

Radhakrishnan's and Brunner's Anthropologies: a Comparison

K. C. MATHEW

II

THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

Man's freedom, according to Radhakrishnan, consists in maintaining his true nature as Spirit. Man is an active participant in the cosmic process of the return of things to God. He can either co-operate, in His creative work, with the Divine, Who dwells in his inmost being, or turn away from Him. Free individuals are those who have resolved the dualism between the Divine and the human and have become identified with the Divine in His creative work.¹ They are integrated individuals who have organized their activities in terms of this ideal. This integration differs from person to person. When all aspects of man are organized in terms of one particular purpose, namely, the realization of one's unity with the Divine in him, one attains the maximum degree of integration and freedom. The more one integrates one's life the more free does one become.² In short, integration is freedom. This identification of integration and freedom is a good example of Radhakrishnan's synthesis. He has poured into the old bottle of Hindu thought the new wine of an essential element of the Berdyaevian type of existentialism.³

Man attains complete freedom when his self becomes 'co-extensive with the whole'. This is salvation or liberation or *Moksa*. It is a state in which self-consciousness is displaced by God-consciousness; individuality by universality.

Spiritual freedom consists in the transformation of one's whole nature and not in the escape of the immortal spirit from the mortal human life.⁴ His body, life and mind are not dissolved but are transformed and have become transparent to the divine light. He is released from divided loyalties and actions.

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³ Berdyaev describes integrated personality as one 'in which the Spiritual principle has mastery over all his other powers, both mental and physical. The unification of personality is created by the Spirit' (*Slavery and Freedom*, p. 278).

⁴ Radhakrishnan, 'Fragments of a Confession' (in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p. 61).

He works in a freedom of spirit and an inner joy and peace which are independent of external sources. This is a close parallel to what Sri Aurobindo means by 'integral transformation'.¹

The key to the understanding of Brunner's concept of freedom is his doctrine of *Imago Dei*. He claims that freedom belongs to the context of God-relation. Man is free when he stands in right relation to God which is the same as dependence on God. Therefore the maximum of dependence on God is the maximum of freedom.²

Human freedom is conditioned freedom in contrast to the absolute freedom of God. If man fails to respond to the call of God, he loses his original freedom. The actual man by failing to respond to the call of God has fallen from his original freedom to 'unfreedom'.³ This does not mean that all freedom has been lost. Man does not cease to be a subject. Even in the fallen state man's existence is based on decision.⁴ The Fall does not destroy the free will. The unfreedom into which man has fallen through sin is unfreedom in freedom.

By unfreedom Brunner means that the breach with God is irreparable by man. Man is no longer free to regain his original freedom which he lost through sin. Augustine's celebrated formula, *non posse non peccare*, well describes this unfreedom of fallen man. No amount of work on the part of man can break the barrier of *non posse non peccare*.⁵

Therefore, the most crucial question facing man is how can he regain his lost original freedom. He can close the door to it, but he cannot open the door he has already closed. Without outside help he is lost for ever. The only answer to this problem of man, according to Brunner, is the forgiving act of God—Jesus Christ who imparts to man through faith his lost freedom.⁶ It is in faith that man is truly free.

The problem of free will is not the problem of freedom for both Radhakrishnan and Brunner. They do not deny free will. There is a different kind of freedom for both—the freedom to be that for which God created man. It is the evolutionary goal for Radhakrishnan. But Brunner holds that it is something lost through the Fall and to be regained. They disagree completely as to the method of realizing this freedom. Radhakrishnan's man

¹ Another contemporary Indian exponent of the same idea is Aurobindo Ghose. His favourite expression is 'integral transformation' which 'includes a taking up of that which is lower into higher values; the divine or spiritual life will not only assume into itself the mental, vital, physical life transformed and spiritualized, but it will give them a much wider and fuller play than was open to them so long as they were living on their own level' (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 649).

² Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, Vol. I, p. 132.

³ Brunner, *The Divine Human Encounter*, p. 77.

⁴ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶ Brunner, *The Word and the World*, pp. 52-53.

attains spiritual freedom through his own work—self-realization. But Brunner's man is dependent on the Act of God in which God alone has the initiative. It is offered to man as a gift and is received in faith.

Radhakrishnan conceives freedom in ontological terms. It is a state to which man evolves. But Brunner conceives of it in existential terms. To be free from him is not a condition or state but an act. The locus of freedom for the former is the spirit and for the latter it is God-relation. Man is spirit, according to Brunner, only in that he is addressed by God. In this 'address and answer' relationship lies the mystery of human freedom.¹ Man has to maintain this freedom by a moment by moment act of faith and it can be lost by unbelief. But Radhakrishnan's man never loses his spiritual freedom, once it is realized.

