

The concept of «persona» in Hinduism and Christianity. A theological approach

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Page | 90

„We will not really face the crisis of modernity [...], without starting from another anthropological concept: instead of the individual we place the relation, experience and the absolute priority of a personal relationship”.
(Christos Yannaras)

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at a comparing exposure between Christianity and classical Hinduism on the concept of person, analysed from theological point of view. In this plan, i.e. of the Divine and human understanding as a person, there is not only a distinction between these two great world religions, but also a level difference, qualitatively insurmountable, since Christianity rests on postulating and understanding of God as the Person par excellence, while in the current Asiatic religion, at the absolute level, divinity (Brahman) goes beyond the status of a person, that is endowed with only at a lower level (phenomenal). The postulation of a single ultimate Reality, in which souls return once they reached the state of liberation, can be understood but only through a monistic-pantheistic identification of the creaturely with the Absolute, Brahman. For despite the insistence on a personal relationship between man and divinity that we find at some classical thinkers, ultimately, what remains is the absolute and impersonal reality of Brahman. Man cannot be thought of in personal terms, rather than as a temporary manifestation, for once with the breakage of the causal chain: «avidya-karma-samsara», he gets dissolved in the impersonal Absolute of God. In Christianity, the problem of person and that of hypostasizing nature is expressed in such a way that excludes simultaneous emphasis on unity (One) or plurality (Multiple). Christian theology knows no abstract deity: God cannot be conceived outside the three Persons. If ousia and hypostasis are almost synonymous, that happens so just to defeat our reason, to prevent us from objecting the divine essence outside Persons and of “their eternal movement of love”.

Keywords: *persona, God, Brahman, ultimate reality, monism, pantheism, relationship, hypostasis, ousia.*

Introduction

If man is a “deep mystery”, leaving so little room to uncover himself, this is due to his ontological status of *persona*, created *apud imaginem Dei*, as revealed in the Judeo-Christian revelation, which postulates a direct lineage of man (come forth from the very hands of the Creator). Therefore, any honest attempt whatsoever, not only theological, but equally, scientific and anthropological, encounters an obstacle, namely the *mystery of persona*. For a person cannot be defined but only as an “indefinable being”. [1]

It is, we believe, more than relevant, to begin the current approach on the mystery of *persona* from the etymology of the term itself. Thus, it consists of $\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$ preposition (“towards”) and the noun $\omega\psi$ (genitive $\omega\psi\omicron\varsigma$), which means *eye, view*. So, person

(προσωπον) means: *I've got my face directed towards someone, I stand before someone.* Therefore, the primary content of the word *person* is defined as a relationship, as a reference. But, in turn, it defines a relationship, a reference as well. But the moment we speak of a relationship-reference, we do not understand an analogy or an abstract comparison, but a very specific event: "I - am - in - someone's - face". I - means that I have self-consciousness, am certain that I exist and that the one who exists is me; I am a being with identity, something that differentiates myself from any other being. And this distinction is an absolute alterity, a unique and unrepeatable character that defines my existence.[2]

In the classical Greek thinking, the idea of a personal existence, denoting the power of self-determination was foreign and even incompatible with the basic ideas of the way of thinking in this field. To make acceptable the concept of a Single-God-in-three-Persons, officially promulgated by the Church in course of the 4-th century, St. Athanasius of Alexandria and especially St. Basil the Great had recourse to the concept of "persona", as implying an ontological relationship (σχέσις). Classical Greek didn't had an equivalent term with that of *person*, except, in the etymological sense, to that of προσωπον (Latin 'persona': someone "to be probed through"), which had meant only a mask worn by anyone, especially by the actors on stage, whereby they had "articulated" the roles of other people. For this reason, St. Basil – along with others – advocated the use of υποστασις, a term by then considered synonymous with ουσια.[3]

In the present paper we will proceed to an exposition, not as much diachronic, but one comparative, synchronic between Christianity and classical Hinduism, at the level of the concept of *person*, theologically analysed. *De plano*, act says that in this plan, understanding the Deity and man as a person, there is not only a distinction between these two great world religions, and a level difference, qualitative insurmountable, since Christianity rests on postulating and understanding of God as a person *par excellence*, while in that so much prized (by some) Oriental religion, at an absolute level, the Brahman- deity exceeds the status of person, which is provided with only at a lower level, i.e. phenomenal.

