

## The Higher Evolution of Man

### Tape 78: Religion: Ethnic and Universal

I think most of you know that I was in the East for a period of some 20 years, mostly in India but also for a shorter period in Ceylon, Malaya, Sikkim, Nepal and a few other places. Some 12 years I happened to spend in Kalimpong, which at one time was very much in the news. Kalimpong is a small township situated in the foothills of the Himalayas some 4000 feet above sea level. And it is situated in a very interesting, even a very strategic spot; it is situated precisely at the juncture of India and Tibet and Nepal and Sikkim and Bhutan. To the south you have the great Indian sub-continent, to the north you have Sikkim and then Tibet, then away to the West there is Nepal, away to the East is Bhutan. So Kalimpong is right in the centre, right at the juncture of all these territories. So it is naturally a very cosmopolitan sort of place where one can meet in a matter of moments not only Indians, Nepalese and Sikkimese but Bhutanese, Tibetans, even Chinese, Europeans, even sometimes the odd American. It is a very cosmopolitan place.

So here some years ago, on the outskirts of this town, about two miles out of town, I established a small Vihara, a sort of hermitage, and this commanded (and often I remember this) a really magnificent view of the Himalayas. I remember as soon as I sat up in bed in the morning, even without sitting up maybe, I could look straight out through the window and there, above the foothills, above the mountains, I would see shining in the distance the snow peaks of the great Kanchenjunga range. At dawn this was a very, very beautiful sight because, first of all you would see them glimmering a sort of ghostly white and then as the sun rose they turned a brilliant crimson and then a glowing gold; and then the gold would die away and they would be left a dazzling white. And I saw this sort of sight almost every morning of the year, especially at this time of the year, which is Autumn in Kalimpong, when the skies are blue and clear and cloudless and when the peaks of the Himalayas shine forth even more brilliantly and vividly than usual. So it was here, with this sort of view before me, that I established this Vihara, this hermitage, and in this spot I studied and meditated and wrote books and received friends for many, many years. And every now and then, perhaps once or twice a year, I would go out on tour down to the Plains, down to the heat, down to the perspiration of India, and especially wander among the ex-Untouchables in Central and Western India, who had been converted to Buddhism. But I always made a point of being back in Kalimpong for the rainy season which, traditionally in Buddhist countries, is observed as a retreat. And this was my period of seclusion. During this period, for three to four months, I didn't step outside the Vihara, outside the hermitage. And not only was it for me a period of seclusion, it was also a period of reflection. If you haven't experienced the rainy season, it is very difficult to describe the sort of effect it has upon the mind. One doesn't get just an occasional shower of rain. The rain just comes falling down steadily, without intermission, day after day, night after night, and it falls down with a very gentle and soothing sound; it muffles every other sound. So you naturally feel in a very reflective, even in a very meditative mood.

So here was I, shut up in my Vihara, during the rainy season, with the rain falling all around, no visitors, just my few books, meditation, study, reflection. And at this time I used to take up and reflect upon all sorts of problems. Not exactly problems in the psychological sense but questions which required some sort of examination, some sort of elucidation, especially problems connected with Buddhism, history of Buddhism, Buddhist thought, Buddhist doctrine, and with the spiritual life generally. Sometimes, by dint of protracted reflection and thought during this rainy season retreat, one would succeed in solving or resolving one problem or another. But there was one problem I remember, there was one question, which kept coming up again and again, year after year, rainy season after rainy season, to which there appeared to be no answer and no solution, at least not for a very long time. And this question wasn't anything very abstract. It wasn't anything profoundly philosophical, deeply metaphysical, or anything like that. In a sense it was an historical, almost a sociological question; but one which had nevertheless all sorts of philosophical, social, religious and spiritual implications. It was, moreover, a question which arose quite naturally in the course of one's study of the history of Buddhism, especially in India. It was a question, too, which people very often used to ask me. Now, of course, you are wondering what was this question. I don't suppose anybody has any idea what it might have been. But the question was this: Why did Buddhism disappear from India? And when one thinks of it, considers it, tries to go into it, this is really quite a question. Buddhism didn't really disappear from India until the 11th or 12th century of our era. Buddhism began, as we all know, as the teaching of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, about the year 500 BC. And it flourished in India for upwards of 1500 years. It was at its height, at the height of its development and its influence from around 200 BC to around 400 or 500 AD. It was in the course of this period, during which it spread all over India, that it produced some of the greatest spiritual masters, some of the greatest spiritual teachers and thinkers that the world has ever seen, produced some of the greatest religious, and the greatest spiritual art and literature and so on. But after that glorious efflorescence we see only gradual, as though inevitable, decline and disappearance. Something, we may say, almost unprecedented in the history of religions in the world. Now why did this happen? Why was it that after 1500 years, Buddhism

apparently so suddenly, almost so catastrophically, disappeared from the face of India, disappeared from the Indian religious scene? Now as I mused on this question, as I reflected on this question, all those years, during the rainy season, I soon saw that there was no short, no simple answer to this question. No such answer was, in fact, possible. There is no one reason, no one factor responsible for the disappearance of Buddhism from the land of its origin. All sorts of factors, all sorts of reasons are involved, though admittedly some are more important than others. Not only that. As I thought over this question, as I reflected upon it, as I tried to go more and more deeply into it, I saw that the ramifications of this question extended very far beyond the history of Buddhism, very far beyond Buddhism itself. It was out of a consideration of some of these ramifications that I was led eventually to recognise the importance of the distinction between ethnic religion on the one hand and universal religion on the other.

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And this is of course our subject for tonight, RELIGION: ETHNIC AND UNIVERSAL. How this particular subject fits into our general evolutionary scheme of things, we shall see a little later on. Just for the moment, I want to remain with this question of why Buddhism disappeared from India. I want to deal, as briefly as I can, with some of the main reasons for its disappearance. This will help us to establish the nature of the distinction between Ethnic religion on the one hand and Universal religion on the other. It will also clarify to some extent the nature of the relationship between these two, ethnic and universal religion. And this in turn will pave the way for a general consideration of the characteristics of these two kinds of religion. Why then, we may ask, did Buddhism disappear from India? We can list some four or five main reasons, all of which are inter-connected. Now the order in which we deal with them is not very important, so I shall take them just as they come.

1. First of all, centralisation of monastic life. It may come as a surprise to some of you at least to learn that originally in Buddhism there was no such thing as monasticism, no such thing, that is to say, as coenobitical<sup>(1)</sup> monasticism, that is to say monks living permanently in monasteries and confined to one particular place. There was no monasticism in that sense. There were no monks, in fact, in that sense. There were only what were known as wanderers, *parivrajakas*, people wandering about from place to place, of course on foot. Not attached to anywhere, not tied anywhere, and living on alms. Just going to people's doors every day, once or twice, and just accepting whatever was offered to them in the way of food, whether cooked or uncooked. And this is how they used to pass their lives, just wandering from place to place, unattached, living on the alms of other people. During the rainy season, they took shelter. In India you can't go roaming around during the rainy season. The rains are far too heavy. So during the rainy season, these people just stayed sequestered in one place and they practised meditation, very often, during this period. They put up either in some mountain cave or in a hollow tree, we are told, or else in a hut in somebody's garden, or a little lean-to shed against the wall of somebody's house, and when the rains were over, forth they would go, they would start wandering again.

And they also memorised some simple sayings of the Buddha, very often in verse form, and as they roamed about they would chant these, recite these to themselves, and if two or three of them were going along the road together they would chant and recite together as they went along. Sometimes groups of them would congregate together, especially on the day of the Full Moon, and they would chant together whatever little verses and sayings they had memorised, they would sit in meditation, and that was their Full Moon day celebration. So in this way, in the Buddha's day, you had these little bands of wanderers, or individual wanderers also, just going about from place to place, and living in this very simple, this very unpretentious sort of way. But of monastic life, as we have known it in the West, there was nothing at all. There wasn't even at this stage any specifically monastic dress. All that the wanderers used to do was to take ordinary Indian lay dress, which was two single pieces of cloth - one to put round the waist and the other over the shoulder - and they discoloured them, with brown earth so that they weren't of any use to anyone else. And they would just go around in this way.

