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# LISTENING TO VOICES

## OUTSIDE THE NORTH AMERICAN GATE: TRINITY AND SACCIDANANDA IN THE WRITINGS OF BRAHMABANDHAV UPADHYAY

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### Introduction

Christianity is the only world religion whose primary source documents are in a language other than the language of the founder of the religion. The New Testament is written in Koine Greek, not in Aramaic, the language of Jesus. This is unique among all world religions and stands as a remarkable testimony to the translatability of the Christian message which has been enshrined in our most sacred texts. This linguistic translatability of the Christian message has been the inspiration for the translation of the New Testament into thousands of global languages. However, the gospel is not only *linguistically* translatable, it is *culturally* translatable. The gospel is not only delivered to us in the enscripturated text, but also in the proclamation and witness of a believing community, the members of which belong to a particular culture at a particular time in history. Indeed, the gospel must be made intelligible as it is announced in specific, local contexts. Authentic theology has been described as “reflecting on the faith in the light of one’s historical context.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to explore the work of an Indian Christian theologian who sought to communicate the Christian gospel to those in

the Indian context who remain unfamiliar with western theological formulations and western church history. This study is representative of both the complex challenges the church has faced as well as the creative solutions which have been offered as these Christians have tried to explore how the gospel can best address itself to the particular challenges posed by a religiously and culturally diverse world.

This study focuses on the writings of the 19th century Hindu convert to Christianity, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907). He was a journalist, a theologian and, at the end of his life, an imprisoned leader of India's nationalistic movement, who earnestly sought to use the language of *advaitic* Hinduism as an interpretive bridge or hermeneutic whereby he might be able to better communicate Christianity to enquiring Hindus. This study will focus on his use of the *advaitic* doctrine of *saccidananda* (Sat-Cit-Ananda) to explain and expound the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **Can the Hindu Upanishads help us explain the Trinity?**

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, the 19th C. convert from Hinduism has been called the “father of Indian Christian theology.” Since many of our readers will be unfamiliar with Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, we will begin with a brief overview of his life and work.<sup>2</sup>

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907) was born Bhavani Charan Banerjea into a Bengali Brahmin family in 1861. In 1887, he was formally initiated into the *Brahmo Samaj*, a Hindu reform movement founded by Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). In keeping with the vision of the society, Upadhyay worked hard during his years with the *Brahmo Samaj* to promote a version of Hinduism which was more consistent with monotheism. However, during this period he became increasingly attracted to the uniqueness of Christ and on February 26, 1891, he received Christian baptism, though he did not formally unite with the Catholic Church until September 1. In 1894, he declared himself a *sannyasin* (world-renouncer)<sup>3</sup> and thereafter was known as Brahmabandhav Upadhyay.<sup>4</sup> Upadhyay's conversion to Christianity marks the beginning of a series of journalistic efforts in which he sought to demonstrate how Christian theology, particularly neo-Thomistic thought, was compatible with indigenous thought forms in India. His writings are contained in several journals he founded, including the *Sophia*, *The Twentieth Century* and *Sandhya*.

Upadhyay was dismayed at the inability of Christianity to flourish in India. He once described Christianity in India as “standing in the corner,

like an exotic stunted plant with poor foliage, showing little or no promise of blossom.”<sup>5</sup> He decided to dedicate his life to an expression of Christianity which was not Western, but was fully Indian in its expression. Over the course of his life, he made three major attempts to discover an appropriate foundation upon which the gospel could effectively take root and flourish in India. The first foundation upon which he attempted to construct a Christian proclamation was the foundation of natural theology based on general revelation and the universal knowledge of God which is present among all people. However, deficiencies in this foundation led him to re-examine the possibility of using the language and thought-forms of Hindu philosophy as a more appropriate foundation for establishing Christian thought in India.

Upadhyay observed how Thomas Aquinas had boldly adopted the Aristotelian system of philosophy and effectively used it as the basis for constructing a Christian theology and philosophy which, in time, came to dominate the entire Middle Ages. Why, he reasoned, “should we Catholics of India now wage a destructive warfare with Hindu philosophy?” Alternatively, he argued, we should “look upon it in the same way as St. Thomas looked upon the Aristotelian system.” He then declared,

We are of the opinion that attempts should be made to win over Hindu philosophy to the service of Christianity just as Greek philosophy was won over in the Middle Ages...The task is beset with many dangers. But we have a conviction and it is growing day by day, that the Catholic church will find it hard to conquer India unless she makes Hindu philosophy hew wood and draw water for her.<sup>6</sup>

Upadhyay was convinced that the 8th century Hindu philosopher Sankara (discussed in chapters two and three) could serve Christianity in India the way Aristotle served Aquinas. This project consumes much of Upadhyay’s writing during the next four years. It is his writings concerning the Trinity which emerge during this period that will be the focus of this case study.

While Upadhyay never abandoned his desire to establish a philosophical foundation for Christianity in India, he did come to realize that many Indians who were committed to popular, village Hinduism did not respond to the sublime philosophy of the Upanishads. Thus, in his later years he attempted to find ways to build Christianity on a third foundation of Indian culture through a Christian interpretation of such common cultural practices in India as the caste system, idol worship and the four life-stages. It was his attempt to affirm the value of India’s cultural heritage that eventually placed him as a leader of India’s nationalistic movement. He has the distinction of being the first Indian to publicly call for complete indepen-

dence from Britain. In fact, his writings were considered sufficiently seditious by the British in India to warrant his arrest and imprisonment. However, he continued his protest against the British even from prison. However, while his trial was still on, Upadhyay fell ill and was rushed to the hospital where he received a successful hernia operation. Tragically, he developed a tetanus infection and died in the hospital on October 27, 1907. Despite his untimely death, he left behind a remarkable collection of journalistic writings which continue to influence the debate today concerning the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity. This study will focus on only one aspect of his work; namely, his attempt to communicate the doctrine of the Trinity using the language of the Upanishads and the philosophy of Vedantic Hinduism.