I. Concept of «persona» in Hinduism

In order to achieve "forging" of such key concepts that support the believer to its rescue, it needs a personal relationship through which he can reach the experience of God. Apart from this personal experience with the divine, true religion cannot arise.

It is stated that all religions owe their personal inspiration to the intuitions of their founding prophets. Hindu religion is characterized by an adherence to the facts. In its pure form, it was not supported at all on authority, as other religions have done. It is not a "founded" religion and does not revolve around any historical event, which gives it rather a *natural character*. Its distinctive feature was the insistence on an inner life of spirit.[4]

That explains why a religion which today counts over nine hundred million followers is so varied and does not claim from any particular founder, recording, over time, a variety of religious and philosophical trends. As regards the central idea – that of divinity –, one can identify three major patterns. The first is *henotheism*, the ancient Vedic religion, and that of Śaiva and Vaishnava theistic currents, which provides the worship of a main deity, as it be alone, without rejecting other deities (Max Müller). The second is *pantheism*, the perspective offered by the Upanishads and, later, by Vedanta, which considers the Ultimate Reality as a transcendent, impersonal being (Brahman). The third configuration pattern of the deity is that offered by Sāṅkhya and Yoga of Patañjali, who allow for two ultimate realities: Puruṣa

(the soul) and prakrti (matter), although, ultimately, it is reducible to a monistic perspective of reality through Purusha's postulation as state of isolation (*kaivalya*) or detachment from prakrti, the state yogi turns to.[5]

Hindu tradition proposes three ways (*mārga*) to achieve final release: *jñāna-mārga* (that of gnosis), *karma-mārga* (of the facts) and *bhakti-mārga* (of devotion to the deity). These are not mutually exclusive, but represent rather different accents that are appropriated by different types of personality or even by the same person in different moments of life. Among them, *jñāna-mārga*, the path of knowledge or spiritual discernment is a translation into practice of pantheistic Vedānta philosophy, because according to this teaching man, in his deepest nature, is already one with the Universal Being or the Supreme Self. Human existence as a separate ego is an illusion (*māyā*), although an illusion entirely true, as long as it lasts.

As such, through *jñāna-mārga* man strives to achieve, not just intellectually, but with his whole being, the truth supremely declared: *tat tvam asi*: “Thou art that” (Chāndogya Up. VI.12.3), the deepest inner self identity with that of eternal and universal Self. True knowledge is to understand that empirical domain has no real status. Hence, the ideal is detaching from sensory forms, simply because they belong to the artificially maintained world of *māyā*. Given the upanishadic premise, the authentic state of knowledge lies in the realization of the fact that the individual self is Brahman-ātman and nothing more.[6]

Genuine knowledge constitutes a genuine negative method, peculiar to the mystical currents, but which Hindu mystic applies in a personal manner.[7] Being aware that any noetic action takes place in space of *māyā*, the adept of *jñāna* must de-conceptualize the structures that he really considers to be true. For him, the aim is to achieve totality by a gradual entry in one of the multiplicity of the unit. Therefore, before any object, *jñānas* must say: this art that; this also is Brahman, seeking at the same time, to see in every object, that which is him in his own essence and reach progressively at the awareness that the truth is *saccidānanda* (a compound of three vectors: being, consciousness or intelligence and happiness).[8]

As noted by Indian professor Y. Masih, Hinduism is not predominantly theist, but pantheist, however Indian pantheism does not grant personality to the embracing reality. According to him, pantheism is not necessarily impersonal, as some Western thinkers have put it. From historical perspective, pantheism was *impersonal* (e.g. Spinozism, Wordsworth's naturalism, Vedāntism of Śankara), *over-personal* (F.H. Bradley, S. Radhakrishnan, etc.) and also *personal* (as in some forms of Sufism and in Christian mysticism, especially in Western one).[9]

The perspective of Brahman-phenomenality in the light of the upanishadic thinking is very important for understanding Hindu pantheism. The relationship between Brahman and its development as a pluralistic world is one of identity. (Cf. Śvetāśvatara Up. VI.10). However, it remains a great difference between the-one-Brahman and the plurality of its manifestations. In this point – explains Paul Deussen –, had to make a greater concession to the awareness about space, time and causality, Brahman being considered as the previous cause in time, and the world, the effect produced by it. This world inner dependence of Brahman and the identity of essence with him appeared as a creation of the world out of Brahman and through Brahman, thus leading to the point where theories of creation, not accepted by the idealism of the Upanishads are understood by unconscious accommodating to the forms of human cognitive capacity.[10]

The relationship between Brahman and creation might be defined, metaphorically, as analogous to the relationship between the individual and his self or between the individual and his most intimate consciousness. Breaking this “dialogue” would make impossible any basis for existence. Similarly, the lack of the dialogue between Brahman and the world would make the world simply without any basis. This view is one of the reports rather monologist: of Brahman with himself (Ātman), where the concept of otherness is missing, which is so important in Christian theology.