Now, as I have mentioned, they used to spend the rainy season retreat, a period of some three or four months, in one place. Now what happened after the Buddha's death was this. Certain wanderers used to get into the habit of returning to the same spot for the rainy season retreat every year. They would wander around, maybe many hundreds of miles, but by the time the rainy season came round again they would come back to the same spot, the same cave, or the same little hut in someone's garden. And they would get into the habit of spending every rainy season there, for a number of years in succession. Then after that another development took place. Some of the wanderers stopped wandering. Some of them apparently felt: What's the use of wandering about all the time? Why not stay in this little hut, not just during the rainy season, why not stay all the time? So during this stage of development, you get the wanderers settling down in the huts, the caves, the other little shelters, and staying there all the year round.

Once they were staying there all the year round, what happened? They found that the temporary shed or hut was no longer enough. So they started putting up buildings, permanent buildings, and as more and more people came they needed bigger and bigger buildings. So they started enlisting the support of the kings and other wealthy people, and obtaining grants of land, and in this way something more closely resembling what we, in the West, call monasticism developed. Not only that, we find that during this period 100, 200, 300 years after the death of the Buddha, the spiritual life itself became more and more identified not so much with the life of the lay community, not even so much with the life of the wanderers, but identified with monastic life in this coenobitical sense. And then again we find that as the centuries went by, there was a tendency for the monasteries, the mahaviharas as they were called, to become bigger and bigger and bigger, and eventually from sheltering just 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 monks, they came to shelter thousands of monks, all living together in enormous monastic institutions. The biggest of them all and the grandest of them all was at Nalanda in Bihar. And here, at its heyday, we find 14,000 monks living together, not exactly under one roof, but in one great complex of monastic buildings. We know very much about monastic life in Nalanda during the early Buddhist Middle Ages because the great Chinese pilgrim Huen Chan (???) visited Nalanda, studied at Nalanda, became a professor at Nalanda, in the 6th century. He wrote, rather he dictated memoirs, giving a very detailed, very vivid picture of the monastic life of Nalanda and the academic life of Nalanda during his stay. So in this way we see that hundreds of years after the Buddha's death, certainly by the 2nd or 3rd century of the Christian era, monastic life, Buddhist monastic life in India had become very, very highly centralised. There weren't lots of little hermitages and monasteries dotted all over the country. There tended to be just a few very, very big ones containing practically all the monks. Whoever became seriously interested in Buddhism in India, especially during the later period, tended to become a monk. And whoever became a monk joined a big monastery. So we see that in this way Buddhism itself became centralised in these large monastic institutions which were, of course, dependent upon royal patronage. And this meant that, inasmuch as the monks were all centralised, in the big monasteries which were patronised and supported by the kings, the monks and the monastic life generally became more and more cut off from the life of the people. And we shall see the consequences of this in just a minute.

2. A second reason for the disappearance of Buddhism from India: dependence on and eventual failure of royal patronage. The individual wanderer, wandering about collecting his food every day, could depend on the individual householder. He could just go to one single person's house, and he would get enough for the day, and that was that. Then even when small hermitages or viharas were established in the vicinity of a little village or town, they could depend for support on the village community. They weren't too much for the village community to manage, to support. But suppose one wanted to build, to establish and develop a very large monastery, then to whom could one turn for support? One couldn't appeal for funds over the radio or through the newspapers because there were no such things in those days. So to whom could one turn? Only to the king, it was only the king who had enough money to support ventures of this kind. So we find that from the very beginning in India, Buddhism tended to seek, to enlist the support of the kings. Now we find that very often they succeeded brilliantly and there were names of certain kings who were very distinguished in this respect, celebrated for the very munificent support they gave Buddhism, especially in the way of endowing and maintaining huge monasteries. We remember in this connection the names of *Asoka*, of *Kaniska*, of *Harsha* and so on.

And sometimes we find that Buddhism succeeded in gaining the support of whole dynasties, the *Gupta* dynasty and the *Pala* dynasty in North-eastern India, and the *Sattavahanas* in the South in the Deccan. Though this support was not always exclusive. Many kings supported Buddhism but supported other religions as well. And of course the example of the king was followed by lesser folk. Whatever the king does, of course everybody else does. So if he supports Buddhism, then other less wealthy people also would tend to support it. Now unfortunately this strength of Buddhism was also its weakness. You had these enormous monastic institutions, supported by royal patronage, but kings are fickle creatures. Put not your trust in princes. And sometimes the kings changed their religion, they switched over, very often for entirely political reasons, and they became sometimes violent Shiva-ites or fanatical Jains, didn't support Buddhism, even started persecuting it. Or sometimes, unfortunately, a Buddhist dynasty just died out, just dwindled away. But what happened, in either case, was that support was withdrawn and Buddhism, in the sense of monastic Buddhism, suffered.

3. Third factor: the hostility of the Brahmins. Now who were these Brahmins? Some of you may not know. The Brahmins were the hereditary priesthood of orthodox Hinduism. And, of course, the Brahmins and Brahminism were in existence in India long before the time of the Buddha. The Brahmins traditionally claimed a monopoly of religious knowledge. They specialised, as it were, in religion. That was their profession. And they claimed also the exclusive right to teach, whether religious subjects or even secular subjects, what we would call arts and sciences. You couldn't be a religious teacher unless you were a Brahmin. The Brahmins were very strong on this. It was one of the things on which they criticised the

Buddha, that being a Ksatriya, a warrior, he dared to teach religion, which they thought was all wrong.

And the Brahmins had very strong notions indeed about their own superiority to the rest of mankind. We find them claiming, for instance, that they, the Brahmins, were born at the very beginning of things, at the dawn of creation, out of the head of Brahma, Brahma being the personal god; whereas the Ksatriyas, the fighters, were born from his shoulders, the Vaisyas or traders were born from his thighs, and the Sudras, the workers - that is the vast majority - from his feet. And we find that throughout the history of India, the Brahmins have always been a very proud, a very exclusive, a very haughty and a very powerful body of men indeed. They have always claimed social precedence and a deciding voice in all political affairs. In Ancient India the Brahmins also considered themselves above the law, a Brahmin could not really be punished, and certainly a Brahmin could not be put to death by anybody regardless of the crime he committed. This law was in force in Nepal until quite recent times. During my own visit there some years ago, it was still in force.

Now it is not surprising that these Brahmins, the hereditary priesthood of orthodox Hinduism, were rather hostile to the Buddha because the Buddha didn't like the caste system, didn't agree with the caste system, didn't agree that some were superior by birth and others inferior by birth. The Buddha taught very clearly, very unmistakably that a man's worth depended not on his birth but on his deeds, his actions, on his character, on his spiritual attainments. So the Brahmins were not very happy, on the whole, with the Buddha or with his teaching. Sometimes they used to come to him, wherever he was sitting - under a tree or in a cave - with tricky questions. The Pali scriptures represent the Brahmins as sort of plotting among themselves and talking it over. One says, "I shall go to him and put such and such a question. And there are only two possible answers to this question. If he answers in this way, we'll catch him out like this. If he answers in that way, we'll catch him out like that. This way he won't fail to escape." So in this way they plotted and planned and came in front of the Buddha, very often with mock humility, as if to learn something, and they put these questions. But of course the Buddha, being the Buddha, invariably answered the questions and the Brahmins were invariably discomfited. It rather reminds one of the scribes and pharisees coming to Christ with their questions and expecting to catch him out. Now the fact that the Buddha, like Christ, wasn't caught out, ever, didn't make him any more popular with the Brahmins. But for the time being there was nothing that they could do about it. There was the Buddha, even they had to recognise his great superiority, intellectually and spiritually; they could do nothing about it during his own lifetime or for a long time afterwards. But they bided their time. It is characteristic of all hereditary priesthoods that they have a very long memory, like the elephant they never forget. And the Brahmins of India certainly never forgot and they certainly never forgave Buddhism.

