A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
IN THE POETRY OF HOPKINS AND NAMMALVAR

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

Concurrent with different religions, Religion exists in its own respect. Different religions have come out of different traditions and against different backgrounds. But in so far as Religion as a whole arises in human consciousness due to certain common problems that human beings have to face in the world and people of different traditions share certain common feelings, ideas and sentiments, Religion exists as a whole concomitant as well as concurrent with religions. Comparative philosophy, in its earnestness to be objective and scientific, has explored into the qualitative aspects of different religions and has ended up in comparing such of those aspects that are comparatively similar and establishing differences between such of those aspects distinct to different religions. But comparative study, as the name implies, looks at different religions as compared with rather than compared to each other. The latter approach need not necessarily be construed as part of the former in as much as the former has brought out similarities between different religions. Seeing through such similarities, seeing one religion as compared to the other or others from a phenomenological perspective is to reveal facts regarding the common problems, feelings, ideas and sentiments which the human consciousness experiences.

That would take us to an attempted definition of Religion. Religion, in a tentative definition, would be a commitment to a kind or quality of life which recognizes a source beyond itself, usually called God and it manifests itself in recognizable fruits in human conduct, culture and thought on the one hand and attitude on the other. The word life in such a definition may convey the notion of life as a span or continuum, or the idea of strength and vital principle of the body or the notion of life in its fundamental sense considered independently of the number
of years and apart from its animating principle. Thus the life to which Religion proposes to commit is a specially valuable or deep kind of life. There may be great differences in the way in which this special kind of life is conceived in different religions but Religion as a whole cherishes the notion of a life that is intrinsically far richer or better than the kind to which we refer when we use the word life. This study first of all accepts the fact that only religions exist, only religions present themselves to us in the world of experience. But in so far as religions are committed to a different kind of life even as the religious live this life, and in so far as all religions recognize a source beyond in the name of God, it must be possible to study this life in relation to the life committed to and the terms of reference to the source beyond life with a view to understanding what this life at a phenomenological level could mean which in turn may facilitate a better perspective of Religion. Such a study is quite ambitious and to be exhaustive may have to take several philosophic considerations into account. But in part such a study may propose to investigate the experience of this life lived with the fullest awareness of the fact that one's real commitment is not to this life but to a different and deeper life whose source is beyond this life. Narrower in scope, such a study would enquire into the nature of the experience of this life, the longing for the life committed to and the necessity of inspiration from the source beyond for such fulfilment. Such a study can further be narrowed down to the phenomenology of life as explained in terms of any two religions. A still further narrowing down is possible if a study attempts at tracing the three aspects as in the life of two individuals belonging to two such religious traditions. Having so narrowed down the scope of the study, a further choice may have to be made with regard to the religion at one level and the individuals at another level.

It is this phenomenological perspective that has prompted this study of religious experience as revealed in the poetry of Hopkins, a Jesuit Priest Poet and Nammalvar a Hindu Vaisnavite saint and poet. The difference in time, climate notwithstanding, this study tries to focus on the phenomenological aspects of religious experience which are common to human consciousness.

That man suffers this life, that man is hopeful of release from this suffering, that such release is partly to be worked out by man and partly and ultimately to be granted him by God.
and that during the process man has to live this life, are factors acknowledged in the poetry of both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. Therefore the study.

THE PHILOSOPHIC BACKGROUND

Man is an ego consciously related to other persons and objects who not only perceives the other objects in the world with cognitive interest but also makes use of them for the satisfaction of his practical purposes. Mostly his consciousness thus comes to be exteriorised and dispersed in the practical pursuits of his life. Such a mode of consciousness can be defined as the intentional mode of consciousness which is directed towards the outer objects of the world in their discreteness. This can be designated also as the practical level of consciousness and most men do not rise above it. However, it is possible for him to transcend it at times and consider objects in their interrelated totality and assess their basic meaning or final value for himself. Objects in their totality in so far as they are disclosed to man’s consciousness constitute the world for him in which he has his being. Man is thus a being-in-the-world. His questions regarding the significance or the value of the world about himself ipso facto are questions regarding the significance or value of one’s own being-in-the-world. This is the phenomenological standpoint in which human consciousness becomes interiorised and it regards its own being-in-the-world as an object for its reflection and evaluation. This interiorised consciousness becomes the origin of an intimately personal and deeply felt religious attitude towards all that is. This is a psychological process, intensely emotional and highly insightful, involving an inner dynamism of consciousness.