### **Understanding the Problem: The Classic Trinitarian Formulation and the Indian Context**

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was formulated in response to heretical ideas such as modalism or Arianism. The Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. issued a clear and explicit statement of the Trinity to articulate the beliefs which had been held implicitly by the church until that time. The key formula which emerged from the affirmation that there is “one essence (*ousia*) in three eternal distinctions/persons (*hypostasis*).” All Western formulations which emerged in the centuries that followed were based on the Constantinople statement. Perhaps the most famous is the Westminster Confession formulated in the 17th century to provide doctrinal guidance for the church in the newly united kingdom of England and Scotland. The following statement concerning the Trinity was issued, clearly reflecting the orthodoxy of Constantinople:

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.<sup>7</sup>

There are four technical terms in this brief statement: person, substance, begotten and proceeding. All of these terms are immensely difficult to translate into Indian languages with the necessary precision. The word ‘person’ for example is often translated as ‘individual’ which it cannot mean in the orthodox statement. The word ‘begotten’ will invariably utilize a word with sexual connotations. The word ‘substance’ is often translated as some-

thing solid and material which is not at all what was meant by the Greek word '*ousia*'.<sup>8</sup> The word 'proceeding' is invoked because of a long standing theological and philosophical debate between the Eastern and Western branches of the Church. It is an important debate, but one in which the Indian church has not participated, so the terminology seems alien to them. In short, the orthodox formulations can be *translated* into Indian languages, but truly capturing the essence and heart of the formulation is exceedingly difficult.

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay recognizes this problem and attempts to re-state the same truths, capturing the essence of the Constantinople formulation, but using the language and thought forms more familiar to Indians. For Westerners, many of the terms and concepts utilized by Upadhyay may be quite strange. Nevertheless, Upadhyay is writing as an Indian for other Indians, and he is seeking to convey the Trinity in language and terms which *they* will understand. He does this through a restatement of Trinitarianism using as his starting point the Upanishadic and philosophic doctrine of *saccidananda*.

### **God as Saccidananda: A Re-statement of Trinitarianism**

In the later Upanishads it is not uncommon to find Brahman described as *sat* (being or reality), *cit* (intelligence or consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss).<sup>9</sup> Thus, *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, often designated by the term *saccidananda*, is widely regarded as the most complete description of Brahman in all of Hindu sacred literature.<sup>10</sup>

The first Indian theologian to identify *saccidananda* with the Christian Trinity was Upadhyay's mentor Keshab Chandra Sen. Sen used the picture of a triangle with Brahma of the Vedas at the apex. Brahma descends down as the Son, and then moving along the base of the triangle represents his permeation of the world. Finally, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he returns to the apex carrying degenerated humanity with him: the Still God, the Journeying God, the Returning God; Truth, Intelligence and Joy.<sup>11</sup> However this is only a first step, a bare sketch in terms of any comprehensive identification of the two great doctrines of *saccidananda* and Trinity. Sen's conception of the Trinity was modalistic and therefore could not serve as an effective model for the Christian Trinity.<sup>12</sup> It is Upadhyay who provided the first detailed analysis of how the two doctrines could relate one to another without compromising Christian orthodoxy. Upadhyay sought to restate the Trinity in a way which utilized the Upanishadic catego-

ries, but was faithful to the historic Christian position regarding the Trinity. The various components which Upadhyay uses to construct this doctrine will now be examined.

### **Internal Knowledge/Relationship within Sat Cit and Ananda**

Upadhyay begins by arguing that the three-fold distinction within the Upanishads of *sat*, *cit* and *ananda* point to internal knowledge and relationships within the Godhead.

If, for example, God is *cit*, intelligence, as the Upanishads claim, reasons Upadhyay, then he must necessarily know himself. To this end “he must form to himself an inward word or image through which this self-knowledge is effected.” However, the difference between the inner images we form and that of the Supreme Being is that our images are “accidental and transitory.” For God, nothing can be accidental or transitory. Therefore,

His eternal self-comprehension or word is to be conceived as identical with the divine nature and still as distinct from the Supreme Being in as far as he by comprehending himself generates His word. God, knowing himself by producing or generating His own image and word, is called Father; and God as known by himself by this inward generation of the word is called the Word or the Son.<sup>13</sup>

This inner relation must be carefully distinguished from any necessary relationship external to himself. Upadhyay writes, “The Supreme Being is absolute; he is beyond all *necessary* relationship with any object external to himself.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, God has an eternal, necessary relationship within himself; but all relationships outside of himself are not necessary, but contingent (*vyavaharika*).<sup>15</sup> The idea of relating the relationship between *sat*, *cit* and *ananda* to the internal mystery of the three persons of the Trinity is completely unique to Upadhyay and becomes the basic hermeneutic from which his whole argument proceeds.

This argument by Upadhyay is clearly an application of scholastic Thomism to the Indian context. However, Upadhyay is not trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity through reason alone. He says that the doctrine of the Trinity is a truth “which man can never find out but [is] revealed by God himself or through his infallible messengers.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, Upadhyay believes that the revelation of God extends beyond the Bible because he sees fragments of divine revelation present in the indigenous scriptures of India in much the same way as Justin Martyr found fragments

of revelation which he called ‘*logos spermatikos*’ (seed of the word) present in Hellenistic philosophy.