You must remember, by the way, that the Brahmins were householders. They weren't monks. They lived at home with their wives and families. They officiated at various social and religious ceremonies for other lay people, such as name-giving, giving the first rice, writing the letters of the alphabet. You find in orthodox Hinduism there are scores and scores of ceremonies, your whole life is marked out by ceremonies. As soon as you are born, there has to be a ceremony of purification, then there is a ceremony for giving you a name, and then when the child is given rice for the first time there's another ceremony. Every time there is a ceremony, you have to call in the Brahmin priest because he's got the monopoly, he's the only one who can perform the ceremony, the only one who has the right to pronounce the sacred words which make the ceremony a success. And of course you have to pay him for that. That's his *dakshana* or his fee. So this is what we find. In this way the Brahmins were in close touch with the lay community, from birth until death and after death. Even after death you weren't free from the Brahmin priest; you had to call him in or go to him to perform your after-death ceremonies and even now in India people do this and they believe that unless the Brahmin has performed the *pindadarn* and the *shraad* ceremonies the soul, the spirit of your father, grandfather or whatever, would not, cannot go to heaven. Many Hindus very firmly believe this and these ceremonies are still kept up very much to the benefit of the Brahmins. If you go to Benares, even now, you can see this - you've seen them in the slides - the Brahmins sitting under these magnificent umbrellas and people coming to them on the steps of the ghats and people paying them to perform these after-death ceremonies. So in this way we find that the Brahmins, staying at home, living in the villages with their own families, performing ceremonies for the lay people, were in very close touch with the lay community all the time.

But as we saw a little while ago, Buddhism was becoming more and more monastic, more and more centralised on the large monasteries away from the lay community. In this way, we may say, a very dangerous situation developed. The Brahmins gradually became dominant in the social and religious life of the community at large, whereas the Buddhist monks remained confined to large monasteries, supported by the remaining Buddhist kings or kings sympathetic to Buddhism. This was how things developed.

4. The fourth factor or reason for the disappearance of Buddhism from India: partial absorption of

Buddhism by Hinduism. Now we may say that really there is no such thing as Hinduism. Hinduism is not a religion in the sense that Buddhism is, if one can even call Buddhism itself a religion. Hinduism has no one single founder. We may say that it is the sum total of the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the Indian people, from pre-historic times right down to the present day.

Now the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, lived and taught in a Hindu environment. He was a New Man appearing among the Old Men, that is to say until the appearance of more New Men as the result of his own teaching. Now by virtue of his Enlightenment, by virtue of the fact that he was the Buddha, the Enlightened One, by virtue of the fact that his Enlightenment was not just wisdom but was also compassion, he had something to communicate, something to tell, some message if you like, something that he wanted to share with humanity, share with the people around him. But how was he to communicate this, to put it across to them? Through what medium? Obviously, even though his experience, his Enlightenment experience, his Transcendental experience, his experience of Reality, was unprecedented, was new, was unique, he still had to use the old language as soon as he opened his mouth to speak; not only the old language in the merely linguistic sense but in the sense of language of thought, language of ideas, language of concepts, of attitudes. In other words, to put it simply, Buddhism has to speak the language of Hinduism and it is important to understand this, very much of what we think of as Buddhist is only Hindu, or is only Indian, and has in fact nothing to do with Buddhism. You've all encountered these long lists, lists of doctrinal terms, when you have been reading Buddhist scriptures, whether in Pali or Sanskrit or translations. Again and again and again you come across long lists of terms, the 5 of this, the 8 of something else, the 24 of something else, the 52 of something else, the 89 of something else, sometimes Buddhist literature just seems to consist of these lists, and lists of lists, and lists of lists of lists, and in this way many canonical scriptures are built up. They are great massive lists, one list piled on top of another like Pelion on Ossa. And one might think this is Buddhism, this is characteristic of Buddhism, this is just how Buddhism is. Buddhism is lists, it is an essential part of Buddhism; it is the way Buddhism looks at everything, it sees everything as lists, lists on earth, lists in heaven, lists everywhere.

But this has nothing at all to do with Buddhism, nothing at all to do with the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. This is the Indian mind at work, not a Transcendental mind but a lower mind, a conditioned mind, the Indian mind at work. The Indian mind loves tabulations, and so the Indian mind got busy also on Buddhism. It was a useful way of remembering things but we think that this is Buddhism, but here again it is Buddhism speaking the language of Hinduism. In the same way, much of what we think of as Zen, this wonderful word Zen, has nothing to do with Zen whatever: a certain way of sitting, cushions - a certain shape and size, a particular way of chanting. These have nothing to do with Zen at all, this is all merely Japanese. Or we might even come nearer home and we might say that much of what we think of as Christianity is nothing to do with Christianity at all, in the sense of the actual teaching of Christ. It is either Mediterranean Paganism of Roman Imperialism, nothing to do with Christianity.

Now when Buddhism uses the language of Hinduism, Hinduism itself changes. It is very important to notice this. Hinduism itself changes just as when a great poetic genius like Shakespeare uses the English language, the English language itself is permanently changed, permanently enriched. How is it that in modern English we can interchange all the parts of speech? This is due mainly to Shakespeare, it was Shakespeare who did this on a grand scale. And in this way he made the English language more elastic, more expressive than it ever had been before. So in the same way, when Buddhism speaks the language of Hinduism, Hinduism itself is changed. In other words, the appearance of Buddhism, the appearance of the Buddha and his teaching, in the midst of Hinduism, profoundly influenced, profoundly modified Hinduism itself; in fact, we may say, transformed it. Hinduism, as we know it today, is not the old Vedic Hinduism of the time of the Buddha. Hinduism as we know it today is a quite different thing and it developed largely as a result of the stimulus given to it by Buddhism over 1500 years.

This is very well illustrated by the history of Indian logic. This is rather a classic case because it is so clear. Indian logic, Hindu logic, was a very primitive affair originally and along came the Buddhist logicians and criticised it. Then the Hindu logicians responded. They criticised the Buddhist criticisms. This went on for 1000 years. A ding-dong battle between rival schools of logicians, Hindu and Buddhist, right down to the time of the disappearance of Buddhism from India. The battle continues in Tibet. It continues even as between Buddhist logicians and Marxist logicians, it goes on right down to the present time. So what happened in the field of logic, this ding-dong battle between the Hindu and the Buddhist schools, the one sharpening and refining the other and provoking it as it were to higher and higher flights, this happened in practically all other fields as well. And of course the whole process was sharpened by Brahminical rivalry and eventually the Brahmins, when they saw which way the wind was blowing, started deliberately borrowing from Buddhism. It is for this reason that we speak of the partial absorption of Buddhism by

Hinduism, as more and more material was taken over by Hinduism from Buddhism. It is only a partial absorption because the real spirit of Buddhism was not, and it could not be, assimilated. The caste system with all its inequalities, all its injustices, remained intact and, of course, that supremely important consideration - the supremacy of the Brahmins - was ensured.