The human consciousness which thus reflects on its own being-in-the-world very early, discovers certain structural aspects, not as falling outside it but as inherently permeating it. In its being-in-the-world, it finds itself as being-there in the world. Without the world it has no positive content and it is inalienably bound to the world throughout its life. The THERENESS of consciousness ontologically implies its being-alongside the objects with which it is concerned and its being-with other persons with whom it has to live in harmony or conflict. In being-there in the world, human consciousness also discovers itself as being-thrown into the world from nowhere, as being-ahead-of-itself, constantly moving towards a future and as
being-immersed in a situation which is immediately present. These are the several aspects of the care-structure of man’s being. The matter of real concern here is not any or all these aspects taken severally but their total and cumulative impact on man’s consciousness as being-in-the-world. This impact is one of fatigue not physical but mental. It may be called the fatigue of the spirit in religious terminology. It develops gradually within the care-structure of man’s being-in-the-world. The root cause of this fatigue is not temporality which is inherently woven into man’s structure of being in the world. Man is constantly engaged in the present concernful activities, based upon his memory of the past and directed towards an anticipatory future. Thus man lives time and he is not merely in time but is time. He finds himself always oriented towards a future which is drawn into the present; but the present itself constantly recedes into the past no sooner than it is present. This transicncy characterises man’s life all through and creates a sense of void or vacuity in the care-structure of man’s being-in-the-world. The world seems to be incessantly sliding away from him and he is perpetually being reduced to the status of mere lack, want or purpose which can never have any permanent self fulfilment. The fact that man is subjected to such ontological pattern of existence creates boredom in him about his own being-in-the-world. Being faced with such internal boredom may conclude with all is nothing which is not a judgement of fact but a judgement of value. He knows full well that the pleasures of life do exist as fact but they do not please him as they are undermined by the transicncy in which they are rooted and are hence devalued and turned into void. This is an oppressive feeling which man finds to be unbearable and dreadful. Dread, in this sense, is not ordinary fear which arises out of an external cause and disappears with the removal of that cause; it is the sense of nothingsness which permeates man’s whole being-in-the-world and it is man’s being-in-the-world as such which is the object of dread.

The inevitable phenomenon of death intensifies the feeling of nothingness revealed in the dread. Death is the innermost, primordial potentiality of human existence in the world, not just a future accident which simply terminates human existence at a certain point of time. Thus death comes to be regarded as an ontological truth of utmost significance since man’s being-in-the-world is subject to an inevitable move towards certain death. Thus far, any philosophical valuation of man’s being-in-the-world has to be taken up in the light of the immanence and inevitability of death. The truth which will naturally be revealed by such valuation is that man’s being-in-the-world is his being-already-ahead-of-himself-towards-death. The anticipatory
conception of death in the human consciousness results in the devaluation of its 'being-in-the-world' and deepens the feeling of nothingness already permeating it due to transience.

An attempt to slide back into pleasure oriented way of life is often the escape route from this feeling of boredom or dread. But the recognition of the presence of the dread in all that he seeks defeats the purpose of any such escapism. Thus man grows into accepting it, facing it, and living with it. Thence the dread and boredom come to grow deep into consciousness developing into melancholy. Melancholy in its long enduring form makes man feel utterly lonely and disrelated to the world. Inability to know what to do with oneself fills him with a sense of complete frustration or despair in which all the intentional modes of consciousness are reduced to the point of nullification and man becomes completely overwhelmed with the feeling of inner void or nothingness in all its depth and intensity.