### God as Sat, Cit and Ananda

By December 1897, Upadhyay is convinced that the seeds of the doctrine of the Trinity are present in the Upanishads. He credits the Vedantic philosophers with soaring so high as to “peep into the Essence of God [and] to contemplate His interior life.”<sup>17</sup> What they realized is that God could not go outside of himself to satisfy His infinite knowledge and bliss. If he did, he would not be absolute (*asanga*) and unrelated (*nirguna*). However, rather than recognize the *internal* relatedness of the Godhead, the philosophers either denied the reality of anything external to God, or declared that it was a mystery too great for the “undeveloped intellects of the common people...who must be satisfied with stocks and stones.”<sup>18</sup> For Upadhyay, this is the source of the idolatry which stands in stark contrast to the sublime heights which the Vedantic philosophers scaled.

Upadhyay’s understanding of Vedantism is profoundly influenced by his reading and study of the influential 14th C. neo-Vedantic teaching manual, *Pancadasī* by Vidyaranya.<sup>19</sup> The *Pancadasī* contains fifteen chapters divided into three sections known as quintads. Broadly speaking, “the three quintads have for their theme the three aspects of Brahman, *sat* (existence), *cit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss).”<sup>20</sup> Characteristic of Upadhyay’s own theological approach, the *Pancadasī* builds Vedantic revelation on the foundation of human reason, including the insight of Brahman as *saccidananda*.

Adopting the *Pancadasī*’s three-fold framework of God as *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*, Upadhyay uses it as the basis for his Trinitarian theology. His application of this theology to each of the three persons of the Trinity will now be explored.

### God the Father as Sat

In his journal *Sophia Weekly* Upadhyay launched a five week series to demonstrate the philosophical underpinnings of his thought. Upadhyay argues that Descartes’ famous *Cogito ergo sum* is “beset with innumerable dangers” because it makes “human thought the measure of existence.” Instead, Upadhyay argues for *Ens est ergo Cogito* (Being is, therefore I think).<sup>21</sup> If Being is not posited first, then one risks falling into what Upadhyay called the abyss of ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness’, an almost certain refer-

ence to Buddhism. For Upadhyay, “Being is the ultimate foundation of all certitude, the foundation of thinking.” Only God can be truly called *sat*, i.e. existence by itself which is eternal, immutable and infinite. All other being has only a borrowed or contingent existence, enduring in time, and is both mutable and limited. To deny that true Being is self-existent “is to affirm that being and non-being are identical.”<sup>22</sup>

For Upadhyay, being (*sat*) implies not only relatedness, as explored earlier, but it also implies act. Two questions arise: What does an Infinite, self-existent, eternal Being act upon? How does it act? First, any form of dualism or polytheism is self-destructive, argues Upadhyay, because “there can be only one self-existence; there is no room for a separate, co-eternal recipient of its influence” which is external to the self-existent Being. Thus, as before, the action must be necessarily inward, i.e. within its own self-existent Being, without ruling out the possibility of action with and upon contingently related finite beings. Second, the only way a self-existent being can act upon itself is through knowledge and intelligence; its act is self-knowledge: “The result of its self-act is an eternal distinction between its knowing self and known self without any division in the substance.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the presence of *sat* necessarily involves a self-related *cit*.

### God the Son as Cit

We have already demonstrated that, for Upadhyay, the object of God’s knowledge is God. The consciousness (*cit*) of God must, of necessity, be distinguishable from the Subject (*sat*) because, he reasons, “a being cannot stand in *relation* to its *identical* self.” Yet, as has also been demonstrated, God cannot go outside of himself for any *necessary* relations. Thus, Upadhyay argues, there must be a “relation of reciprocity” without any division in the divine substance. This, according to revelation, is precisely what the Trinity provides: “God begets in thought his infinite Self-Image and reposes on it with infinite delight while the begotten Self acknowledges responsively his eternal thought-generation.” Without compromising the unity of the absolute there is, nevertheless, a “variety of cognition and re-cognition, the subject and the object corresponding with each other in knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> Upadhyay has now established the ontological basis for the Second Person of the Trinity in a way consistent with advaitic thought.<sup>25</sup>

### God the Holy Spirit as Ananda

The third and final radical making up the doctrine of *saccidananda* is the term *ananda*, translated as bliss or joy. The term *ananda* as joy or bliss sounds strange to the Western ear until it is recognized that it seals the internal joy of the triune Godhead apart from any external relationships, or, to use Upadhyay's phrase, it celebrates "the beatitude of triple colloquy." All other sources of joy outside the Godhead must stand in only a contingent relationship to His eternal joy, lest the doctrine erode the doctrine of God as *asanga* (absolute). Upadhyay's development of *ananda* emphasizes three main areas. First, he seeks to demonstrate how *ananda* confirms the unrelated nature of the Absolute.<sup>26</sup> Second, he seeks to make it clear that *ananda* is a person, a third, eternal distinction within the Godhead. Third, *ananda* protects the doctrine of God from slipping into a rationalistic abstraction, but clarifies that the Christian God is one, who out of joy, does enter into direct, personal relations with humanity.

To begin with, Upadhyay defines bliss (*ananda*) as "the complacent repose of a being upon its own self or its like."<sup>27</sup> He makes an important distinction between the Upanishadic use of *ananda* as a description of the Absolute, as opposed to *vijnana*. He argues that *vijnana* "cognises self through not-self" which implies that the Supreme Being knows himself through relations outside of His own eternal existence. The term *ananda*, in contrast, implies that the infinite is "self-sufficient, self satisfied and not dependent upon relations which are not co-terminous with his substance."<sup>28</sup> For Upadhyay any being which is "obliged to form alliance with something other than its own self cannot be *essentially* happy."<sup>29</sup>

Second, the three aspects of the Trinity are not qualities, but eternal, personal distinctions within the One Absolute Godhead. Indeed, as explored in chapter two, one of the great mysteries of Hinduism is the relationship between the 'One and the many'. Upadhyay seeks to demonstrate that this *ananda* is distinct, yet One. The three eternal distinctions within the Godhead are not inconsistent with the unity of God. Upadhyay says, "*sat, cit* and *ananda* cannot be made to give up their distinctions though they are one in *Brahman*."<sup>30</sup> *Ananda* is distinct, yet it manifests "the infinitude of the Eternal Essence."<sup>31</sup>