Hindu pantheism cannot be similar in structure with Western-style pantheism, according to which God turns to the world in order to completely identify with it. Such pantheism grants to nature an endless and real status and, therefore, for God is no longer any place outside the world, but only within it. Here both the world and God are synonyms. You might call such a philosophical and theological orientation with the name of classical pantheism, especially if one takes into account that its last consequences are seen in the development of system of German idealist philosophy, reflected in the philosophical orientation from western theological reflection that lays stress on speech about the world, a world incapable to understand God as both immanent and transcendent to the creation. [11]

Starting from the evidence of Upanishad texts, concluding that the universe is Brahman (Chāndogya III.14), a statement that will become the guiding idea of any further speculation regarding this topic, one will define *Hindu pantheism* (in contrast to the Western or classical one) as of the abstract nature. The logic of this formulation lies in the reasoning that, on the one hand, Brahman is not immanent in creation, once immanence involving stationing in something objective (which is not the case with creation, because it lacks the objective nature) [12] ; on the other hand, Hinduism speaks about the absolute transcendence of Brahman. Due to the fact that creation is Brahman, it can acquire the status of a “transcendent” to the extent that in any “element” of it is ātman incorporated.

The philosophical system developed by the most influential Vedāntic (and not only) thinker Śāṅkara (9th century AD) is seen as the expression *par excellence* of an absolute monism, because one of the fundamental ideas is expressed as the equation: Brahman = Ātman. For according to Advaita Vedānta (non-dualistic Vedānta of Śāṅkara), only the innermost man is conscious. No other part of it can feel, see or know something. In Sanskrit, the name of that conscience is “ātman. It is that part of a man who identifies him and which in Western philosophy and religion finds its counterpart in the concept of “soul”. [13]

According to the classical Upanishads *timeless* and *spaceless* can be declared as real attributes of Brahman. Starting from these premises, Śāṅkara claims that Brahman has two fundamental features: the nirguna-Brahman, rendered through the classic triad "saccidānanda" (being-intelligence-happiness) and the saguna-Brahman, qualified by the admission of an infinity of attributes. In the second dimension (as saguna Brahman), he is Īśvara, the Lord, starting from the premise that saguna-Brahman is only one accident, not an end in itself. It was designed to facilitate the process of ontological identifying of personal jivas with Brahman, and of obtaining the pure knowledge: *parā vidya*. [14]

Being the ultimate essence of things, ātman acquired secondary meaning of “I”, regardless of the relating plan, which can be physical, mental or spiritual. That is why before the real Self of man, there is the "I" of which he speaks when he says "I" or "you" meaning this man or that man. In other words, there are two in each man – the outer man and the inner man, mental and physical individuality and genuine person. Therefore, the context is very important to know which kind of ātman one text or another refers to, if it refers to Himself, with a capital letter of himself. It is noteworthy that the distinction is to be found in Christian

theology as well, that between the "spirit" (pneuma-πνευμα) and "soul" (psihe-ψυχη), with the meaning of St. Paul the Apostle (I Thess. 5:23).[15]

Ontological unity of Brahman-Ātman, which Śankara takes on in his system, is an understanding of ternary premise of existence (he argued). Most of the times, misinterpretation of these three levels of existence has caused many not to be able to understand different texts *shruti* (revealed, authoritative), which sometimes are only apparently contradictory. These levels of existence are: 1) the transcendental; 2) the empirical and 3) the illusory one. When we say that all people are one, that statement cannot be true empirically; they are obviously different to one another as race, religion, country etc. is concerned. The statement about the unity of the people requires to be understood, having truth value at the transcendental level, because the same eternal Principle (Principium Aeternitatis) is inherent in each of them. Once understood the "levels of reality" in that way, the Absolute Brahman receives the quality of person not at the transcendental level, but at the lower one, i.e. empirical. Only in his manifested capacity (saguna-Brahman), Absolute is assigned personhood, as manifested especially in the famous triadic concept of divinity, Trimūrti, consisting of Brahmā ("the Creator"), Vishnu ("the Preserver") and Śiva ("the Destroyer").[16]