Now we can see very well how the position now stands. Buddhism had become centralised, in the large monasteries. It was thus dependent on the support of a dwindling number of Buddhist kings. It was cut off from the lay community, and the lay community itself was increasingly under the influence of the Brahmins. And the Brahmins had succeeded in borrowing more and more from Buddhism. So it's obvious that the Buddhists in India were heading for trouble. And, of course, the trouble came and it came with:

5. Our fifth factor, the Muslim invasion. The Muslim invasion of India is part of the general political history of India but it had a very profound, a very decisive effect on the fortunes of Buddhism. The Muslims as we all know are great iconoclasts<sup>(2)</sup>. For a Muslim to see an image is to smash it. I remember when I was in Pune once, I was staying with friends who had a Muslim servant. He gathered that I was not a Hindu but he knew nothing about Buddhism and he didn't realise that I was a Buddhist monk. To him I was just an Englishman. So he was telling me about the Hindu-Muslim riots in Bihar from which he came, which had occurred some years before, and he described how he and a party of Muslim friends had entered a Hindu temple. He said, speaking of the Hindu images very gleefully, "We smashed them to pieces". And from the way he said this you could tell the feeling against the image which the Muslim has and it is very, very strong. When a Muslim sees an image, whether its a Buddha, a Hindu god or goddess, or maybe a Christian image of the Madonna or a saint, a Muslim feels very, very angry inside. He feels that God is being affronted. He has an irresistible urge to tear it down, to smash it to pieces, rather like the Puritan iconoclasts in the 17th century in this country. So when the Muslim hordes poured down into India, what did they see? They saw great temples, temples full of images, monasteries full of images; and they went almost mad it seems. They indulged in an orgy, a frenzy of destruction wherever they went. They smashed images, destroyed and desecrated temples right and left, wherever they found them. Not only Buddhist temples and images but Hindu ones as well. It is one of the saddest sights in India nowadays to go from one ancient Buddhist site to another (all these sites have now been excavated) and you find beautiful images which have been dug up from the earth but they are all mutilated: minus the nose, minus the arms, minus the feet, minus the head, everything minus. This is the work of the Muslim invaders, the Muslim iconoclasts. And the Buddhists were particularly vulnerable to the process and, of course, the great monastic centres were destroyed almost at once. They stood out in the landscape. India is a flat country, especially that great Gangetic valley is flat, and from miles away you could see these great buildings, many-storeyed buildings looming up, with these hordes of yellow-robed monks, and these all were destroyed. Nalanda itself was finally sacked in the year 1197. According to a Turkish historian, thousands of monks of Nalanda were burned alive, thousands were beheaded and the burning of the great library at Nalanda, famous all over the Buddhist world, all over the East, continued for several months together. And in this way Buddhism disappeared from India. The Brahmins of course were left in possession of the field. Not in exclusive possession because Islam also took root.

Now I have gone into this in some detail, not full detail by any means, for two reasons: first of all, because of the intrinsic interest of the subject, why Buddhism disappeared from India. And second because, as I said at the beginning, the story of the disappearance of Buddhism from India illustrates the nature of the distinction between Ethnic religion on the one hand and Universal religion on the other, as well as the general relationship between them.

Now it is time that we explored this subject [this distinction between Ethnic and Universal religion] in more general terms and also more deeply. And in so doing, our main point of departure will be the fourth factor in the disappearance of Buddhism from Indian, i.e. the partial absorption of Buddhism by Hinduism; or rather we shall be giving a more detailed consideration to some of the issues involved in this factor. Now let us try to list some general characteristics:

1. of Ethnic religion, then
2. of Universal religion.

I am not going to define the word 'religion' itself. I am going to let, perhaps, a definition emerge as we proceed.

#### 1. Characteristics of Ethnic religion:

(a) As the term suggests, ethnic religion is the religion of an *ethnos*, of a race, of a people. That is to say, of a group of people related, at least originally related, by blood. And this particular group, this ethnic group, is usually tied to a particular locality, a particular geographical area. And we find therefore that ethnic religion tends to be identified with that locality and with that area, especially with the culture of that area. We'll see how this works out in concrete cases a little later on. We find also that an ethnic religion is collective. It is not anything pertaining to the individual as such but to the human collectivity. This collectiveness is, perhaps, the main, the basic characteristic of ethnic religions. One which, as it were, summarises all the others. Ethnic religion is the religion of the group as group, and of the individual only indirectly. It is the religion of the individual, that is to say the group member (not the free individual, the non-group member), only in so far as he is a member of the group; the group being the family group, the tribal group, the clan group and so on. In this way ethnic religion is collective.

(b) Ethnic religions have, we find also, no one single founder. You can't point, in the case of the ethnic religion, to any one person and say, this person is the founder of this religion. In the same way there are no individual followers. You don't follow an ethnic religion because you are an individual following that religion. You follow it, as I have said, only as a member of the group, the tribe, the clan, the family.

(c) And of course you have to be born into this group. This is another characteristic of ethnic religion. You can't join it, you have to be born into it. Hence there is no such thing as conversion.

(d) An ethnic religion, we find, invariably affirms the values of the group. It affirms collective values, it doesn't affirm individual values. It exalts values which ensure the survival of the group as a biological, as an anthropological entity. We therefore find that ethnic religion emphasises and indeed consecrates such things as marriage, family and tribal relationships in general, submission to the group, to the Elders, and authority.

There are some other characteristics of ethnic religion, too, but these which I have indicated will suffice for our present purpose. These are the general characteristics of ethnic religion.

## 2. Characteristics of Universal religion:

The characteristics of Universal religion are the exact opposite of ethnic religion.

(a) Universal religion is universal. It is not the religion of the group, not the religion of the human collectivity. Universal religion is the religion of any individual, anywhere, at any time. That is, it is at least potentially the religion of any such individual. For this reason, a universal religion is never tied to any particular locality. It is never identified with any particular culture. It may embrace cultures, work through cultures, express itself in cultures, but is never in principle identified with any one of them. Above all, universal religion is individual. This is its basic characteristic. One follows a universal religion as an individual, for oneself alone, by oneself alone. Others may happen to be following it, but one does not follow because they are following or because one belongs to a group that follows. One follows on account of one's own individual decision and responsibility.

(b) We find, therefore, that universal religions all have individual founders. That is to say, at the very source, at the very origin, at the very fountainhead of the tradition which they represent, there stand those who have become True Individuals, New Men, and who encourage others to become likewise.

(c) Now truly, one cannot be born into a universal religion. You can't belong to it just because your family or your group belong to it, or your mother or father belong to it. Into a universal religion you must be personally converted and converted by virtue of a change of life.

(d) Therefore we find that universal religion affirms individual values. It does not affirm collective values. Indeed we may say that it negates collective values. Universal religions negate such things as marriage, tribal relationships and ties of blood and soil. It negates them and it passes beyond them. It negates the idea of submission to the group or to other more powerful members of the group, of the family, the tribe, the

clan, etc. Universal religion, therefore, in a word, negates authority. It exalts whatever enhances individuality. It emphasises freedom, emphasises independence, emphasises personal responsibility, individual responsibility.

These then are the characteristics of universal religion.

Now neither ethnic religion nor universal religion exist in the abstract. Both are embodied, each of them, in concrete individual religious systems. So now let us just cast a glance at some of the historical religions, one by one, and try to classify them as to whether they are ethnic or universal.

But before we do that, let's take a look at our chart because we mustn't forget that in the midst of all this we are still concerned with the Higher Evolution of Man. In our first lecture we saw that evolution is the most important concept of modern thought. We saw that it enables us to understand the whole of existence, cosmic and human, as consisting of one gigantic process of development from lower to higher levels of being and organisation. We saw, too, that Man, ourselves, Man is included in this process. And we saw that we can study Man in two ways, either in terms of what he has developed out of (this is the Lower Evolution) or in terms of what he will develop into, is developing into (this is the Higher Evolution). Now on our chart, the Lower Evolution is represented by Section 0 up to point 2; then the Higher Evolution is represented by the Section 2 up to point Infinity. Now starting from the bottom, Point 0 represents the starting point of the whole evolutionary process. Point 1 represents the point at which consciousness, i.e. specifically human consciousness, emerges. Point 2 is the point at which self consciousness or awareness emerges. Point 3 is the point at which transcendental awareness emerges, that is to say awareness of Reality; and the highest point of all, crowned by the symbol for infinity, represents the point of Nirvana, the Transcendental, the Ultimate, the Absolute Buddha-nature, whatever you may care to call it. And these 5 points altogether divide the whole evolutionary process into 4 sections or stages: (A) the infra-human stage, (B) the human stage, primitive and civilised, (C) the ultra-human stage and (D) the supra-human or trans-human stage. In this way we saw, in the course of the first lecture, the whole process of evolution is covered.

How does all this work out in terms of our present lecture? What place do ethnic religion and universal religion occupy in the total scale of human evolution? This isn't difficult to see. The basic characteristic of ethnic religion is that it is collective. Ethnic religion therefore belongs to the Lower Evolution, though it has branches in the Higher Evolution, specifically branches in the ultra-human stage of the Higher Evolution.