Finally, Upadhyay is convinced that the Upanishadic summary of the essence of Brahman as *saccidananda* separates God from the mere abstraction of the rationalists. While Upadhyay repeatedly affirms his self-sufficiency and independence, this does not mean that God is unknowable or unapproachable. In a review of a collection of sonnets entitled *Naivedya*,

published by his good friend Tagore, Upadhyay writes:

The keynote of the Sonnets is the direct, personal relation with the Infinite. There are some who argue that as the Infinite is not easily approachable, the finite should be worshipped tentatively as the Infinite by the less spiritually advanced. Is the Infinite really unapproachable? If it had been so, Reason would be an anomaly. The perception of the Infinite is the dawn of Reason.<sup>32</sup>

Upadhyay views creation itself as “an overflow of bliss” (*ananda*). Vedanta teaches that “to know that the supreme being is bliss (*ananda*) and that the creation of the world (*loka*) is an outflow of that bliss, is the culmination of divine science (*vidya*).<sup>33</sup> While it is not essential to His nature, the multiplicity of personal relationships nevertheless occurs as an overflow or abundance. Upadhyay comments, saying, “it is not a product of necessity, but of superabundance. But this overflow, this superabundance is a mystery which reason encounters as the very outset of religious enquiry.”<sup>34</sup> God has endowed each person with a spiritual part, or sheath (*anandamaya kosha*) which “enables him to become a passive recipient of Divine grace and joy.”<sup>35</sup>

Upadhyay’s development of God as *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* is one of the most significant of his theological contributions. It is a bold attempt in contextualized theology which seeks to do theology ‘outside the gate’ and, in the process, help to communicate the Trinity in language and thought forms which are familiar to those within his own context.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the Trinity remains a mystery which can only be grasped *via* revelation. It is beyond human comprehension to understand how “God begets in thought his infinite Self-image and reposes on it with infinite delight,” never losing “blissful communication and colloquy within the bosom of God-head” without creating “any division in the divine Substance.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Hymn to the Trinity using the language of Saccidananda**

Upadhyay’s theology is explicitly and intentionally related wholly to the particular demands of the Indian context, especially Hinduism. There is no better illustration of his application of Christian theology to the Indian context using the language of Vedanta than his Trinitarian hymn to *Saccidananda*.

### **Canticle to the Trinity**

Upadhyay’s *Canticle to the Trinity*, published in the pages of *Sophia Monthly* in October 1898, is widely regarded as a magnificent “gem of Christian

hymnology.” It has also been cited as one of the most original contributions of Upadhyay to Indian Christian theology, combining as it does ideas from the Christian Scriptures with Greek and Hindu sources resulting in a unique work. Gispert-Sauch calls it the “best example of a deep adaptation of the Christian faith to the cultural patterns of Indian religious thought.”<sup>38</sup> It is, in my view, a marvelous example of the kind of contextualized theology which is both faithful to the apostolic message, yet also fully faithful to the particular Indian context into which the gospel is being proclaimed.

The hymn consists of a refrain and four stanzas. The first stanza develops the theme of the refrain which is an adoration to the Trinity. The last three stanzas are dedicated to each of the three persons of the Trinity. The following is the English translation by Upadhyay which originally appeared in *Sophia Monthly*:

**Refrain:**

- (1) I adore: The *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Intelligence) and *Ananda* (Bliss):
- (2) The highest goal, which is despised by worldlings, which is desired by *yogis* (devotees).

**Stanza One:**

- (3) The supreme, ancient, higher than the highest, full, indivisible, transcendent and immanent.
- (4) One having triple interior relationship, holy, unrelated, self-conscious, hard to realise.

**Stanza Two:**

- (5) The Father, Begetter, the highest Lord, unbegotten, the rootless principle of the tree of existence.
- (6) The cause of the universe, one who creates intelligently, the preserver of the world.

**Stanza Three:**

- (7) The increate, infinite Logos or Word, supremely great.
- (8) The Image of the Father, one whose form is intelligence, the giver of the highest freedom.

**Stanza Four:**

- (9) One who proceeds from the union of *Sat* and *Cit*, the blessed Spirit (breath), intense bliss.
- (10) The sanctifier, one whose movements are swift, one who speaks of the Word, the life-giver.<sup>39</sup>

We will now carefully explore each stanza of the hymn in order to demonstrate how Upadhyay sought to contextualize the communication of the

Trinity in the Indian context, using the language and thought forms of Vedanta.

## The Refrain

Upadhyay's purpose is clearly to celebrate the Triune Godhead using language which evokes an Indian, rather than a Greek or Latin, atmosphere. Indeed, the opening word of the hymn "*vande*" (I bow to or I adore) would almost certainly evoke associations with the Indian nationalistic anthem, *vande mataram*. The word *vande* is the only verb in the entire hymn, the remainder of the hymn standing as the object of the verb "I adore." The rest of the refrain is the primary object of the adoration of the entire hymn, *saccidanandam*, the *advaita* equivalent to the Christian word Trinity. Neither word "*saccidanandam*" or "Trinity" appears in the primary documents of *advaita* and Christianity respectively (Classical Upanishads or New Testament). However, both serve as a *mahavakya* (great utterance) or *adesa* (religious formula) summarizing the essence of *advaitic* or Christian teaching regarding the nature of God.

This summarizing utterance does not reflect qualities in the Absolute or composition of substance, but serves to "define... his very essence by an indirect signification (*laksanartha*)" such that each term "completes the other" and "gives an aspect of the One Reality that remains without any internal division or composition."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the opening refrain is directed to the worship of God, as he is in himself, pure, undifferentiated *nirguna*. The later stanzas explore, in part, how God has freely related himself to His creation.