The controversy of similarity between Trimūrti and the Holy Trinity occurs when they are considered structurally identical and having common origin. This would suggest that both would only valorisation of how to be God's Trinitarian. Both Holy Trinity and Trimūrti (like other religious triads) are nothing but ways to underscore one and the same eternal truth: that of the divine trinity. The history of comparative religions is very significant on stressing out the ternary trait of divinity, observed in so many religions that structure threefold or triadic their pantheon (see, inter alia, the triads of ancient Egyptians, in the Assyrian-Babylonian religion or Trinitarian aspect of Chinese Tao etc.). The conclusion is that there is an equating between them and that Triad is equally true everywhere.[17]

As stated often, Hindu religious experience does not imply a strict separation between the sacred and the profane sphere of existence. The classical Western spirituality distinction, that of dialectic of the sacred and the profane, does not work here, because in the frame of monistic-pantheistic Hindu premise one can no longer speak of a knowledge polarity, everything being infused by the only and ultimate reality: impersonal Brahman. Religious experience alike cannot assume dualism, but its unifying overcome. The suggestive example is to be found in the classical Hindu grounds: Bhagavat-Gītā and Upanishads texts. Both theistic experience of Gītā and the Upanishads non-dualism are aimed at achieving either Brahman-Ātman ontological identity or identification with the Supreme Lord (Īśvara). In other words, any religious experience assumes obtaining non-duality consciousness.

Hindu thesis involved in Trimūrti admits that Brahman, the undifferentiated Principle is the Absolute, manifested modalistic, figuratively, without thereby the divine figures (gods) to hypostasize or to give personal character to the Absolute. Being is existence, but to declare it as existence is not made in virtue of an "internal life" of being. Such an approach is alien to Hinduism. Being is existence because it is "within itself", not because it is an existence discovered through mediation, be it as a mere image. In his manifestation Brahman manifests not his being because that remains isolated. Only in its manifestation as a "reality", the creaturely ontically identifies with it (ontic reflection on world "objects" is opposed to "ontological" reflection on world being itself), but does not mean that reality is something in itself. This something-in-itself is being, simple, without determinations. The gods of

traditional triad manifest only a certain dimension of the divine and not of the being, which always remains identical to itself.

II. Theological configuration of «persona» in Christianity

Structuring its premises based on personalistic categories, Christianity refuses the idea of an impersonal, abstract God. The God's quality *to be* God is not stating by identifying Him with an undifferentiated, neutral Absolute, as in the Brahman of the Upanishads, but through real act of the Incarnation, undeniable proof of divine omnipotence, in which humanity becomes the receptacle of whole Revelation, that *to be* God is *to be* Trinity. In other words, the Incarnation settle in the centre of Christian theology the mystery of the Trinity, for He Who gets embodied is none other than the Logos, the second person of the Holy Trinity.[18] This does not mean, of course, that God is Trinity only via Incarnation, but that through Incarnation is revealed – in the relative space-time plan of the world – that God is eternal Trinity of Persons.

Unlike striking classical configuration of Brahman or of the Hindu triad, in the case of Holy Trinity would be a fallacy to speak of a "beginning" of Her, because each Person is eternally equal in dignity to the other two, participating mysteriously together in the act of iconomy or of the outpouring to the world. *On the one hand*, by virtue of «consubstantiality», the three Persons are equal and never opposable, not even *in potentia*. *On the other hand*, by virtue of *appropriation*, each Person is assigned, eminently, a certain work: creation to the Father, salvation to the Son and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. That concerns the life "ad extra" of Trinity or the act of iconomy, but here it must be stressed out there is not a single divine work to which all three Persons cannot participate, for as St. Athanasius the Great teaches, "God the Father, makes everything *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit".

But the big problem and challenge of the fourth century was to express the simultaneity of divine unity and diversity, in other words, to harmonize at the level of the existence of God *coincidentia oppositorum*, that is monad with triad. This is an immeasurable effort of the Fathers of the Church, for what they have done is tantamount to a revolution or transmutation of language. Using concepts of Greek philosophy – sometimes even words of current language – they resignified the terms, broadening their semantic sphere, so that they become apt to grasp completely new reality appeared in Christianity, that of the *persona*, identifiable both in God and in man, the latter as *imago Dei*.