The basic characteristic of universal religion is that it is an individual affair. Universal religion therefore belongs to the Higher Evolution, though it has roots deep down in the Lower Evolution, specifically in the human stage and the stage of primitive and civilised Man.

There is also a correspondence in terms of last week's lecture: between folk art on the one hand and Ethnic religion on the other, as well as between the Fine Arts on the one hand and Universal religion on the other. But we have no time tonight to pursue this question further. We have to push on with our classification of religions.

1. HINDUISM: this very obviously is an ethnic religion. It is the sum total of the beliefs and practices of the people of India. It is confined to that country, that sub-continent. It is found elsewhere only where one has Indian colonists, where Indian culture has been transplanted. Hinduism is very much identified with Indian culture. One can hardly say, in fact, where Indian culture ends and Hinduism begins. It is the religion of all the Indian people, with the exception of those who have been converted to one or another of the universal religions. And, of course, it is collective not individual. It has no single founder, even though a large number of great personalities are revered within Hinduism. Again, one has to be born a Hindu. You can't be converted to Hinduism.

In this connection there is a very interesting story about the great emperor Akbar<sup>(3)</sup>. He was really of Muslim descent of very mixed parentage. He was a very broad-minded, liberal-minded man. One day he thought, apparently, that he ought to become converted to Hinduism as the majority of his subjects were Hindus and he probably thought it would be a good thing to do politically. So what happened? He called, invited, the Pundits of Benares to meet him. The Pundits of Benares are the most learned, most scholarly and most orthodox of all the Brahmins of India. So Akbar invited, according to the history books, the Brahmins of Benares to come and meet him, I think it was at Agra. And he discussed this question with them. He said, "I would like to become a Hindu. So please tell me how it is to be done." So we are told that the Brahmins, the Pundits of Benares went away and they returned with a donkey. The Brahmins are very clever, they have a sense of humour, you must admit. And they said to Akbar, "Your Majesty, please



make this donkey a horse." So Akbar said, "But that's impossible. He's born a donkey. How can he possibly become a horse?" So they said, "Your Majesty, you have been born a non-Hindu. How can you possibly be made into a Hindu? There is no way of doing it." So this was the way, we are told, in which Akbar did not become a Hindu. He remained a Muslim and India continued to be ruled by this Muslim dynasty.

So you can't be converted to Hinduism. This is still the case. Hinduism, of course, therefore affirms group values. It stresses very strongly caste solidarity and the performance of caste duties. In the eyes of orthodox Hinduism, you are not an individual, you are the member of a caste. You can't get away from that caste. In India, it is practically impossible not to have a caste, even if you are not a Hindu. I remember when, in my own wandering days in South India when I was going about from place to place on foot for about two years, the question I was asked everywhere I went in South India, in every village, by every person I met, "What is your caste?" And I would say, "Well: (1) I'm a Buddhist and Buddhists don't believe in caste; and (2) I'm English, we don't have any caste system back home in England. So I have no caste. And they would always say, "But that's impossible. Everybody must have a caste. You can't not have a caste." And they always used to think: he must be very low caste and he's concealing it because he's ashamed of the fact. This is what they thought. You must have a caste. And they would sometimes become very agitated over this and very upset and disturbed, that you had tried to escape from the net of the caste system and to be a free individual, just a human being without a caste. To their way of thinking, you had to belong to the Brahmin caste or the Vaisya caste or the Sudra caste. Or to any other of the 2000 castes and sub-castes of India, of Hinduism. You had to have one. Even Christians, who don't belong to the caste system really as they are not Hindus, have been given a caste in India. The Anglo-Indians have been given a caste and been embraced within this overall structure. The Jains have been given a caste, a sub-caste of the (mawlawiys??), the Vaisyas. So this is the tendency in Hinduism. You cannot be an individual, you are a member of a group. You have your existence only through the group and Hinduism affirms group values.

In Hinduism, it is a sin not to propagate the human species. Here again, group values are being affirmed, to carry on the tribe, the family. And we are told in some of the Hindu religious books that if a Brahmin, especially, leaves his daughter unmarried after puberty, then he's guilty of as many murders as potential children she might have had. And they take this very seriously. This is or was one of the reasons in India for marrying girls off as soon as they reached the age of puberty. Otherwise the father was guilty of the murder of their potential children.

Hinduism, again, as an ethnic religion, lays very strong emphasis upon worldly prosperity. In the Vedas, which are the main scriptures of ancient Hinduism, we find there are scores of prayers for cows, the Brahmins were always after cows because they represented wealth and there are very interesting episodes and anecdotes where certain Brahmins were represented as doing things for certain kings and the kings ask, "What now can I give you?" and the Brahmin would say, "A thousand cows, your Majesty." In this way they would accumulate thousands and thousands of cows representing wealth. And there was, and still is, this emphasis, very strongly, in Hinduism. So this goes to make it very much an ethnic religion.

2. **BUDDHISM:** It is equally clear that Buddhism is a universal religion, because the truth taught by Buddhism is to be followed and experienced by each one for himself, individually. And this can be done at any place, at any time. Buddhism isn't tied to any particular locality. It spread throughout the Far East; it didn't remain confined to India like Hinduism. It spread all over the East and is beginning to spread also in the West. It isn't identified with any particular culture.

Of course one cannot be born a Buddhist. Buddhist is as Buddhist does. One becomes a Buddhist only by practising the teaching and this finds outward expression in the act of Going for Refuge. Then again, we find Buddhism negating collective values. Buddhism encourages one to cut off from home, from the family, from the tribe, even from the nation. It stresses individual values like mindfulness, awareness, self-responsibility and has no time at all for authoritarianism. Sometimes friends of mine ask me, "Who tells you what to do? Who sent you to London, who told you that you had to stay there and carry on Buddhist activities?" They imagine that there is some great Superior sitting up somewhere in the East, rather like the Pope in Rome, and ordering us all about to go here and go there, to do this and do that. So I say, "Well, nobody ordered me to do this, no-one tells me to stay here. It is my own free decision." This is the way Buddhism is organised - or rather isn't organised. As soon as you have had your training, ten years of it at least or even five years would do at a pinch, you're free to go out and do what you want to do. You've no Ghostly Superior, no Pope, not even a Bishop, not even a Father Superior. You have your elders and your teachers whose advice you will ask from time to time, but they never attempt to control you, or dictate to you. If you want to go and meditate in the jungle you can do it. No-one will say anything. If you want to go and study further, do that. If you want to go and preach, do that. If you want to paint pictures of the Buddha, do that. So long as you are occupied with Buddhism in some way or other,

everybody is perfectly happy and you are not shifted around like a little ecclesiastical pawn on the ecclesiastical chess board. This sort of thing doesn't happen.

So there is no time for Authoritarianism in Buddhism; and Buddhism is certainly not concerned with the propagation of the Race. It leaves that very much to the ethnic religions. So Buddhism, we may say, probably represents universal religion in a very pure form. Just as Hinduism represents ethnic religion in a very pure form.

Let's come on now to some of the other religions:

3. CONFUCIANISM: Confucius himself was undoubtedly a New Man though, if we may say so perhaps, not a New Man of the very highest type. And his actual teaching so far as it is recorded has very strong ethnic characteristics. In any case it is confined to China and rather identified with Chinese culture or at least with certain important aspects of Chinese culture, not quite with all of them. And Confucianism stresses very much group relationships and responsibilities. It stresses things like filial piety: that from your own birth to the time of your father and mother's death you should be under their control. In a sense you never really grow up. Confucianism also stresses loyalty to the Ruler. It stresses civic duties and responsibilities etc. But at the same time, Confucius did very definitely inculcate some individual values such as self-respect, mindfulness of one's own actions and mindfulness of and for other people. He also stressed very much independence of judgement. You were not bound to serve a bad Ruler, for instance. But on the whole, we may say, Confucianism is an ethnic religion and perhaps in the course of time it became even more ethnic than it was originally in Confucius' own time.