The second line of the refrain tells us that he is "the highest goal." The literal meaning of *carama pada* is "the last step." The language calls to mind one of the most well-known stories in Hindu literature; namely, the *avatar* of Visnu as a dwarf and the story of his three steps or *padas*. In the myth, Visnu takes the form of a Brahmin dwarf during a time when all the world was controlled by demons. Vishnu approaches Bali, the lord of demons, and asks if he might give the dwarf the space he could cover in three strides. Bali grants the request only to watch as Visnu assumes his cosmic form and in three strides steps over the earth, the sky and the heaven, thus regaining the universe for the gods.<sup>41</sup> The expression "*paramam padam*" also appears in the *Katha* Upanishad which says, "He who has the understanding for the driver of the chariot and controls the rein of his mind, he reaches the *end of the journey*, that supreme abode of the all-pervading."<sup>42</sup> Thus, the verse celebrates that the Trinity or *saccidananda* is the "last step" or the "end of the journey" in one's understanding of the

Godhead.

The second part of the last line of the refrain declares that this “last step” is paradoxically both despised and desired, i.e. the great Unity of the Godhead nevertheless divides humanity because this truth is “despised by worldlings” (*bhogis*) who would rather follow sensuality and turn away from the “last step,” whereas “those who are for self-renunciation and self-control (*yogis*) accept it and yearn for it.” Upadhyay ingeniously brings out the division which the New Testament affirms is characteristic of the human response to God, yet he employs indigenous philosophical and mythological language to communicate the idea.<sup>43</sup>

### First Stanza to the Triune Godhead

The first stanza develops the refrain and praises the Triune God in a way which is consistent with the Upanishadic tradition. Upadhyay applies adjectives and titles which are frequently applied to Brahman in the Upanishads, but are here being referenced to the Christian Triune God. The alliteration of the description adds to the beauty as God is adored as *parama*, *purana* and *paratpara*. The first term means “supreme”, the second “Ancient of Days” and the third literally means “beyond the beyond” or transcendent. All of these terms are found in the Upanishads as well as in the popular Hindu literature.<sup>44</sup> This first line of the stanza celebrates the Triune transcendence. The second line underscores the Christian and *advaitic* opposition to Buddhist *sunya* (emptiness), by stressing the fullness of the Triune God. The fullness of Brahman is a theme which re-occurs in the *Bṛhad-Araṇyaka*, especially 5.1.1: That is full, this is full. From fullness, fullness proceeds. If we take away the fullness of fullness, even fullness then remains.<sup>45</sup> The fullness which Upadhyay celebrates is one which is both transcendent and immanent, a theme vital to orthodox Christianity.

The last line of the stanza explores the mystery of God’s Oneness; a oneness which has “triple interior relationship.” Here we clearly see one of Upadhyay’s favorite themes; namely, that God is one and unrelated (*nirguna*), yet related internally within the Godhead in the mystery of trinity (*trisanga*). Gispert-Sauch appropriately quotes Abhishiktananda who said that the “*sat* of God is in reality *sam-sat*,” i.e. a Being-with communion or internal relationships. Yet, “in all his inner relatedness, God remains pure, *suddha*, the inner relations in no way compromising the inner purity of the divine essence, which remains one only without a second, free from any essential duality.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, in the mystery of the Trinity, God is both *trisanga*

and *asanga*; tripled-related within, yet unrelated (of necessity) to the world.

Upadhyay then balances the unrelated nature of God with the declaration that he is conscious, using the powerful Eastern word *buddha* (awakened or enlightened), asserting God's claim as the ultimately enlightened one and the source of all enlightenment reflecting the words of John's gospel, "He is the light which enlightens every man in the world."<sup>47</sup> The paradox and mystery of the Trinity has now been declared: triple-related, yet unrelated; unrelated to the world, yet the source of the world's enlightenment. The mystery cannot be penetrated apart from revelation. Thus, Upadhyay ends by declaring this truth "hard to realize." Even the enlightenment of God is never completely separate from the mystery of the unfathomable, ineffable nature of the Triune Godhead.

### Second Stanza to the Father

The second stanza is dedicated to the adoration of the Father. It opens with the Sanskrit word for father, *pitr*. Upadhyay then uses a key word found in the first verse of the Vedas "*Savitr*." Gispert-Sauch comments that "*Savitr* is the designation of God ...that is taught to the young Brahmin at the *upanayana* or initiation ceremony: the famous *gayatri mantra* which is revered as specially auspicious: *tat savitur varenyam / bhargo devasya dhimahi / dhiyo ya no pracodayat*: 'May we meditate upon that splendour of the God *Savitr* and may he inspire our thoughts.'<sup>48</sup> The word *Savitr* refers to a solar deity (or, as Upadhyay would prefer it, the God of the Sun) in the *RgVeda*. Thus, the word evokes images of the Father as the creative source of life, and the power and energy which gives life to the whole earth.