This is the point of inner conversion in which man's egoistic affiliations to the world through the intentional modes of consciousness are annulled and at the same time, the Being or Transcendence or God thus lies through the medium of nothingness since nothingness nihilis itself in Being. If such movement can be defined as a dialectical movement of consciousness, it cannot be a mere thought-concept, as it has an experiential content and is disclosed to consciousness only through a moodal negation of all cognitive modes of particularised consciousness. It reveals itself to the interiorised consciousness spontaneously only when all the self-reliant efforts of human consciousness to seek it end up in utter despair or frustration. Man's effortlessness which is also the denial of the effort to be effortless is the precondition of the disclosure of the Being or Transcendence within his interiorised consciousness. All this description may sound to suggest something mystical and if it is so, it is not a matter of surprise in that religion in its purity and intensity is bound to be mystical and without such a concrete inner mystical base, it fades away into a set of theoretical dogmas, a series of rituals and external practices which are all very profane and lack an inner sense of reality.

Two questions however still remain to be answered. How best can the nature of the Being or Transcendence or God be described so as to be consistent with religious consciousness? How best can such a concept be objectively validated against skeptical challenges? In answering such questions, the human consciousness should start upon a
speculative venture about the nature of the universe without, however, losing its concrete basis in the inner reality on which it has landed.

The first question may be reframed as whether the Being or Transcendence or God should be regarded as personal or impersonal in nature. In answering this question, it has to be remembered that the inner passage traversed by the human consciousness is filled with an overwhelming sense of worthlessness of its being-in-the-world. It should, in other words, be of such a nature as to be consciously related to man's being in the world so as to dispel his sense of despair, worthlessness or loneliness and create in their place a sense of hope, worth and inner companionship. Such a nature cannot be ascribed to the Transcendence or Being or God, if it is conceived in purely impersonal terms. Hence it would be reasonable to suppose that Being or Transcendence or God bears a personal character so as to enter into communication with human consciousness which has become intensely religious at this point of meeting the Transcendence and yearns to have a dialogue with it. The religious dialogue takes the forms of devotional music, prayer, poetry and ritualistic worship. These would be meaningless if the Being itself is impersonal and incapable of responding to such religious appeals. Therefore the Being encountered by man's religious consciousness will have to be conceived as profoundly personal so as to make man's personal relationship or commitment to it really meaningful and worthwhile. This concept would then be in conformity with man's religious consciousness which has developed through an inner psychological process of longing for hope and worthfulness. The Transcendence or Being or which can be so related to man in personal terms cannot itself be anything less than a personal God.

But even such a description of Being as personal God leaves us within the domain of human consciousness. The interpretation amounts to a mere psychological description and it does not cover any logical or objective ground for the validation of the reality of God. Thus the existence of God is to be established on the grounds of broad-based objective empirical evidence.

The world as we see it around us has certain characteristic features such as purposiveness, orderliness, value, novelty and few more which are open ended. These features are disclosed to us in our common human experience and are explained on the ground of the existence
of the God of a specific nature. Thus the apparently contingent purposeless universe would come to have no coherent correlation or need for explanation. But the basic postulates of the unity and uniformity of nature have been the foundation for systematic thinking and sane living. Hence it would be reasonable to believe that the universe in which we live as purposive beings should itself be purposive in its basic constitution. This reasoning would avoid the paradox fundamental to many existentialist schools: *Man's is a purposive existence in a purposeless universe.*

The universe in its basic constitution consists of an infinite number of infinitesimal actual occasions, each of which is purposive at least in a rudimentary sense. Each actual occasion is a centre of subjectivity or feeling and comes into existence by unconsciously prehending the past objective data of the universe so as to make itself what it is. This is a process of self-creation or concrescence of the actual occasions. But it cannot take place without an initial aim given to it to become what it is. The actual occasions being infinite in number, they together constitute an eternal cosmic process in which the initial aim is to be given perpetually to each newly arising actual occasion. There must then be an eternal source from which the initial aim is constantly given to the newly arising actual occasion in the universe and that source can be none other than God. For God in his primordial nature includes an infinite number of possibilities or values which have yet to be actualised in the universe and for their actualisation, God gives the initial aim to the concrescent actual occasion to realise any possibility to whatever extent possible. However, the realisation of one possibility should necessarily exclude the other possibilities if there should be orderliness in the universe as we find it. Hence the infinite number of possibilities should reasonably be supposed to be sustained in the primordial nature of God through a principle of exclusion. However, no possibility is exhaustible in its actualisation. This explains the fact that any existent in the universe cannot be a bare repetition of the old one but has a novelty of its own depending upon the nature and degree of possibility it has chosen to realise for itself.