4. TAOISM: Taoism, one must admit, is a rather curious case. It is confined to China and it is identified to some extent with Chinese culture but, potentially I think we may say, Taoism is a universal religion. But unfortunately it very quickly degenerated. It was certainly highly individual, not to say individualistic, certainly in the text known as the Tao Te Ching. One might even say that Taoism in its original primitive form is anarchistic. It is opposed to civilisation as such, to the collective. It wants to give up the refinements of civilisation, wants to go back to primitive simplicity. It preaches a return to nature, to naturalness. But sometimes it seems to advocate a return from the collective to the pre-collective, that is to say to primitive human existence before the time of the River Valley civilisations etc., rather than an advance from the collective to the New Man. Nevertheless, we may say, that its cosmic intuitions, its cosmic insights as we may call them are of value at all levels of human evolution, whether lower or higher. We could probably regard Taoism as a quasi-ethnic system which teaches advance to the new in terms of retreat to the old. For this reason perhaps, Taoism never really got started. If we want to characterise it at its best, we can call it a transcendental primitivism. And it remains, still, for many people the solace of the lonely individualist.

5. SHINTO: Shinto, literally, means 'the Way of the Gods'. The 'Gods' of course are the gods of Japan, gods of the Land of the Rising Sun, and we are told in Japanese history, or Japanese mythology - at least the Japanese take it seriously - that the gods created Japan first before the rest of the world. First of all came Japan and after that all the other countries were created. So Shinto we can say very definitely is an ethnic religion. No need to go into this very far. Its relationship with Buddhism, by the way, is a very interesting and instructive chapter in the history of comparative religion. But we have no time to discuss it now.

6. ZOROASTRIANISM: Very definitely this is a universal religion but again with some ethnic features. Zoroastrianism never spread very much beyond the boundaries of the Persian Empire, though it did have a single founder, Hespisima (??) Zarathustra who on the whole stressed individual rather than collective values. And it is perhaps significant that he was strongly opposed by the Magi, i.e. the hereditary priests of the old Persian ethnic religion; just as the Buddha was opposed by the Brahmins.

7. JUDAISM: Judaism very definitely is an ethnic religion even though later on in its history it developed some universal features. It is confined to a single, blood-related (in principle) group, that is the Jewish people. And it has of course a very strong identification with a particular area, with Palestine. And it is very significant that after 2000 years the Jews returned, some of them at least, to Palestine. No Western Buddhist one might say, certainly no English Buddhist, would think in terms of returning to North-Eastern India just because that was where Buddhism originated. Here you can begin to see the great difference between an ethnic and a universal religion, a difference of perspective. Now the ethnic religion is comparatively identified with, and universal religion not identified with, a particular geographical area. In Judaism, Moses and the prophets are revered but there is no one single founder of the religion. And of course, again, Judaism, like Hinduism, stresses collective values. It emphasises the importance of the family. Traditionally, in Judaism you can't be a Rabbi, a religious teacher, unless you are married, unless

you have at least one child. And on the whole there is no such thing as conversion to Judaism, certainly not in the old days, even though it seems to be changing now, especially in the United States and among what are called Reformed Jews, though not among the Orthodox Jews.

8. CHRISTIANITY: This is, of course, obviously a universal religion so far as the actual teaching of Christ himself is concerned; it is not a group religion. Christianity addresses itself to the individual. It is not confined to any particular area, not confined to any particular culture and we know that it has spread over practically the whole earth. It has, of course, a single founder, Christ, and of course one cannot really be born a Christian. One becomes a Christian, strictly speaking, by virtue of a spiritual re-birth. And the rite of baptism is only a symbol of this process. Christianity, in the sense of the teaching of Christ, affirms individual values. And we may say that Christianity attacks, positively attacks, group values even more vigorously than Buddhism itself does. We find, for instance, Christ saying that if a man is not ready to give up mother and father then he is not worthy to be his disciple. And then again, we know that well-known episode when his mother stood at the door and his attention was called to that and he went to her and said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" He cut off connection completely from mother, father, family, from tribe, and his true family was the family of those who were following his teaching; his spiritual brothers and spiritual sisters, spiritual sons and spiritual daughters. No need, I think, to insist on these points. Christianity, we may say, is clearly a universal religion in the fullest sense of the term. What has been made of it in the course of centuries is, of course, a different matter.

9. ISLAM: This is a universal religion with some ethnic features, has a single founder, Mohammed. It is not confined to any particular locality or identified with any particular culture. It has spread, practically, all over the world. On the whole, Islam stresses individual values, even though in Islam the individual is not entirely emancipated from the group, especially not emancipated from the family. There is no monastic life in Islam, for instance. But there are some mitigating factors. In Islam, the head of the family enjoys freedom to the extent that the family submit to him unconditionally. But this is not, we may say, really true freedom because it is based upon the submission of other people, not on one's own free individuality.

Now there are many other religions that I would like to comment on, especially for instance Manichaeism<sup>(4)</sup>, but there is no time. I must just barely mention the religions of Ancient Greece and Rome and of the Teutonic and Celtic peoples. None of them have special names but of course they are all ethnic religions.

Now having classified religions as either ethnic or universal, as belonging primarily to the higher evolution or to the lower evolution, it is time we started drawing a few conclusions and making a few observations of a general nature, before we close. First of all, we must notice one fact, that is a universal religion always arises in the context of an ethnic religion. A universal religion never appears out of the blue, never appears among very primitive people. It appears in the context of a fairly well-developed ethnic religion. Buddhism for instance arises in the midst of Hinduism, and even when it went to China it, as it were, grafted itself onto Taoism and Confucianism, especially onto Taoism. And it did the same thing with Shinto in Japan. Then suppose we take the case of Christianity which arose in a context of Judaism. Just the same with Islam which arose in the context of Judaism though it was also influenced to some extent by Christianity. We could also cite Zoroastrianism which arose in a context of Magian religion.

So we can not formulate on the basis of these facts a general law, a general principle, which is that whereas an ethnic religion may or may not give birth to a universal religion, a universal religion always arises or emerges on the basis of an ethnic religion. There are three great examples of this sort of relationship:

1. Buddhism arising on the basis of Hinduism
2. Christianity arising on the basis of Judaism
3. Islam arising on the basis of Judaism

These three universal religions arise on the basis of an ethnic religion. We may say that the religions making up each pair are continuous as it were with each other, the universal with the ethnic religion, just as the higher evolution is continuous with the lower evolution. This is illustrated very clearly especially in the case of Christianity. We find, as you all know, the Old Testament, representing Judaism, bound up with the New Testament, representing Christianity itself, in one and the same Bible; the latter continuous with the former even though it goes quite beyond it. Now at this particular point, quite a number of different lines of investigation open out. We can't pursue them all and we can't pursue any of them very systematically but I want to touch, before we do conclude, on at least a few of them because they disclose insights and perspectives of very great importance indeed.

First of all, as we saw, Universal religion speaks the language of the ethnic religion in the midst of which

it was born. For example, Buddhism speaks the language of Karma and Rebirth, of Hindu cosmology and psychology. Similarly, Christianity speaks the language of Messianism<sup>(5)</sup>, of Jewish eschatology<sup>(6)</sup>, angelology<sup>(7)</sup> and demonology<sup>(8)</sup>. Now in speaking this language of the ethnic religion, the universal religion not only expresses its own content but at the same time refines the language, refines the ethnic religion itself. But herein resides, at the same time, a danger because the process can work the other way round, too. A universal religion can become coarsened, as it were, if it speaks the language of ethnic religion too much or too long, especially if its followers, the followers of the universal religion, start taking that language too literally or if the universal religion incorporates too many unassimilated ethnic aims.