The Father is also called *paramesam*, the Supreme or Highest Lord, a title for *Siva*. The mystery is again pressed as Upadhyay now calls the Begetter (*Savitr*) the Unbegotten. He who has brought all of creation into existence is himself uncaused, recalling not only the language of early Christian creeds, but the language of the Upanishads which assert that Brahman is "not-engendered."<sup>49</sup> The idea of the Unbegotten Begetter is reinforced by the next expression which Gispert-Sauch has translated, "Unsown seed of the tree of existence."<sup>50</sup> The Father is the seed (*bijam*) who is himself without seed (*abijam*). The tree metaphor is quite popular in Indian figurative religious language.<sup>51</sup>

In the last line of the second stanza the Father is celebrated as the great Cause (*karanam*) of the whole universe. Here we meet Thomas' Intelligent, Personal, First Cause, a declaration which separates Upadhyay from the *Samkhya* school of Indian philosophy which rejects a personal or

intelligent cause of the universe. Creation in advaita, as understood by Upadhyay, is an “intelligent (*iksana*), personal act, not an impersonal evolution.”<sup>52</sup> The last description of the Father in this stanza is the word *Govinda*, which translates into English as “preserver of the world,” an expression which resonates with Western theological formulations. However, the literal meaning of the expression is “Cowherd of the universe” as Upadhyay boldly draws from the popular, mythological literature one of the most recognizable titles of Krishna. Here Upadhyay emphasizes the providential, shepherding care of the Father over the universe, but does so while evoking language found in both the *RgVeda* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.<sup>53</sup>

### Third Stanza to the Son

The third stanza is devoted to the praise of the Son. The opening words declare the Son to be “*anahata sabda*” which means “non-struck”. It is a technical distinction in Indian philosophy which refers to the “transcendental cosmic Sound that is said to fill the universe.”<sup>54</sup> It is a sound which is said to be eternal and had no originating strike which produced the sound. This powerfully reflects Christ as the sounding Word which has eternally gone forth from the Father, the “infinite *Logos*” as the next phrase affirms. Calling the Son “infinite” (*ananta*) ingeniously draws upon both *advaita*’s emphasis that the Supreme Being is infinite, as well as (when used adjectively) being one of the names to describe the gigantic mythological snake, *Sesa*, who is the mount of Lord *Visnu*. The last word of this line describes the Son as “supremely great,” reminiscent of the *Svetasvatara* Upanishad which regularly speaks of the *mahan purusa*.<sup>55</sup>

The last line of this stanza to the Son begins with an affirmation that the Son is consubstantial with the Father through the phrase *pitṛ-svarupa*, translated by Upadhyay as “Image of the Father”. The word “*svarupa*” denotes essence or inner form, reflecting the truth that the Son and the Father share the same essence. Also, in North India, the word is widely used to refer to the *image* of a god.<sup>56</sup> The next phrase (*cinmaya-rupa*) reinforces the concept of the Son as *Cit* and is translated “one whose form is intelligence” or, as Gispert-Sauch renders it “whose essence is made of Consciousness.”<sup>57</sup> The last phrase of the stanza to the Son is the phrase *sumukunda*, with mythological overtones associated with *Visnu*. *Mukunda* is a name for Vishnu, but the *su* prefix makes it adjectival, distancing itself from a direct identification with Vishnu and instead emphasizing the etymology from the root “*muk*” from which come words such as *mukti*, or liberation. Thus, Upadhyay translates it “giver of the highest freedom,”<sup>58</sup> re-

flecting the redemptive, liberating work of Christ which is so central to the Christian message as well as a celebration of him who liberates from the bonds of *samsara*.

### Fourth Stanza to the Holy Spirit

The fourth and final stanza begins by bridging traditional Latin filioque theology with the famous doctrine of *saccidananda*. The Holy Spirit is pictured as “proceeding from the union of *Sat* and *Cit*.” This is followed by a concept as deeply imbedded in the Vedantic tradition as the filioque is in the Latin. The Holy Spirit is *anandaghana*, i.e. a “solid mass of bliss,” or as Upadhyay translates it, “intense bliss.”<sup>59</sup> The expression seeks to convey the purity of the Supreme bliss, unmixed with anything unclean. Thus, it appropriately carries the idea of holiness which proceeds from the Father and the Son as their pure and good (*subha*) breath or spirit (*svasita*).

The second part of the final stanza celebrates the work of the Holy Spirit. He is called the *pavana*, a term which the Sanskrit tradition connects, appropriately, with both fire and wind, “the two great purifying agencies in nature,”<sup>60</sup> and consonant with the Biblical description of the Holy Spirit as “fire” and “wind.” As the “wind” of God, His “movements are swift,” recalling both the *Svetasvatara* Upanishad and John’s gospel.<sup>61</sup> In the final line of the stanza the work of the Holy Spirit continues to be extolled as the one who “Speaks of the Word,” i.e. bears witness to Christ and the Prophets and the “Life-giver,” reflecting the task of regeneration, yet still faintly echoing the language of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.<sup>62</sup>

It should be kept in mind that this is first and foremost a Christian hymn, seeking to worship and adore the Triune Godhead. However, it is Christian worship grown from the seeds of the Indian tradition and planted in the indigenous soil of India. It is for this reason that Gispert-Sauch is able to say that in this hymn one finds “the most successful example of true adaptation or incarnation of faith in India.”<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay once said that the reason his Hindu friends could not understand “the subtlety and sanctity” of the Christian faith is “because of its hard coating of Europeanism.”<sup>64</sup> This study has focused on an attempt by Upadhyay to re-state the classic Trinitarian formulation in terms and thought-forms which may seem alien to those of us in the West, but are more familiar to Indians. Upadhyay never claims that his use of *saccidananda* was able to capture the incomprehensible mystery of the

Trinity. After all, every formulation must accept the limitations of human language. Nor did he believe that his re-statement of the Trinity using the language of Vedanta could ever become normative for anyone outside the Indian context. Rather, he was pioneering an experiment in contextualization which involved the re-statement of doctrines which continue, for the most part, to be stated around the world using the Latin and Greek conceptual framework. The fact that the church is now predominantly non-western, makes the kind of work by Upadhyay and other non-western Christians impossible to ignore. We need a more vigorous discussion concerning the viability of these efforts, and it hoped that this study will help us as we seek to find the proper balance between our commitment to the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3) as well as our calling to be faithful to the particularities of our local contexts.

#### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1982) 3.
- <sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive study of the theology of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay see my book, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations: The Legacy of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> In traditional Hinduism, Hindu life has four idealized stages, beginning with a student, followed by a householder, followed by a meditating forest dweller and finally, culminating in a world-renouncer or *sannyasin*.
- <sup>4</sup> It was customary for Brahmin teachers to take on a new name consistent with their life work. The word ‘Brahmabandhav’ is the Sanskrit equivalent of the Greek name, Theophilus, meaning, lover of God. His surname, Upadhyay, means ‘teacher’.
- <sup>5</sup> B. Animanada, *The Blade* (Calcutta: Roy and Son, 1947), Appendix 1, i.
- <sup>6</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 4, no. 7 (July 1897): 8, 9.
- <sup>7</sup> Westminster Confession II.3. For a full text of the Westminster Confession see, Robert L. Dabney, *The Westminster Confession and Creeds* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publication, 1983).
- <sup>8</sup> For a full exposition of the problems of translating Latin doctrinal formulations into the Indian context see the excellent book by Robin Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).
- <sup>9</sup> *Vajrasucika* Upanishad, 9. Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Principal Upanishads* (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1996), 937, 938.
- <sup>10</sup> *Saccidananda* is a religious formula similar to an *adesa*, i.e. a compact presentation of truth, often contained in a single word or phrase, which summarizes the essence of a teaching. The formula *saccidananda* does not appear in the earlier Upanishads, but it was used by later Vedantists to summarize the essence of Upanishadic teaching regarding the Absolute as *Sat, Cit,*

*Ananda.*

- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>12</sup> Modalism refers to the ancient heresy of rejecting the three eternal distinctions in the Godhead and instead viewing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three, successive manifestations of the One God. According to Modalism, God has revealed himself in three names only. Sen also failed to relate the Trinity to *nirguna* Brahman, but only to precedents within Hindu literature identified with *saguna* Brahman only.
- <sup>13</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 2, no. 4 (April, 1895): 11. This is a summary of the position of “the Editor of *Sophia*” (Upadhyay) as found in an article by A. Heglin, S. J. entitled “One God and Three Persons.” Similar statements may be found in Upadhyay’s own writings, but this gives some insight into the early support, encouragement and, indeed, written defense, which he received in the early years from the Jesuit community in India.
- <sup>14</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 3, no. 2 (Feb., 1896): 5.
- <sup>15</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 4, no. 8 (Aug., 1897): 9.
- <sup>16</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 3, no. 3 (Mar., 1896): 4. In another article Upadhyay writes of “the wonderful fitness of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity [which] illumines the darkness of that abode where dwells the Absolute in light inaccessible, [and] where human reason gets dazzled and blinded.” See, *Sophia Monthly* 4, no. 8 (Aug., 1897): 9.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 4, no. 12 (Dec., 1897): 2.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* This also sheds light on why Upadhyay was unwilling to move closer to Ramanuja’s position which, for his point of view, gives too much credence to the crude, exoteric worship of village Hinduism. A ‘stock’ is a 19th century term for a block of wood.
- <sup>19</sup> For a modern English translation of the *Pancadasī* see, T. M. P. Mahadevan, trans., *Pancadasī*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1967. Upadhyay even attempted his own translation and verse by verse exposition of the *Pancadasī*, a portion of which was published in 1902. It is not known for certain how much of the *Pancadasī* he completed, as only the first fourteen verses (with commentary) are found in the archives of the Goethal’s library in Calcutta. Unfortunately, the only extant copy stops in the middle of a sentence in his exposition of chapter one, verse 14. However, even in the small selection which is available, Upadhyay clearly sets out his understanding in his opening exposition that the three divisions of the *Pancadasī* correspond to the three aspects of Being: *Sat*, *Cit* and *Ananda*. See, B. Upadhyay, translator, *Pancadasī*, 1902, publisher unknown, Goethal library archives, Calcutta.
- <sup>20</sup> T. M. P. Mahadevan, trans., ix. This is an editorial comment by Madadevan who goes on to emphasize that though the three quintads carry these three themes, all three sections carry the essential teachings of Vedantism reflecting the common repetitious nature of this kind of teaching manual.
- <sup>21</sup> *Sophia Weekly* 1, no. 2, New Series (23 June, 1900): 8.

- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Sophia Weekly* 1, no. 7, New Series (28 July, 1900): 7.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Twentieth Century* 1, no. 1 (Jan., 1901): 6, 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Although space does not permit a full development of Upadhyay's development of the Son as cit, he seeks to establish is not only on epistemological grounds, but also on religious grounds through the application of *logos* theology to the *advaitic* context and a hymn of Christian worship to the Son of God using the language of Vedanta. For a full exposition and discussion of this *advaitic* hymn and the application of *logos* theology to the Indian context see my, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations*.
- <sup>26</sup> As the discussion concerning *ananda* will make clear, Upadhyay's initial emphasis on the 'unrelated nature' of God only means that God is not related to His creation out of *necessity*.
- <sup>27</sup> *Sophia Weekly* 1, no. 7, New Series (28 July, 1900): 6.
- <sup>28</sup> *Sophia Weekly* 1, New Series (Sept., 1900). Upadhyay's identification of *ananda* and reason is based on his study of the *Pancadasī* which affirms that "inanimateness manifests his being, sentiency his intelligence and rationality his bliss." In the October 27 issue of *Sophia Weekly*, Upadhyay quotes this as from [sic]15:20-21 (vol. 1, no. 18, page 7). In *Sophia Monthly* 3, no. 2 (Feb., 1896): 5. Upadhyay translates *ananda* as "unalloyed joy" to reinforce that His joy is not related by necessity to any contingent being to make His joy complete or full.
- <sup>29</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 5, no. 8 (Aug., 1898): 119. This clearly means that humans have no *intrinsic* or self-grounded ability to be joyful apart from a relationship with the living God.
- <sup>30</sup> *Twentieth Century* 1, no. 6 (June, 1901): 12.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> B. Animananda, *The Blade*, 101; Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 71.
- <sup>33</sup> As quoted in *Sophia Weekly*, vol 1, no. 7, New Series (28 July, 1900): 6.
- <sup>34</sup> *Sophia Weekly* 1, no. 8, New Series (4 Aug., 1900). A similar statement is found in Upadhyay's personal translation of a portion of the first chapter of the *Pancadasī*. He comments on verses 8 and 9 of the first chapter saying "This eternal *Samvid* is bliss transcendent...it is its own object of supreme love. Its love of self is independent of its love of dependent objects; and its love for objects other than self proceed from super-abundance of its love of the self-object. It is not in need of being correlated with the finite for the purpose of maintaining its bliss. It is a pure self-act." See, *Pancadasī*, translation with commentary by B. Upadhyay, 1:8, page 14; Goethal's library archives, St. Xavier's College, Calcutta.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Twentieth Century* 1, no. 1 (31 Jan., 1901): 10.
- <sup>36</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 5, no. 1 (Jan., 1898).
- <sup>37</sup> *Twentieth Century* 1, no. 1 (Jan, 1901).
- <sup>38</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch, S. J., "The Sanskrit Hymns of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay,"