Questions with regard to the presence of freedom and the existence of evil would naturally arise in the context of the foregoing description of the basic constitution of the universe which appears to be quite *naïve.* The stark reality of freedom of choice and evil can
best be accounted for if it is admitted that the concrescent activity of actual occasions is given the initial aim but is in no way determined by God. The freedom of each actual occasion is secure even if it is circumscribed by the context of the universe in which it has come into existence. The existence of free agents is a factor contributory to the existence of evil. Evil is the misuse of freedom whether at the conscious level or at the unconscious level. However, such evil arising out of the misuse of freedom affects not only the entities in the universe but God Himself in as much as it is an incidental failure to actualise a certain value. This is suffered by God in his consequent nature which is constituted out of all the failures and achievements of the concrete existents in the universe. But God in his immense wisdom relegates the failures to the background and projects the achievements to the foreground passing them on to the future universe as the available data of the past universe through his own superjective nature. The past universe is thus objectified and derouted to the future universe only through the medium of God. What is true of an actual occasion lying at the basis of the universe is also true of man who is an aggregate of such occasions only with the difference that consciousness emerges at the human level and with the result that freedom, choice and valuation now become conscious, deliberate operations and logical articulations instead of remaining merely at the level of unconscious prehensions.

The nature of God in such a conception of reality is one of benevolence. He is said to preserve with tender care whatever value is achieved by any man so as to pass it on to posterity. This gives a sense of objective immortality to man in as much as he feels that what little good he achieves in life is going to be preserved for eternity by God. God then becomes not a mere spectator of the universe but a participant of the joys and sorrows of man in all his struggles since human struggle is the only means through which the possibilities contained in God’s primordial nature can be actualised. God thus comes to be concernfully related to man as a co-sufferer in all his struggles. This understanding of the nature of God as his concernful companion throughout life will create in him a sense of commitment to God and he lives a life of value orientation in tune with God’s own nature. Man’s being-in-the-world which was devalued and turned into nothing in his mood of dread now comes to be seen in a new light. At the level of consciousness man feels committed to both God and man, but his commitment to man is only through his commitment to God.
The above analysis reveals a twofold movement of human consciousness. From its egoistic, intentional modes of practically oriented consciousness, it moves within itself and touches the threshold of Transcendence at the first instance and from the felt certainty of Transcendence, it moves towards the outer world so as to discover the grounding of the world in the Transcendence conceived as God. The former movement is moodal in character while the latter is rational. But the two movements are interrelated and complimentary to each other. The former without the latter will be without a sense of objective validity while the latter without the former will be without a sense of subjective certainty. But the religion of man requires both, since in it a subjectively felt certainty finds a systematic objective expression.

SUBJECT OF STUDY

This study has as its focus a certain type of religious experience disclosed in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Nammāḻvār. The first chapter outlines some general points of orientation for the study and presents a preliminary characterisation of the experience to be studied. The second chapter describes the type of religious experience to be deduced from the poems of Hopkins. The third chapter describes the type of religious experience to be traced from the poems Nammāḻvār. The fourth chapter discusses some problems of interpretation of the religious experience described; proceeds further to trace aspects analogous in the religious experience of Hopkins and Nammāḻvār and finally tries to describe a certain philosophy of religion that evolves subsequent to the study conducted.

THEME AND APPROACH

The type of experience inquired into in this study has been little enough treated by either poets or religious writers, even though it is recognised in religious traditions. Yet the experience seems far more pervasive than might be suggested by philosophic or literary neglect.
The experience is not the experience of a spiritual pilgrim or wanderer trying to find a home in a world that ever foils his search. It is an experience that occurs after a commitment has been firmly made. It is again not that of natural spiritual growth and maturing or steady intensification of spirit or sanctification of an original faith. The topic is the experience of desolation, barrenness and spiritual dryness along with the recovery therefrom that may befall a spiritually committed person. The experience is not that of the doubt of the skeptic nor is it the confusion of an unchosen direction in life. It is the potential hazard subsequent to and consequent on spiritual affirmation. But spiritual commitment has in it the seeds of recovery from desolation. But still it does not automatically eliminate all feelings of barrenness and despair. It is the complex experience of postcommitment desolation and discovery, dryness and rain that is found to be revealed in the poetry studied. It's phenomenology stage by stage and the interpretation thereof is the subject of this study.