In this connection a word ought to be added about Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the doctrine of *Karma* which is an answer to the charge that *Karma* makes man a plaything of fate or a driftwood moved hither and thither by the tide of uncontrolled events. If man is a complete victim of *Karma* and he cannot alter in any way its course of action, then he is a helpless sufferer of the results of his past deeds. Against this view Radhakrishnan maintains the freedom of man to shape his own life. His illustration of the game of bridge shows that there is both determinism and indeterminism in the game of life.² Each man is as free as the bridge player to make the most of the given 'cards' of life and shape wisely his future life. If this were not possible, human consciousness would be a useless luxury.

In the game of life what Radhakrishnan's man needs is the knowledge of the good. This knowledge one gains through the saints who are transparent to the Divine in them.³ Thus he becomes aware of what he potentially is and he begins to work for the realization of the possibilities latent in him. When the last possibility is realized, he becomes free from the law of *Karma*.

Brunner would not accept the basic assumptions of Radhakrishnan in the above interpretation of the law of *Karma*. Radhakrishnan apparently assumes that the deeds and not the doer are bad. For Brunner both the deeds and the doer are bad. It is the doer who had broken his relationship with God and stands in opposition to Him.

Radhakrishnan's next assumption is that man has the power to realize the good. The Spirit holds out the good as a possibility and man brings the good into being. Brunner, on the other hand, denies man this power to realize the good. God has to realize it for him and man receives it from God as a gift through

¹ Brunner, *God and Man*, p. 155.

² Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, p. 279.

³ Radhakrishnan, 'Fragments of a Confession', pp. 64-65.

faith. In faith man becomes that for which he is created. He is freed from the conflict between the *is* and the *ought*. In faith he is a free man.

HISTORY

Radhakrishnan, like all philosophers of history, is faced with the difficult question whether or not the universe is a sphere of meaningful activity. He rejects the answers of naturalism and 'eternalism'. Naturalism, at best, is only a method of interpreting the universe and not a philosophy of history. 'Eternalism'¹ makes history meaningless because it offers no ground for its existence.

He thinks that his idealism gives the best answer for the problem. An idealist view finds that the world has meaning or value. The cosmic process is regarded as a movement with a goal and a destination.² This goal is the consummation of the evolution of the Spirit. It is the transformation of all matter into Spirit and the disappearance of the dualism between the subject and the object.

The temporal is between two eternities. The beginning and end of the temporal are beyond time. Therefore history is an intermediate stage. But the end is not the destruction of history but its fulfilment. It is the transformation of the temporal into the eternal.

Brunner also conceives time as having a beginning and an end. What happens between the two points is real and significant even for God. His intervention in time at a certain point in the shape of an historical person is the proof that He is interested in it.³ This event has charged time with immense significance because it has changed the time of man's history into one of waiting and of decision. It summons man to an unconditional decision, which decides everything else. Every moment is a moment of decision. Time, however, is not the ultimate reality, it is only an intermezzo between divine election in the beginning and the final perfection of history beyond time.⁴ History is thus a movement with a direction and a goal. The goal is not something which happens in history, but something which happens beyond history—another intervention of God similar to that of the first one. This is what is meant by *parousia*.

Therefore, the goal of history is not reached by an immanent growth or progress, but by a revolutionary change of the human situation at the end of history. He denies the idea of a kingdom

¹ This word is coined to distinguish Radhakrishnan's idealism from that which stresses the eternal in such a way as to make the temporal illusory.

² Radhakrishnan's 'Fragments of a Confession', p. 27.

³ Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, Vol. I, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

of God developing according to the view of progress from below upwards. This does not mean that he rejects the growth, progress, enlargement and enrichment of the life of a Christian. Nor does he reject the importance of the spreading of the Christian community. The relation of the historical process to the coming Kingdom is dialectical.

Brunner's negation of history is at the same time its affirmation. He says that eternal life is not only the negation but also the fulfilment of this earthly life. Resurrection to eternal life is the fulfilment of the individual personal aspect of human life, whereas the kingdom of God is the fulfilment of human history. This fulfilment of history is an event beyond history and is realized by destroying the structure of the historical.

Radhakrishnan starts with the Absolute, and winds up with the Absolute. The beginning and the end are the same. So his view of history is cyclical. Brunner emphatically denies the cyclical view of history. But, in the last analysis, his view also is cyclical in the sense that the beginning and the end are the same. He starts with God. The historical is the creation of God out of nothing. The end of history is the destruction of the structure of the historical by bursting the framework of space and time. He himself admits that what remains is what has broken into history—agape.¹ In other words, the beginning and the end are the same. This is the logical conclusion of his dialectical premise and the assertion that the fulfilment of history is beyond history. The other conclusion is one which he accepts by faith and calls it conveniently a paradox.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Radhakrishnan's view of the individual and society is indissolubly linked to his concept of evolution. Individuality is not anything evil in itself. The evolving spirit expresses itself at the human level as self-conscious individuals. But individuality should grow into universality²—the next level of evolution. But this should not be confused with the negative method of asceticism, which according to him is not part of true Hinduism. He claims that the true Hindu ideal is growth into spiritual freedom by developing each side of the individual life until it transcends its limits. Thus individuality is related to universality or super-individuality in a positive way.

