhakti Yoga to the second for he seeks "adequate and progressive symbolism" and yearns for devotion to the deity; and Raja Yoga to the third- for a man of such nature adopts a balanced approach- "mental, emotional and physical, to the divine". Besides, Vedanta contained all the ideals in their perfect form, viz. the ideal of blessedness was to be found in Vasishtha; that of love in Krishna; that of duty in Rama and Sita; and that of intellect in Shukadeva. "Adopt one which suits you best", said the Swami.

Thirdly the ethical basis of Vedanta could appeal to the rational mind of the West. Vedanta says, love every man as your brother, as in Christianity. Brotherhood should be superseded by Universal Selfhood. "Not Universal brotherhood, but Universal Selfhood is our motto", said Swami Vivekananda. He further contended that modern materialism could hold its own and at the same time approach spirituality by taking up the conclusions of Vedanta.

Fourthly, the principles of Vedanta were in harmony with the conclusions of science. Both science and Vedanta conclude that the explanation of things were to be found within their own nature, and that no external beings or existences were

139. Heard, Gerald "Vedanta as the scientific approach to Religion" in Isherwood, p.56.
141. Ibid., p.122.
required to explain what is going on in the Universe. And the corollary of this principle, that "everything comes from within", is "the modern law of evolution. The whole meaning of evolution is simply that the nature of the things is reproduced, that the effect is nothing but the cause in another form, that all the potentialities of the effect were present in the cause, that the whole of creation is but an evolution and not a creation". The statement that "the physical world is a construction of the human mind from a substratum, a basic unity which our animal senses break up into a manifold" is supported by Physics. "The hypothesis that consciousness is sui generis and this particular temporal experience is an event in a series which extends beyond it in both directions" is corroborated by Para-psychology.

Besides, Vedanta was the only 'religion' which created a sharp trichotomy between the three different aspects of religion, namely, philosophy, mythology and ceremonialism. In other religions the principles were so interwoven with the mythology that it was hard to distinguish one from the other. The mythology stood supreme, swallowing up the principles; and in course of centuries the principles were lost sight of. Could any one dare to preach the essentials of Christianity apart from Jesus Christ or the tenets of Islam without Hajrat Mohammad? he asked. The persons, appeal to our emotions; and the principles to something higher, "our calm judgement".

143. Rolland, Romain, p.248.
146. Ibid.
"Principles must conquer in the long run", he remarked, "for that is the manhood of man. Emotions many times drag us down to the level of animals". Vedanta could overcome this difficulty because it did not have one special prophet.

Some modern thinkers such as Gerald Heard support Swami Vivekananda's claims about the Vedanta and argue that the Western religion could not satiate rational minds and answer queries about the discerning and the non-discerning, the real and the unreal, or establish an affinity between science and religion, utilitarianism and mysticism, "the spirit of self-reliance and the spirit of submission". Besides, Western religion had made three fundamental mistakes. Taking its cosmology from the rudimentary Hebrew World view it tied itself to a crude Apocalypticism. Secondly, it neglected psychology and psycho-physiology. "Its conception of Deity, fluctuating between a humanized Jehovah and a Trinity in which an anthropomorphized Logos mediates between man and the inflexible absolute Judge God, made Christianity's one praxis to be simple petitionary prayer". Thirdly, its spirit of intolerance and a propensity "to destroy all who differ from orthodoxy's rulings". Gerald Heard argues that Christianity was "in ruins and even if it stood it would be too small an arch to span that diversity of mankind which today physical science brings into contact, though it cannot combine". The only hope was the gospel of Vedanta which not only ensured "personal salvation" but also "a balanced philosophy and praxis of life.

which could provide sane and progressive living for a unified mankind.

Swami Vivekananda's message of Vedanta thus helped in filling an emotional void caused by 'the sledgehammer blows' of scientific research to the Western religion, stemmed the rising tide of agnosticism and epicureanism and laid out the meeting point of all religions. By wit, by satire, by comparative philology, theology and history, by narrating fables or using a scientific principle to elucidate his point, Swami Vivekananda diagnosed the malady which was afflicting the armature of Western society—so gorgeously built up by the mind of man. The pendulum of progress swung too much on the side of sensual pleasures thus impeding the smooth movement of the long and small hands of the clock of civilisation. Science and technology made the life of man cozy but not peaceful, joyous but not ecstatic, comfortable but not contented. Mounting tension masqueraded in the guise of fast life and material progress concealed in its bosom the symptoms of exhaustion and retrogression. In the din and bustle of western society man was crowded by men but he felt lonely. He yearned to go beyond the external phenomena and sensed a void within him. It was this void that Swami Vivekananda attempted to fill.

148. Gerald Heard in Isherwood, pp.54-56.