Church Fathers were used mostly the terms "ουσια" (*ousia*) and "υποστασις" (*hypostasis*) in order to guide the minds to the mystery of the Trinity. The term "ουσια" is often used by Aristotle, who defines it in his famous *Categories* "We call «ουσια» (*ousia*) primarily, especially in their own way what is not said about any topic and that is not found in any subject; for example, this man or this horse. We call "secondary ousia-s" the species in which "first ousia-s" exist, along with corresponding genera; thus "this man" is specifically *human* and, generally speaking, *animal*. Thus, we call «secondary ousia-s» man and animal." [19] In other words, "first ousia-s" mean individual subsistences, the subsisting individual and "secondary ousia-s" we call the "essences" within the realistic meaning of the term. *Hypostasis*, without the value of a philosophical term, shows in everyday speech what actually subsists, so subsistence. [20]

In developing the Trinitarian terminology process and in an era tributary of ancient philosophy, which had interpreted the individual in atomistic grid, Greek theology preferred

– to indicate divine persons – the term *πρόσωπον* (*prosopon*) instead of the *ὑπόστασις*, even if later both will gain same meaning. The thinking that distinguishes *ousia* from the hypostasis of God uses metaphysical vocabulary and expresses itself into an ontology framework, in which the terms are worthy in terms of conventional signs rather than concepts, to signal the absolute identity and absolute difference. This introduction of a distinction between two synonyms was a new terminology to express irreducibility of hypostasis to *ousia*, of the person to essence, but at the same time, without opposing them as two different realities. This irreducibility cannot be understood or expressed but only in relation of the three *hypostasis*, which in fact are not "three", but "Tri-unity".[21]

While *hypostasis* and *prosopon* would later acquire the same meaning in Greek theology, this happened only because the latter was assimilated to the strong sense of the former (cf. St. John Damascene, *Orthodoxy*, 59). *Hypostasis* has enjoyed a long and interesting philosophical and theological development, but has always retained something of the original force.[22]

Summarizing the entire argumentative unfolding of the Fathers against the charge of *tritheism*, St. Gregory of Nyssa offers a fourfold answer: 1. The Three are One, because first of all share one will and one divine work; 2. because they have a single origin or cause, i.e. the Person of Father; 3. for the number and division applies only to created existence scope, to the things that we are able to count. However God "is not a thing", but is transcendent of everything that we call being; 4. Links to what was later called "interpenetration" (*perichoresis*), i.e. to the presence of each of the three Persons in the others.[23]

Just like Hinduism, owner of an ontological monism, Greek philosophy was unable to found ontology of the person. Greek ontology professes a unity of "being", even if there are multiple beings. However, the creatures are reducing their "being" through their necessary relationship with the unique being. The result is that everything does not participate – by belonging to this unit of "being" –, must be classified as "non-being". Nevertheless, the person does not work according to harmonic laws that exist in the ontological unity involving necessarily divinity and the world, the consequence being the depriving of its ontic content. Coming out of predetermined harmony interspace, *persona* (*prosopon*) is not ontically structured, but remains something external to the individual.[24] However, such a role confirms to the person an identity status, something that makes it unique and unrepeatable.

In Christianity, the problem of person and nature hypostasizing is expressed in such a manner that excludes simultaneously emphasizing on unity (One) or plurality (Multiple). The notion of "person" is that which distinguishes Trinitarian Persons from one another, and the unity of "nature" makes impossible their separation. This is "the cornerstone" for religions and philosophical thinking outside the space of Revelation, where not maintaining the unity of nature led naturally to the plurality of figures.[25]

On the other hand, the "tri-functional" aspect of the Hindu impersonal absolute (Brahman / Ātman) can hardly be compared to the Christian Divine Tri-unity, because it represents rather an aspect of mythological thinking. Mythological thinking will always use the categories of "necessary", which are incompatible with the thinking that is based upon a personal God, someone may enter a relationship with. In Christianity, the appeal is to apophasis: since divinity is "das ganz Andere" (R. Otto), "in the divine Trinity there is an inner life which eludes the concepts." [26] In turn, the gods of triad always obey to necessity, once they are nothing but aspects or "modes" of impersonal absolute, being destined to

absorb themselves in the unique monad, the very moment person is an absolute impossibility.