This is the criterion by which he judges whether or not a social organization has any justification for its existence. The primary function of society is to assist the individuals in their spiritual growth and to help them to think, feel and adore as they choose without constraint of oppressive laws and customs. He is unalterably opposed to any social organization—religious or

¹ Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, p. 56.

² Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 383.

secular—which makes its claims ultimate and suppresses individual action and initiative.¹

He has a strong belief in the dignity of human individuals. Even the humblest individual has the spark of the Spirit in him which even the mightiest empire cannot crush. It is this belief in the dignity and uniqueness of the individual that led him to denounce the caste system—an essential element of popular Hinduism—as an instrument of oppression and intolerance.

In the case of Brunner also it is the nature of man that determines his attitude towards society. In sin as well as faith man is both an individual person and humanity as a whole. It is his existence in this dialectical dimension that makes man man. Thus his personalism is bound up with a radical universalism. He claims that only such a view of man can avoid both individualism and collectivism.² The function of social organizations is to safeguard the dignity of individual persons and the unity of mankind.³

He complains rightly that even empirical Christianity has failed to maintain the unity of the truly personal and the truly communal.⁴ He does not accept the Church as a mysterious entity above the individual to which he may be sacrificed. An institution exists only as embodied in individuals.

Brunner's chief criticism of Radhakrishnan in this connection would be that his view of man fails to maintain the unity of the truly personal and the truly communal. But this concept is not wholly absent in Radhakrishnan's system. His man is a vessel for the expression of the Spirit.⁵ He is also a self-conscious individual. He is universal in that all men are the expressions of the same Spirit. This Radhakrishnan's man is both individual and universal. This unity, however, is causal, whereas the unity of Brunner's man is existential.

The three-fold discipline of human life, as interpreted by Radhakrishnan, shows that man is not an abstract-individual. By virtue of his character, behaviour and function in society he belongs to a particular social group. The variety of spiritual expression determines the empirical variety of human nature.⁶ The function of any social structure is to make this variety work with efficiency. He is opposed to the conception of society in which all are proletarians with no vocations but jobs. Variety and uniformity is the principle of society. He rejects totalitarianisms, both religious and political, which reduce human beings to mere puppets responding to the dictates of the leaders.⁷

¹ Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, pp. 62, 72.

² Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, Vol. I, p. 101.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵ Radhakrishnan, 'The Ancient Asian View of Man' (in *Man's Right to Knowledge*, p. 11).

⁶ Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp. 357, 366.

⁷ Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, p. 72.

SOME REMARKS

The philosophy of Radhakrishnan is a reinterpretation of *Advaita* with a view to providing philosophical and religious sanctions for the individual and social changes demanded from the Hindus by the rapidly changing conditions in modern India. Attempts in this direction by Radhakrishnan and other contemporary Hindu leaders have contributed immensely to bring about a 'silent' rather than a 'violent' social change in New India.

The chief contribution of Radhakrishnan to Indian philosophy through his reinterpretation of *Advaita* consists in relating the world positively to the Absolute. He has shown, in contrast to many orthodox *Advaitins*, that the Absolute can be reached positively. This provides the basis for his contention that the material values are not to be destroyed but to be transformed into spiritual values. He conceives in terms of this basic idea a universal and not individualistic goal for human life. Thus he has attempted to rid Hinduism of the rigid individualism characteristic of extreme asceticism. Following the lead of Sankara and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism he finds work in this world even for the freed souls. Although they are not under the constraints of *Karma*, they work for the redemption of suffering creatures, because all are bound together in their onward march toward their spiritual home. The liberated souls retain their individualities and work for the perfection of the rest of mankind, for no man is truly saved until all others are saved. Perfect freedom and perfect society emerge together.¹

In his reinterpretation of *Advaita*, he has used ideas borrowed from other sources such as Christianity to breathe life into the 'dry bones' of ancient *Advaita* philosophy. This, however, does not imply that his philosophy is just a compilation of borrowed ideas from other sources. His genius and imagination are too great and rich to label him just a borrower from other sources. He has made such a creative synthesis of the essential concept of *Advaita—Tat tvam asi—*with the ideas taken from other sources that the final product is a living *Advaita* attractive not only to Indians but to people abroad. He goes so far as to think that his *Advaita* is the answer to the religious needs of the present-day mankind which is on the road to self-destruction. Today, this new *Advaita* is the greatest challenge to Christianity in India. This article can be regarded only as a feeble attempt to show how far Brunner's anthropology is able to meet this challenge. This kind of conversation between all important Christian and Hindu thinkers should be carried on so that an adequate Indian apologetics can evolve eventually from such studies.

¹ Radhakrishnan, *The Idealist View of Life*, p. 307.