*Religion and Society* 19, no. 4 (Dec., 1972): 60. This hymn is also alluded to in "The Trinity and *Saccidananda*" by Peter May, *Indian Journal of Theology*, 7, no. 3 (July-Sept., 1958): 92-98.

<sup>39</sup> *Sophia Monthly* 5, no. 10 (Oct., 1898): 1-3. I am indebted to Father Gispert-Sauch, S. J. in my analysis of this hymn. His publication entitled, "The Sanskrit Hymns of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay" as well as his willingness to meet with me personally in Delhi in the winter of 1997 to discuss Upadhyay's writings have helped me considerably.

<sup>40</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch, 67.

<sup>41</sup> W. O'Flaherty, ed., *Hindu Myths*, (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 175-179.

<sup>42</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 624. Gispert-Sauch comments that Upadhyay ingeniously employs both philosophical language as well as mythological imagery in his hymn. The philosophical language give the hymn 'laksana power', i.e. the power to imply meanings that are higher than the word designates, as well as 'vyanjana power', i.e. the power to touch religious attitudes and evoke resonances of popular meaning in the hearts of the devoted which may not be explicitly implied. See, Gispert-Sauch, 69.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> For *parama* see, *Brihad-Aranyaka* 4.1.2-7, S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 246-252; for *purana* see *Svetasvatara* 3:21, S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 730. See also, *Brihad-Aranyaka* 4.4.8, S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 274. This passage refers to the "ancient narrow path" which Rumi attributes to Jesus, the *Logos*, "For the true believers I become a bridge across the river." It is the Upanishadic equivalent of John 14:6. See also, *Bhagavad-Gita* 2:20. For *paratpara*, see Mun. U. 3.2.8 where Radhakrishnan translates "*parat-param purusam*" the same as Upadhyay, "higher than the high," 691. See also, *Bhagavad-Gita* 8:20.

<sup>45</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 289.

<sup>46</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch, 70. Upadhyay's reference to the Upanishadic formula that God is "One without a Second" means, for him, that although God is triune and internally related, His *nature* is not divided.

<sup>47</sup> John 1:9.

<sup>48</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch, 71. See *RigVeda* 3:62.10, *Brihad-Aranyaka* 6.3.6, Mait. 6.7 and *Chandogya* 5.2.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Brihad-Aranyaka* 4.4.20-25, S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 278-281. Brahman is referred to repeatedly as "the great Unborn (*aja*) self." See also, *Bhagavad-Gita* 2:20. *Aja* also stands for the Samkhya principle of *prakrti* which they considered to be a principle without beginning, i.e. "unborn."

<sup>50</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 76.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, *Bhagavad-Gita* 15:3.

<sup>52</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Gispert-Sauch points out that there is an ancient RigVedic myth of Indra symbolically "finding the cows." Here, God is shown to find the straying cows all over the universe, evoking Luke 15:3-6 and Psalm 23. The controver-

sial choice of Upadhyay using *Govinda* as a description of the Father is why, according to Gispert-Sauch, Father Antoine changed the word to *visvesam* (which makes *paramesam* redundant and does away with the rhyme) when it was used for public worship (72, footnote 19).

<sup>54</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 72. *The Yoga Darsana* identifies this eternal sound with the sacred syllable OM (pronounced AUM).

<sup>55</sup> *Svetasvatara* 3:8, 12, 19; S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 727-730. Radhakrishnan translates the phrase as "Supreme Person" in verse 8 and 19 and as "Great Lord," in verse 12.

<sup>56</sup> For example, child actors who play the role of gods are known as *svarups*, or images of the gods they represent. Likewise, the Vallabha sect calls the image of Krishna by the term "*svarupa*."

<sup>57</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 73.

<sup>58</sup> Gispert-Sauch also points out that this phrase, like *Govinda*, was omitted in the printed musical version and replaced with the more obvious Christian title, *Jisu-Krishtam*. Gispert-Sauch seems to stretch the etymology of *sumukunda* too far to render it "good Savior," though it does conform to his overall structure by having each stanza conclude with a single summarizing affirmation: Stanza one: the Mystery, Stanza two: our Shepherd; Stanza three: good Savior and Stanza four: our Life-Giver.

<sup>59</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 73. The word "*ghana*" also means 'cloud', referring to the solid mass of monsoon clouds which bring nourishing rain to India.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Svetasvatara* Upanishad 3:19, S. Radhakrishnan, ed., 729, and John 3:18.

<sup>62</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita* 7:9.

<sup>63</sup> Gispert-Sauch, 74.

<sup>64</sup> B. Animananda, 74.