Common observation and study of the extant extensive literature on religious experience would clearly indicate that there are various types of religious experience. Conversion, spiritual pilgrimage, growth in spiritual maturing, the natural joyousness of the once-born individual which takes place without the agony consequent upon either awareness of ignorance or conversion, mystic experience both Eastern and Western, worship and adoration, prophetic calling and spokesmanship, awareness of the holy or sacred power are a few such typologies. This study does not attempt at a detailed listing or classification of the various typologies that religious phenomenology could investigate. From among the many forms of experience, the experience of post commitment desolation and renewal is concentrated upon in this study. The variety of religious experience mentioned above indicates the limited scope of this study as far as religious phenomenology is concerned. Nevertheless, it is fact that there are other expressions of religious experience also finding a place in the poems of the subjects of this study. Nammālvar's references to divine avatars, his notes on the transcendent and immanent aspects of God, his mysticism in terms of the literary conventions of love poetry, on the one hand and Hopkins's references to conversion, his pure celebrations of divine instress into nature, his offerings of adoration to God, and his doctrinal utterances, on the other hand would be illustrations of other expressions of religious experience rather than the phenomenological expression chosen to be studied here. Thus the phenomenology of religious experience
studied herein makes up a possible typological study from among various other typological studies that can be conducted. Nevertheless, the typology indicated hereafter and studied herein has been found the more dominant in the poetry of Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. It is found to form a framework within which other types of religious experience find a place. Thus when the other types are taken as integral parts of the dominant type, a perspective is achieved of the dominant strains of the religious experience of both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. Thus a more unified typology is to be perceived by looking at the poems. This claim seems reasonable for both Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. In the case of Nammāḷvār, the question of commitment is to be taken for granted. In the case of Hopkins, the poems chosen to study come from a postcommitment setting in Hopkins's own life, a time long after he underwent conversion to Roman Catholicism and faithfully accepted the Jesuit order.

Thus, if the study is selective among the types of religious experience, it is also selective among the possible topics in the poetry of Nammāḷvār and Hopkins. The interest of the study is not biographical in any direct sense. It is not the chronology of the poet's experience with which the study is concerned; it is a general phenomenology of experience exhibited in the poems themselves. Though the distinction cannot be very rigid, illustrations of how the patterns of the poet's life determines the pattern of his poetry are sidestepped owing to paucity of reliable information regarding one of the subjects of this study, Nammāḷvār. But occasional allusions to Hopkins's life are cited to illuminate some traits in the general typology of Hopkins's religious experience though biography is not the principal focus. One significant difference between the phenomenological and the biographical approaches is in the handling of the chronology of poems. This is almost an impossible task with Nammāḷvār's poetry in that his poems are by tradition supposed to be the outpourings of a divine inspiration though extant literary criticism will cite textual evidence to the contrary. No attempt is made to refute the claims of either. In the case of Hopkins, biographically, after the outburst of the Wreck came a series mainly of nature poems. Then followed poems on human themes and other religious topics. Only towards the end of this does one find the explicit, intense outcries of depression and desertion. But from the phenomenological perspective, the problematic situation of depression and despair comes topically first in the typology. The situation is still more complex with regard to Nammāḷvār in that Tiruvāyvāmāli
is a series of poems with a loose organization and the mood of the poet alternates and dangerously sways between extreme agony felt in the sense of absence of God and great joyousness felt for brief spells of the experience of communion with God. Thus this study focuses its attention on a characteristic problem and a characteristic solution in the typology, regardless of the order of poetic composition. The study ranges over the entire body of poems to articulate the pattern involved without proceeding either year by year or by some other chronological classification of the poems. The assumption is that the poems do indeed reveal such a type of religious experience and the task is to bring it out for purposes of relating through comparison certain universal analogies within the phenomenological framework of religious experience.