In the Holy Trinity, however, is revealed the infinite aspect of Persons since the Father is consubstantial with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Here we cannot talk about the necessity or psychological or moral conditioning, for divine nature is not beyond Persons. Trinity is God, and every Person has the fullness of the divine nature, without possessing it exclusively. This fullness of the divine nature is equal to the communion of divine persons and man – person creational intended to freedom ("spirit and freedom" – Nikolai Berdyaev) tends to God, establishing a relationship with the preservation of his identity, with no annihilation into Him.[27]

On the other hand, for Holy Fathers, the mystery of man and his destiny is regarded from the perspective of Trinitarian love. Getting permanently attracted by an infinite model, man feels like entrapped in this world. Therefore, only the similarity between human person and living God is the basis of human freedom. But man is called to getting imparted by the glory of God, by the divine "uncreated energies", through updating the divine image in him, that is of hypostatical character of God, the Persona *par excellence*. For St. Peter the Apostle, men are called to become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pt. 1.4), syncopated formula, showing that in a personal meeting (only to a person is possible to communicate, not with nature!) we become partakers (for one participate to the nature!) in the divine life itself; thus the image is reaching the likeness.

This name, these "energies" appear in the Bible and in the writings of the Church Fathers as attributes of the Holy Spirit, Giver of grace, of life that conquers death. The man in the image of God is man-in-Christ, the Father's image, in the infinite breath of the Spirit, that is the image of the Son.[28] And when, for example, St. John the Apostle writes that "God is love" (I John 4:8), this are not to be understood an expression of impersonal primordial energy, but as form to express "supreme unity of tripersonal communion." While in Hindu concept of Trimūrti, Vishnu is a deity who possesses the attribute of compassion towards humanity, to which comes closer by his descents (avatāra), however this compassion cannot be identified with His being, for it lacks the attribute of aseity.

In Christianity, love is precisely what describes best God, for in John's meaning, He is the same with love, but a love manifested fully in freedom and being not under the kingdom of necessity, as in the Hindu triad. Moreover, it is said rightfully, that the only exercise ontologically possible of freedom is love.[29] For the statement "God is love" translates in that God "exists" as Trinity, and then as "Person" and not as substance. Love is not a consequence or a "property" of the divine nature, but what constitutes His substance, allowing Him to be what exactly is: the one God. Thus, love ceases to be a qualifying property, and consequently secondary of "being", in order to become ontological category *par excellence*.[30]

Conclusion

Christian theology knows no abstract deity: God cannot be conceived outside the three Persons. If *ousia* and *hypostasis* are almost synonymous, that so happens to defeat our reason to prevent us from objecting the divine essence outside personas and "their eternal movements of love" (St. Maximus the Confessor). God of Christian theology is a concrete God, as the unique deity is, at the same time, common to the three hypostases and proper to

each of them: to the Father as fountainhead, to the Son as born One, to the Spirit as proceeded from the Father.[31]

In Hinduism, it can be said that the whole effort of conceptualizing the divine, unlike Greek philosophy – related to religion dialectically and developed in contrast with the former, under the shape of another religion, i.e. of thought, purified by reason and composed as a concept – never separated from the ground of religion. It was fed continuously and directly out of this ground's forces, of which there was never uprooted. However, speculation was reformed from its side and it developed religion structure from inside. And once the process was introduced, led from polytheism and henotheism, by favoring a single god, to *pantheism*, the religious attitude so peculiar to Hindus, meaning the unity of God and the world.”[32]

Postulating a single ultimate Reality in which souls return once they have attained liberation cannot be understood except by a monistic-pantheistic identification of creaturely with the Absolute, Brahman. For despite the insistence on a personal relationship between man and divinity, that we find at some classical thinkers (Rāmānuja etc.), ultimately, what remains is the absolute and impersonal reality of Brahman. Man cannot be thought of in personal terms, but rather as a temporary manifestation, for once breaking the causal chain *avidya-karma-samsara* (ignore-deeds-rebirths), it gets dissolved in the impersonal Absolute of God.

If for the Hindus, Trimūrti was never an object of religious devotion, the three deities being worshiped more separately – Brahmā being even deprived of such a cult due to its strong intellectual character –, the Holy Trinity is for the Christian an act of faith around which revolves their whole existence. In this way, Christianity is uniquely set as a religion that, though occurring in history, transcends this history into a *Metahistory*, because it is based on the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God. This condition, fully divine and human at the same time, of its founder, is absolutely specific to Christianity, thereby distinguishing radically not only from Hindu religion, but also from any extra-Christian religious experience.