Now we can state this as a general law: we may say, and this as far as I know has never been pointed out before, a universal religion in course of time tends to become transformed into an ethnic religion, which is quite an extraordinary thing. In other words, it tends to become not individual as it should be but collective. And this is, of course, a great betrayal, if not THE great betrayal. It represents a terrible degeneration but it has happened, is happening, to all universal religions though perhaps in differing degrees. It tends to happen especially as the universal religion spreads, as it becomes more popular, less concentrated, more thinly spread out. After all, we have to admit, to recognise, that the universal religion does belong to the Higher Evolution, it goes beyond Man as we know him even at his best. Among ourselves, the Higher Evolution aims at the production of the New Man, at the production of New Men. It insists on the development of mindfulness, awareness, responsibility, freedom. The Higher Evolution, universal religion, stresses individual values and very, very few therefore are ever capable, in any age, any generation, of really and truly following a universal religion. This is because they are not capable of advancing to, not capable of pursuing, the Higher Evolution. They pay lip-service to universal religion, to the Higher Evolution, to its ideals, but at the same time they bend the universal religion to subserve their own needs, the needs of group Man, of collective Man, the needs of the Lower Evolution. This is what happens with all the universal religions.

Now that great existentialist thinker, Kierkegaard<sup>(9)</sup>, has some very devastating things to say in this connection. He says them of and in connection with Christianity but his remarks are of very general application. So I shall quote from a work called *The Present Moment* - and bear in mind that he was himself a Christian in the true sense:

*"The intention of Christianity was to change everything. [Well just think that over for a start, eh?] Result: the Christianity of Christendom is everything. Literally everything remained as it had been, with just the difference that to everything was affixed the attribute 'Christian' and for the rest, strike up fiddlers, we live in Heathendom. So merrily the dance goes along, or rather we live in a Heathendom made more refined by the help of Life Everlasting and by the help of the thought that after all it is all Christian. Try it. Point to what you will and you shall see that I am right in my assertion:*

*If what Christianity demanded was chastity then away with the brothels. But the change is that the brothels have remained, just as they did in Heathendom and the proportion of prostitutes remains the same, too. To be sure, they became Christian brothels. A brothel-keeper is a Christian brothel-keeper, he is a Christian as well as we others. "Exclude him from the means of grace? Why, for goodness' sake", the clergymen will say, "what will things come to if we excluded a single paying member?" The brothel keeper dies and gets a funeral oration with a eulogy in proportion to the amount he pays. And having earned his money in a manner which, from a Christian point of view, is as filthy and base as it can be (for from a Christian point of view it would be more honourable if he had stolen it), the clergyman returns home. He is in a hurry for he has to go to church in order to deliver an oration, or as Bishop Martinson (?) would say, to bear witness.*

*But if Christianity demanded honesty and uprightness and doing away with this swindle, the change which really came about was this: the swindling has remained just as in Heathendom. Everyone, every Christian is a thief in his own line. Only, the swindling has taken on the predicate of 'Christian'. So we now have Christian swindling and the clergyman bestows his blessing on this Christian community, this Christian State, in which one cheats, just as one did in Heathendom, at the same time that one pays the clergyman, i.e. the biggest swindler of them all. And thus cheats oneself into Christianity."*

So in this way he goes on. This is called his famous attack on Christendom. But it is an attack, in principle, on all universal religions which have become corrupted into ethnic religions or pseudo-ethnic religions, in other words, into the collective. I am afraid we find exactly the same sort of thing in the Buddhist countries. After all, in the Buddhist countries everybody is a Buddhist. Think of that. Sometimes you find people adding up statistics and they say, "In the world there are 600 million Buddhists and 500 million

Christians, etc. etc." If there were in the world 600 million Buddhists and 500 million Christians, it would be heaven on earth. But all this assumes, supposes, that one is born a Buddhist. But what does this mean? I met so many Buddhists in the East and they come up to you and they say, "Are you a Buddhist?" and you say "Yes" and they say "How long?", "Oh, 20 years", "Ah," they say, "born Buddhist, I'm a born Buddhist" So what does this mean, being a 'born Buddhist'? It means that you go on exactly as you would have done without Buddhism. But every now and then you call in the monks to chant a few sutras and then everything becomes Buddhist, by chanting those few sutras. I have seen, for instance, photographs of Thai monks chanting sutras and sprinkling holy water on guns destined for Vietnam. Why? Because the Thai government had ordered them to do so. But of course it is a Buddhist government. So everything is all right. So one finds in all the Buddhist countries of the East nowadays Buddhism closely identified with the national culture. Very often even the monks are unable to distinguish between what is really Buddhism and what is just the national culture. So they are not very much use for spreading Buddhism at all. What they really want to do, very often, is to carry abroad their own national culture, nothing to do with Buddhism. Very often they don't even know what Buddhism is, they only know their own national culture, customs, traditions.

It is very much as it was in India in the days of the Raj, with the Christian missionaries. They got hold of some poor, innocent, half-naked Indian villager, they put a pair of trousers on him and a shirt and a jacket with brass buttons; they took him up off the floor and made him sit on a chair, use a plate, knife, fork, spoon, instead of his dirty fingers, as they thought, and then they would tell him, "John", because they had given him a Christian name, "now you really are a Christian." But if we are not careful, we do the same thing in terms of Buddhism. We take on all sorts of cultural things from the East, from Buddhist countries, and we think that this is Buddhism, and by following these things, learning these things, we become Buddhists. I remember a case some years ago. I heard that some Burmese monks had come to Assam and were spreading Buddhism there. And I met some people who had met them in Assam, there were about 20 of these Burmese Buddhist monks, spreading Buddhism, and I was told they were very, very successful. So I asked these converts, "What have you been taught? What have you learnt? What is Buddhism?" So they said, "Oh, the Burmese monks taught us two things. They taught us to eat dried fish and to write the Burmese alphabet." And they really thought they were spreading Buddhism in this way. It's a terrible story and one might think it would be impossible for this sort of thing to happen. But this is what does happen. People are so concerned with spreading national customs and traditions, not Buddhism as a pure spiritual teaching.

Now why does all this happen? Why does a universal religion tend to become an ethnic religion? This is the result of what I call the gravitational pull. It's an expression borrowed I think from, I don't know the technical term for it - rocketry or something like that. We all know that the earth has a gravitational field and an object within this field will be subject to terrestrial gravity. In other words, it will be pulled down towards the earth. So in order to escape this pull down towards the earth, you just have to go beyond the gravitational field of the earth then you can swing free into space, lose yourself among the stars and so on. And it is the same, we may say, with universal religion and ethnic religion, the Higher Evolution and Lower Evolution, the New Man and Collective Man. The New Man struggles to emerge in the midst of the Collective Man, in midst of the group, and he feels all the time that he is trying to emerge, to get free from the group. He feels the pull, he feels the pressures of the group, and last week you may remember how we saw that this happened in the case of the artist. The artist wants to be himself, wants to be an individual, wants to be free, follow his own path, paint his own pictures, compose his own poems. But what does society say? What does the group, the herd, say? Conform ! Sometimes, conform or perish. So the artist, the New Man who is struggling to emerge, may submit, he may conform, he may have no other alternative.

This is the gravitational pull. And this pull is not just outside him. It is inside him, too. Because he himself is still partly Collective Man, he is not yet fully the New Man. He still belongs partly to the Lower Evolution. Now he is no longer subject to these pulls, to this gravitational pull, coming from below, only after reaching a certain point in the Higher Evolution, a point rather high up. And this is the Point of No Return and this is, of course, the subject of our lecture the week after next: Stream Entry or the Point of No Return.

Now we have seen that universal religions tend to become ethnic religions. We have seen that this is due to the operation of what I call the gravitational pull. But we should not therefore conclude that universal religion should or can cut itself off from ethnic religion. This would be going too far. This would be going to the other extreme. Just as the ethnic has branches in the universal, so the universal religion has roots in the ethnic. And this brings us to another very important concept, the concept of the continuity of ethnic religion and universal religion, the one gradually developing into, merging into the other. And this is, of course, a special aspect, a particular aspect, a limited aspect of the continuity of the whole evolutionary

process itself, advancing and ever advancing in one continuous process from lower to higher levels of being and organisation. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to see this continuity of ethnic and universal religion in the West, and why is this? This is because the continuity of our religious life was interrupted, disrupted, by the advent of orthodox Christianity. Wherever Christianity went in the West, first of all within the Roman Empire, afterwards outside, wherever it went for instance in these islands, Paganism was ruthlessly destroyed. Pagan<sup>(10)</sup> images were smashed, stone circles were damaged, sacred groves were cut down, priests were killed, and so on. So nothing of Paganism survived in these areas in this country, after the advent of Christianity. It was destroyed, practically root and branch. If it did survive at all, it survived in rather negative and distorted forms such as those of what is popularly called witchcraft.