The study is not primarily literary on two scores. On the one hand, it does not deal with features of style, devices and innovation. The interest here lies wholly with substance; and more particularly with that topic in the substance already demarcated. Any reference to any concept regarding the art of poetry is relevant only for its bearing on the religious typology and not for their influence on poetic technique. The focus is phenomenological and not literary.

By phenomenology is meant the effort to describe impartially and objectively and yet with empathy, the inward experience as experienced. Ross Synder would call it the art-science of the personal. It is the philosophical art of disclosing the general structure of lived experience, in the manner of a general description and analysis. Religious experience, of all experiences, is the most intensely and intimately lived and so is a fitting subject for phenomenological study. The poems of Nammālīvār and Hopkins make up a profound and public source from which to draw the general description.

Again, it is found to utilise segments and extracts from the poems more useful than poems in their entirety. This is because the concern is with religious elements and not literary units. This approach is liable to a specific charge: atomizing the poems for their paraphrasable content and then fusing them together into a new whole. The charge is valid if the study is overtly literary. But a study inquiring into the general patterns cutting across the poems
cannot be validated on the same terms as an out and out literary study. This study is validated in so far as smaller literary units are extracted and juxtaposed to exhibit common themes and structures. The philosophy of phenomenology has as its area of interest lived experience which one either undergoes oneself or identifies with in others. To be more specific, the approach here can be even redesignated as existential phenomenological.

ELEMENTS IN THE EXPERIENCE

It would now be in place to be more specific about the experience to be studied here. It may come to happen in one’s spiritual cultivation or religious vocation or one’s relation to God, that one feels periodically confined to certain narrow limitations. The feeling may be akin to that of a caged bird whose natural home is free-winging air. The problem is not that of doctrinal wandering or of the right religion to choose from among a few, or of ignorance of means of grace or of non participation in spiritual discipline. Such things are matters of spiritual commitment already subscribed to. They may be thought about every now and then but not to be thought over. But life’s circumstances - outward or inward, physical or mental - may temporarily overpower one’s usual sensibilities, outdistance one’s will, impoverish one’s zeal, enclose one’s endeavours and effect a sense of inner incarceration. One may feel thwarted, constricted and imprisoned. Life may come to be felt to be circumscribed in narrow bounds, tethered by tightening bands of constraints. A personal sense of nonfulfilment may trouble mental poise. Unfulfilled ambitions and aspirations, unrealised desires, unused talents and floundering hopes may make life appear fallow. A sequence of a sense of nonfulfilment, barrenness and emptiness, sterility and emptiness may come to be felt. Attendant upon this sequence may be three waves of emotional distress or dejection: disappointment, discouragement and despair - disappointment at failures and frustrations, discouragement at general inability to achieve ends, despair at the disappearance of hope in possible achievement or fruition. Altogether, it may be called desolation, the opposite of which can be a sense of consolation customary with spiritual strength. In religious terms, this feeling of desolation and consolation, in relation to God may be taken to mean an experience of the absence and presence of God or an experience of absence of communion and the occurrence of communion with God or an experience of separation from and mystical union with God. The sense of
absence of God, lack of communion with God, separation from God may trigger another sequence of emotions: from bitterness to lament; from lament to reproach; from reproach to even sarcasm and scoffing; from sarcasm and scoffing to a questioning of God's ways and from questioning to confusion. At the same time, earnest prayers for relief and restoration continue and intensify. For all this, one is able to accept the predicament in the name of a preordained purpose in the absence. This sense of absence of God felt as a desertion by God may be linked with a sense of isolation from other people, a sense of felt separation from particular individuals expanding into an isolation from all individuals, a sense of estrangement from all humanity making one feel inherently a stranger in the midst of mankind.

The culmination of personal sorrows will be an acute mental torture. Agony, anguish and self-hate, the first causing painful torment, the second creating an atmosphere of uncertainty of fearfulness, darkness and comfortlessness and the third leading to a sense of being unworthy and despicable comes to be. Such is the pattern of desolation.