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- [3] Lucian Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Persons*, American Academy of Religion, Academy Series, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. X. Such a neologism was not easily accepted. There was a long debate in which St. Gregory of Nyssa has not only continued the work of his brother Basil and his predecessors, but also significantly elucidated a whole spectrum of ideas closely related to this innovative concept.
- [4] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *An idealist view of life*, Harper Collins Publishers India, 3-rd edition, New Delhi, 1998, p. 80.
- [5] That is why despite the rejection – sometimes vehemently, by theologians and philosophers – of the Hindu term "pantheism" as their religion globalizing trend, yet this is the main tendency, outlined once with the era of the Upanishads. For details: Dr. Corneliu-Alexandru ARION, *Hindu pantheism and the Christian teaching on God*, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, pp. 323-324.

- [6] Given the upanishadic premise, the real state of knowledge lies in the realization of the fact that the individual self is Brahman-Atman and nothing more. Cf. Dr. Remus RUS, *Conceptia despre om în marile religii (The concept of man in the great religions)*, in: *Glasul Bisericii*, no. 7-8, 1978, p. 823.
- [7] The method has as its starting point the actual positioning of man to himself. Noetic dialectic process begins with the question: "Who am I?" Typically, responses aimed externality and therefore jñānas (one who undertakes the path of knowledge) assimilates, wrongly, himself to his physical body, saying, I am cold, I am warm, etc. The first necessary step is the detachment from this false assimilation. The next step centred perfectly on identical consciousness of self and Brahman coincides with eliminating any considerations to preach the presence of an ego, excluding such type of statement: I see, I understand ... because they cannot be equated with the sentient Brahman. (Cf. I. Mundaka Upanishad 1. 6). The road continues until the jñānas no longer is tempting to confuse himself with anything belonging space phenomenality, reaching his real origins awareness and understanding that Brahman-Atman alone has all forms. (Śvetāśvatara Upan. I, 9). See: Dr. Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, *op.cit.*, pp. 325 sq.
- [8] Jean HERBERT, *Spiritualité hindoue*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1988, pp. 457-460 passim.
- [9] Y. Masih, *Introduction to Religious Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, Delhi, 1998, pp. 46 sq. The author notes that although putting so much emphasis on gnosis and is supported by an abstract logic; however, Sankara's system is not philosophical but wholly religious. Sankara's arguments were, in fact, aimed to create an attitude of total detachment to man. With such attitude man will not consider of great value even paradisiacal state of happiness. The target is to achieve a perfect life, than which no greater can be conceived or thought.
- [10] Paul Deussen, *Filosofia Upanișadelor (The philosophy of the Upanishads)*, transl. by Cornel Sterian, Tehnică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 124. The myth of Brhadāranyaka Upanishad (I. 4) is significant for the understanding of this report, because it presents the world of Atman and conduct the natural consequence of that conduct. The idea explicit in verse 10 is that "he who recognizes this:" I am Brahman "(Aham Brahma asmi), becomes that All (this universe) and not even gods have power to prevent him, for he is the Self (soul, Atman) himself."
- [11] For details: Dumitru POPESCU, *Ortodoxie și Contemporaneitate (Orthodoxy and contemporaneity)*, Diogenes Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996.
- [12] Because one cannot speak of real presence of Brahman in creation and assumption of pantheism is ruled out by divine immanence.
- [13] The word itself derives from the root "at", which means "going continuously" or "breathe", and from "ap", which translates with to "penetrate" or "wrap". Ātman is called, variously, Jiva Ātman, that individual self or soul or antarātman, i.e. the empirical self. Cf. Corneliu Alexandru-ARION, *op.cit.*, p. 230.
- [14] Once secured this knowledge, the individual soul (jīva ātman) appears as multiple and limited in accordance with the principle of creative illusion, *māyā*, resulting in individualisation, and what remains to the knower is only Brahman as nirguna, the unqualified, the Supreme ego or supreme unmanifested Being. Cf. Dr. Remus RUS, *op.cit.*, p. 737.
- [15] It is true that this "ultimate Self" this "immortal Self of self" is identical to "the soul of the soul" (ψυχή ψυχης) of Philo of Alexandria, and to the "immortal soul" of Plato, understood as distinct from the "mortal soul" and several translators render ātman as "soul". But although there are contexts in which "soul" is set as "spirit" is dangerously misleading - due to current notions of psychology - to speak of ultimate and universal Self as a "soul". It would be, for instance, a serious confusion to suppose that when a philosopher like C. G. Jung speaks of "the man in search of a soul", it could have anything to do with Hindu search of the Self, or what is it in the urging Γνώθι σεαυτόν. Cf. Ananda K. COOMARASWAMY, *Hinduism și Buddhism (Hinduism and Buddhism)*, transl. by George Popa, Timpul Publishing House, Iași, 1997, pp. 123-124.
- [16] For details: Lect. Dr. Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, „Conceptia hinduistă de Trimūrți și triadologia creștină” (The Hindu concept of Trimūrți and Christian triadology), in: *Dionysiana*, year II, no. 1 (2008): *The monotheist Religions and their role in the society of ours days*, Ovidius University Press, Constanta, 2008, pp. 290-315.
- [17] For details: Frithjof SCHUON, *Despre unitatea transcendențială a religiilor (On transcendental unity of religions)*, transl. Anca Manolescu, foreword by André Scrima, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 120-129.