And what is the result of all this? The result is that we, today, can look back in this country in our religious history 1500 years. We can trace it all back: the Oxford Group<sup>(11)</sup> of the last century, the Methodist<sup>(12)</sup> revival before that, Puritanism<sup>(13)</sup> before that, the Medieval Church, the beginnings of the Church in this country. We can trace it all back 1500 years, right to the introduction of Christianity itself. And beyond that, before those 1500 years, nothing. Before that, only an abyss of darkness in which we see hideous shapes vaguely swarming. An abyss, we may say, from which we have been

taught, we have been conditioned to shrink back in horror because this Pre-Christian Darkness, this is the Abyss of Paganism. So we can't feel our own roots, as it were, deep down there. There is no continuity with the past and we are not aware of this. We don't know that we have been deprived of this.

But it isn't so in the East. Take the example of a modern Indian, a young Hindu, say, of today. He can look back into the past thousands and thousands of years. He can look back into the great saints and reformers of the last century, the medieval mystics, the early medieval philosophers, back into Buddhism, back into Brahmic Hinduism, back into Vedic Hinduism, back into the primitive cults before that, back and back - one single uninterrupted process, one single uninterrupted evolution, can trace back, follow it, right back into the dawn of history and beyond until that line of evolution loses itself in the mists of the past. The modern Hindu can feel his continuity, as it were, with the Vedic rishis living hundreds, even thousands of years before Christ. And this surely is a wonderful feeling to be able to feel that one's roots, one's religious roots go so far back, go so deep down. It is just like a flower, as it were, looking down into its own roots, looking down into the soil, looking down into the earth and feeling them all.

But in the West there's nothing like that, not for anyone in any Christian country. In the West it is like a flower without roots, a flower in a glass of water, or even we may say, sadly, an artificial flower. Because continuity with the past has been lost, continuity with our own religious past. Our own special brand of paganism has been lost. And this I feel, this link, must be restored as far as possible. It is very important and many people are beginning, increasingly, to recognise that it is important that the old myths, the old legends, the old beliefs and practices, should be studied; not just in a scholarly, academic manner, not just as so much grist for the academic mill, for churning out yet another thesis, but to get the feel of them, to be able to feel one's way back, as it were, into these old myths and legends of this country, thousands of years ago.

I remember once at a meeting, I think it was down in Portsmouth at an Art College, someone asked me the question: What must happen before Buddhism can really flourish in this country? I replied on this occasion, feeling in a rather jovial mood, that there must be a revival of Paganism first. And everybody thought I was joking. They had a good laugh about it. But one young man thought I might not be joking. He came round to see me privately afterwards and he said, "Did you really mean that? And what did you mean by it?" So I said, "By Paganism I meant freedom from Christian conditioning in moral matters, especially with regard to sex". But I meant also much more than that. I meant that we must re-establish contact with our own religious roots.

And as I started with a bit of autobiography, perhaps I will finish or nearly finish with a bit of autobiography. I came back to this country after 20 years in the East in 1964. I was very busy for a while with lectures, meetings and classes. One day a friend suggested that he would take me out for the weekend and he asked me which place I would like to go and visit, which place I'd like to go and see. So I thought it over and I said, eventually, let's go and visit Stonehenge. So we went there and as many of you know it is a very impressive sight, this great circle of stones standing there on the open countryside, on the Plain. Stones that have stood there now for about 4000 years. But they are just stones, just archaeological monuments. We don't feel any real continuity with the religious life, the cultural life, of the people who built those, because of the disruptive influence, we may say, of the Church, of orthodox Christianity. So I feel it is important that people generally, including Buddhists in this country, should try to establish contact with their own pre-Christian past. One might even say that Buddhism will have to put down roots

in this country before it can start producing flowers. Personally I wouldn't mind seeing a combination, as it were, of Celtic Paganism and Buddhism - the one, you may say, for the majority and the other for the minority, and each perfectly tolerant towards the other. So that it would be easy to pass, for those who wished, from the one to the other, from the ethnic to the universal, from the Lower to the Higher. This after all was the situation in India in the Buddha's time. The people, as a whole, followed the old ethnic cults but the Buddha, the New Man, was free to recruit other potential New Men from their midst, from their ranks. I personally feel that the days of pseudo-universal religion, that is to say pseudo-universal in the sense of universal religions that have become corrupted and function as ethnic religions, I think those days are over; that society at large is becoming, day by day, more secular and more pagan. I think the 'in' word is permissive. It's a dirty word in some quarters but it probably does represent a very healthy development. I think in the future, in the midst of this secular and pagan society, universal religion will be found available just here and there for those who really want it, those who are really potentially New Men, will be found wherever the New Men are in process of actual emergence. However, these considerations, though they are very fascinating, will take us much too far afield and we've already gone on rather longer than we usually do. But I hope that I have been able this evening to make clear the distinction between ethnic religion on the one hand and universal religion on the other, as well as to indicate the bearing of the distinction on the whole Higher Evolution of Man.

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NOTES - Tape 78  
(mostly taken from Collins English Dictionary)

1. COENOBITE: a member of religious order following a communal rule of life. [compare EREMITTE: a Christian hermit or recluse.]
2. ICONOCLAST: 1. a person who attacks established or traditional concepts, principles, laws, etc. 2. (a) a destroyer of religious images or sacred objects. (b) an adherent of the heretical movement within the Greek Orthodox Church from 725 to 842 AD, which aimed at the destruction of icons and religious images.
3. AKBAR: called *Akbar the Great*, 1542-1605, Mogul emperor of India (1556-1605), who extended the Mogul empire to include North India. [MOGUL: 1. a member of the Muslim dynasty of Indian emperors established by Baber in 1526. 2. a Muslim Indian, Mongol or Mongolian.]
4. MANICHAISM: 1. the system of religious doctrines, including elements of Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc. taught by the Persian prophet Mani about the 3rd century AD. It was based on a supposed primordial conflict between light and darkness or goodness and evil. 2. *chiefly R.C. Church*. Any similar heretical philosophy involving a radical dualism.
5. MESSIANIC: 1. *Bible* (a) of or relating to the Messiah, his awaited deliverance of the Jews, or the new age of peace expected to follow this. (b) of or relating to Jesus Christ or the salvation believed to have been brought by him. 2. (a) of or relating to any popular leader promising deliverance or an ideal era of peace and prosperity. (b) of or relating to promises of this kind or to an ideal era of this kind.
6. ESCHATOLOGY: the branch of theology or biblical exegesis concerned with the end of the world.
7. ANGELOLOGY: doctrine or theory treating of angels.
8. DEMONOLOGY: the study of demons or demonic beliefs.
9. KIERKEGAARD, Soren Aabye, 1813-55, Danish philosopher and theologian. He rejected organised Christianity and anticipated the existentialists in emphasising Man's moral responsibility and freedom of choice.
10. PAGAN: 1. a member of a group professing a polytheistic religion or any religion other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. 2. a person without any religion; heathen. 3. of or relating to pagans, their

faith or worship. 4. heathen, irreligious.

11. OXFORD MOVEMENT: the movement within the Church of England, initiated by the Tractarians at Oxford in 1833, insisting upon the continuity of the Church with patristic Christianity and opposing liberalizing and rationalizing tendencies. [Oxford Group was another name for Moral Rearmament, founded by Frank Buchman in 1938.]

12. METHODIST: a member of any of the Nonconformist denominations that derive from the system of faith and practice initiated by John Wesley and his followers.

13. PURITAN: (in the late 16th and 17th centuries) any of the more extreme English Protestants, most of whom were Calvinists, who wished to purify the Church of England of most of its ceremony and other aspects that they deemed to be Catholic.

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