Yet healing is possible through resources open to his own hand which are made possible as gifts of nature. But the ultimate hope is from God's grace. It is appropriate, first, to look at what man can do himself and what are the resources of renewal. Man can be open to beauty. He needs to meet it and accept it not as a distraction or beguile but as pointing to a better beauty, grace and as a balm to be found anywhere and everywhere, in natural things and in human form which can dispel distress. Along with the ability to appreciate beauty not as a pleasant diversion but as a self-existent anodyne to human distress, the ability to create is another activity in which man can engage himself by virtue of what he is, to dispel distress. Art in its truest form accentuates the individuality in man bringing out the true individual self speaking to the latent freedom in the otherwise circumscribed self. In so far as it brings out the true individual self, creative activity has the potentiality of human nature breaking into healing artistries. Moral resolve is another restorative influence. The context of man's life demands certain immediate obligations to the self like staying alive, keep going, hope for relief, do tasks at hand. Once these are fulfilled, one enters into wider duties in one's calling and accepts or renews responsibilities regarding his community or society. Ultimately even desolation comes to be looked at as having the positive benefit of chastening one's moral resolve. Moral resolve enables
satisfying one's sense of duty and afford a sense of contributing to a better life around. Human association, especially association with people of similar feelings, irrespective of proximity and relationship also contributes to the way out of desolation. The practice of spiritual discipline which is often mistaken for a self-induced ego satisfaction is in essence a service to God. A persistent spiritual discipline may have psychological by-products like forestalling aimlessness of purpose, circumventing wasteful brooding, bringing bodily and mental refreshment and consolation of the conviction of being oriented in a worthy direction. There are two ways in which spiritual discipline can be looked at; at a more realistic level, the cost and sacrifice of discipline are the preconditions of some natural goods and the price to be paid for them; at a deeper level, spiritual discipline is necessary for the preparedness, for the dispositional readiness of the soul to receive higher graces. Strangely enough, even humour can be a source of consolation. Who would ever have expected from Nammaḻvār an analogy of a person watching and enjoying the movement of the lips of a donkey at the expense of the grain that he has to guard against the same donkey! Thus desolation can be partly got rid of through means available to man from himself.

But grace is to abound for the process of consolation to be completed. What man can do by nature passes into what man receives by grace. Theologically, grace is a free, personal bestowal of unmerited favour upon man by God. Phenomenologically, it is a strength from beyond oneself, an unexpected gift, a renewal of spirit and response of deep gratitude. It is a powerful guard against degeneration during desolation. Something from beyond keeps one going. Also strength is provided against specific temptations and evils. Patience and love are instilled by grace and the sustenance of the individual against the evil and despair is looked at not as an indication of self heroism but as a manifestation of the divine action. Grace again teaches man to find purposes at work even in one's suffering. One such purpose which is immediate is the acquisition of the ability to discover God afresh or in a deeper way. Grace works through sufferings and privations to scorge the barriers of guilt and hardheartedness, bringing out patience and other virtues, turning man away from passing frivolities to lasting goods, hammering out the true self to become a return presentation to God. If these are the inward impacts of the divine purpose, the outward accomplishment is God's will in man, such a will being love and most worthy of being accomplished. Such a prospective of divine
purpose offers a totally altered perspective of man, of himself, his mission in life, his vocation, so much so, any worthy vocation can be a vehicle for the grace of divine calling. Nature and man are looked at from the perspective of being God's handiwork, bearing universally the marks of the divine being and the original being that is good and meant for noble stature. The creation then glorifies and does not malign the creator. Grace also contributes to a growth in spiritual sanctification. A deepening awareness of God's presence and steadfastness in spite of trials, tribulations, discouragements and setbacks makes life more meaningful in that God with his grace is patient in spite of our indifference, merciful in spite of our follies. He grows concerned; He protects us against specific events; He preserves our true selves; He becomes the sustenance of the whole natural order; He reaches out to us even in the depths of oceanic darkness.