- [18] Vladimir LOSSKY, *Introducere în Teologia Ortodoxă (An Introduction to Orthodox Theology)*, foreword by Rev. Prof. Dumitru Gh. Popescu, transl. by Lidia and Remus Rus, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, p. 43. Incarnation and the Trinity are thus inseparable.
- [19] ARISTOTEL, *Organon*, vol. I, Translation, foreword, introduction and notes by Mircea Florian, Categories, ch. V, I, 2, 11-19, IRI Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 110 ff.
- [20] Vladimir LOSSKY, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de răsărit (Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church)*, foreword by Dumitru Stăniloae, transl. by Rev. Vasile Răducă, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 50.
- [21] Vladimir LOSSKY, *După chipul și după asemănarea lui Dumnezeu (In the image and likeness of God)*, transl. by Anca Manolache, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1998, p. 106.
- [22] A force that can be summed up noting that it is more or less exactly the equivalent of the Latin *substantia*. Alexander GOLITZIN, *Simeon Noul Teolog: viața, epoca, gândirea (Symeon the New Theologian: life, the age, thinking)*, in: St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discursuri teologice și etice, Scrieri I (Theological and ethical discourses, Writings I)*, *Introductory study and translation* Deacon. John I. Ică jr., Publisher Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 498.
- [23] Alexander GOLITZIN, *loc.cit.*, p. 501.
- [24] In the platonic thinking, concept of "persona" is an ontological impossibility, because the soul that provides lasting, human "being", is not always linked to concrete man, «individual»: he lives eternally, but he can get attached to another concrete body; he may be another "individuality", as if a revival. For Aristotle, things are exactly the opposite: the concept of person is an ontological impossibility by virtue of the fact that soul is inextricably linked to concrete, to the "individual": man is a concrete individuality, but persists only during his psychosomatic composition, for death definitively abolishes this given individuality. Ioannis ZIZIOLAS, *Ființa eclezială (Being as communion)*, transl. by Aurel Nae, Bizantină Publisher, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 22-23.
- [25] Cf. Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, *op.cit.*, p. 373.
- [26] Nikolai BERDIAEV, *Spirit și libertate. Încercare de filosofie creștină (Spirit and freedom. An attempt of Christian Philosophy)*, transl. by Stelian Lăcătușu, afterword by Gh. Vlăduțescu, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 102.
- [27] Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, *op.cit.*, p. 376.
- [28] Olivier CLÉMENT, „Realitatea biologică a trupului și transcendența Persoanei” (Biological reality of the body and transcendence of Person), in: *Bioetica și Taina Persoanei. Perspective ortodoxe (Bioethics and the Mystery of Person. Orthodox perspective)*, transl. by Nicoleta Petuhov, edit. by Tatiana Petrache, Byzantine Publishing, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 43-44. As early as the second century, St. Irenaeus wrote that the divine image and likeness of man are nothing but the Holy Spirit.
- [29] Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, *op.cit.*, pp. 377-378.
- [30] Cf. Ioannis ZIZIOLAS, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- [31] Vladimir LOSSKY, *Introducere în Teologia Ortodoxă*, p. 21.
- [32] Erich FRAUWALLNER, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, transl. by V.M. Bedekar, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984, p. xiii.