For the Vaiṣṇavite experient of grace, a constant communion with God adds a further dimension to sanctification. For the Christian experient of grace, growing personal identification with Christ is a further dimension of sanctification. A desire to have unimpeded communion with God in the former and a desire to mirror his likeness in the case of the latter become increasingly felt. Such experience may focus on a theological interpretation of the godhead and Christ or on simple allegiance. Whatever the particular focus, God is held as destroyer and preserver in one in the former case and Christ comes to be emulated more and more as the central light and model in the case of the latter. The whole experience of grace felt in terms either of communion with God or of identification with Christ culminates in a joyfulness of spirit that transcends the grief of alienation or separation in the former case and desolation in the latter. The sorrows of separation and despair give way to a radiance of spiritual affections. This joy vitalises one's earthly career as life presses inward poised between precarious human realities and ultimate anticipations. It is this predicament of man's life realised in terms of a religious experience in the poetry of Nammāḻvār and Hopkins that has been made the subject of this study.

The experience of mourning and glorification, consolation and dryness of heart is however not far to seek to be materially corroborated. In Christian literature, the Psalmist is a classic example of the one who knew both mourning and glorification. The phenomenon of dark night of the soul is to be found in a mystic like St. John too, to quote another biblical witness. Thomas Kempis says To those who are well versed in the ways of God, there is
nothing new about this, nothing strange: the great Saints and Prophets of the old suffered similar alterations of consolation and dryness of heart. He would proceed further to affirm, I have never come upon anyone, however religious and devout, who has not sometimes experienced a withdrawal of grace, felt a cooling-off of his fervour. (II:9:7) The reason for this occurrence is twofold: God specifically tests an individual's faith and all men live in a finite world, a temporary abode, an alien way-station with vicissitudes and temptations. It is natural that man who becomes aware of his exiled state and the many dangers his soul runs can never be really contented in this life. To anticipate distress and to prepare to cope with it is the way of religious life. Thomas would implore the religious to try means within nature and one's own nature in the process of the resolution of this predicament. Most of the injunctions made by him call for moral improvement and preparation to receive grace. He would also indicate that the sorrow attendant upon moral lapses can also be turned to advantage. He would even speak of the cultivation of the holy sorrow: Well for you, if you can manage to clear all distractions out of the way and concentrate on a single point - the exercise of holy sorrow ... Strive hard to reach that goal; habit must be formed if habit is to be overcome (1:21:2). But natural means are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for recovery. Grace is essential for recovery from desolation. It's like this when the grace of God comes to a man, there's nothing he can do. When it leaves him, he becomes poor and unsteady, abandoned, as it were, the lash of memory (II:8:5). He would talk about patient self-abandonment to the will of God : I may have at my side good men, devout brethren, loyal friends; I may have holy books or beautifully written treatises, sweet sounding chants and hymns; but it's little help they can give me, little spiritual zest, when grace has left me and I am alone with my poverty. At times like these, there is no better remedy than patient self-abandonment to the will of God (II:9:6). The devout thus come to realise grace as the ultimate source of renewal from their sorrow: How can I bear this my life of sorrow, if you do not support me with your mercy and grace? St. Ignatius of Loyola would write in similar terms about desolation, consolation, natural means of recovery and grace. He would define consolation or the ideal state of the soul as follows:

I call that consolation when there is excited in the soul some interior movement by which it begins to be inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord... Likewise when it sheds tears, moving it to the love of its Lord... finally I call consolation any increase of hope, faith.
and charity and any interior joy which calls and attracts one to heavenly things.

Desolation is described as follows:

I call that desolation which is contrary to what is set down in the third rule, such as darkness of soul, attraction toward low and earthly objects, disquietitude caused by various agitations and temptations, which move the soul to diffidence without hope and without love so that it finds itself altogether slothful, tepid, sad and as it were separated from its Creator and Lord. The need for natural means for alleviation is much in evidence in desolation itself: Let him who is in desolation consider, how our Lord, to try him, has left him his own natural powers to resist the various agitations and temptations of the enemy.

He insists on prayer, meditation, selfexamination and penance as integral parts of the way of life of the devotee. Still Loyola also would subscribe to the theory of sufficiency of grace. Devotees must Intimately feel that it is not in our own power to acquire or retain great devotion, ardent love, tears or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is a gift and grace of God our Lord.
CHAPTER II

HOPKINS - HIS POETRY AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The Concept of Man in Christian Thought
The Theory of Divine Discovery
The Predicament of Man
Binding Confinement in Hopkins's Poetry
The Means of Recovery
Grace