

## -Man-centered Creeds-

-by Savitri Devi

According to the religious creeds which we have characterized as "man-centered," man, alone created "in the likeness of God," is God's most beloved child, perhaps even his only child on this earth. The heavenly Father of the Christian Gospels no doubt loves the sparrows. But he loves man infinitely more. He loves the lilies too; he has clothed them more beautifully "than Solomon in all his glory"; yet, man is the main object of his solicitude, not they. Among all the living beings that are born in the visible world man alone is supposed to be endowed with an immortal soul. He alone was created for eternity. The transient world was made for him to enjoy and exploit during his short earthly life, and creatures of several species were appointed -- both quadrupeds and birds -- as meat for him to eat.

And that is not all. A whole scheme of salvation was worked out for him by God himself, so that man might still reach everlasting bliss in spite of his sins. God raised prophets to urge rebellious humanity to repentance and to point out the way of righteousness. And according to the Christian belief, he even sent his only Son to suffer and die, so that his blood might become the ransom of all sinners who put their faith in him. All the splendor of the material world; all the grace, strength and loveliness of millions of beasts, birds, fishes, trees and creepers; the majesty of the snow-clad mountains, the beauty of the unfurling waves -- all that and much more -- is not worth, in God's eyes, the immortal soul of a human imbecile -- so they say, at least. That is why the hunting of tigers and deer, the butchering of innocent woolly lambs, so glad to live, the dissecting of pretty white guinea pigs or of intelligent dogs, are not "sins" according to the man-centered faiths -- not even if they imply the most appalling suffering. But the painless chloroforming of worthless human idiots is a "crime." How could it be otherwise? They have two legs, no tail, and an immortal soul. However degenerate they be, they are men.

I cannot help here recalling the answer of a French medical student, a member of the "Christian Federation of Students," whom I had asked, twenty-five years ago, how he could reconcile his religious aspirations with his support of vivisection. "What conflict can there be between the two?" said he. "Christ did not die for guinea pigs and dogs." I do not know what Christ would actually have said to that. The fact remains that, from the point of view of historical Christianity, the boy was right. And his answer is enough to disgust one forever with all man-centered creeds.

Man-centered creeds do not even enjoy that minimum of inner consistency which forces one sometimes to recognize a certain strength in a bad system of thought. Those who believe in them and who happen not to be by nature too irredeemably irrational, try to justify their point of view by saying that man, as a whole, is superior to the dumb beasts. He can speak, and they

cannot. That is certain. He can speak, and subsequently he can define and deduce, and pass from one deduction to another. He can transfer to other people the conclusions of his reasoning and the results of his experience. He becomes more aware of his own thoughts by expressing them. In a word, he can do all that is only possible by means of a conventional system of symbolical sounds, which we call language and which beasts and birds do not possess. His very being is raised above the immediate needs of everyday life, and his mind rendered capable of evolution, by the use of such a system.

Anyone will agree that this is true to a great extent, though all may not necessarily see what relation there is between this human advantage of speech and the exploitation of dumb animals by man. It is more difficult to understand the privileged place which religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam give to man, when one remembers that the sacred books of those three famous creeds admit the existence of heavenly creatures far more beautiful and more intelligent than he, mainly of angels -- creatures who need not wait for the day of resurrection to acquire a "glorious" body, but who are, here and now, in their raiment of light, free from disease, decay and death. They, and not the clumsy sons of Adam, should have been the ones for whom nature and man were made, for it would seem, from whatever one can gather about them in the holy Scripture, that angels are as much above men as the most brilliant men can claim to be above animals, and even more so.

Still, apparently God loves man the best. All human sinners can expect to be saved by his grace; while those poor angels who once, at the dawn of time, rebelled against their Maker under the leadership of Lucifer, have no other alternative but to remain damned forever. No Redeemer was ever sent to pay the ransom of their sin. No hope of salvation was ever given to them. No repentance of theirs, it seems, would be of any avail. Why? Goodness knows. They are not men, not God's spoilt darlings. That is the only explanation one can give, if any can be given of old Father Jehovah's strange justice and queer tastes. They are not men. Intelligent and beautiful as they may be, and full of endless possibilities for good no less than for evil if only they were given a chance, they are apparently not worth, in God's eyes, the repentant drunkard who weeps aloud at the end of a Salvation Army meeting. God's ways cannot be discussed. But then, don't tell us that his love for man is "justified" by man's superiority, and that the right he gave the chosen species to exploit the rest of his weaker creatures is founded on a reasonable basis. It is not. For, if it were, there would have been, in Paradise, a place for the repentant fallen angels, and at least as much joy for one of them as for the souls of ten thousand drunkards from the East End of London.

The real reason for this continual stress upon the welfare of man alone, in this world and in the next, seems to lie in God's incapacity to transcend a certain puerile partiality -- we speak, of course, of the personal God of the man-centered faiths rooted in Judaism, and not of that impersonal Power behind all existence, in which we are inclined to believe. The God of the Christians, the God of Islam, and the God of most of those later Free Thinkers who are not out and out atheists, never succeeded in shaking off completely the habits he once had when he was

but the patron deity of a few tribes of desert wanderers, slaves in the land of the Pharaohs. He was able to raise himself from the rank of a national god to that of a God of all humanity. But that is all. His love seems to have been spent out in its extension from the "chosen People" of Israel to the Chosen Species of mankind. He had not in him the urge to broaden his fatherly feelings still beyond those narrow limits. It never occurred to him how narrow they were in fact and how irrational, how mean, how all-too-human that childish preference for man was, in a God that is supposed to have made the Milky Way.

The bloodthirsty national gods of West-Asian Antiquity -- once his rivals; now all dead -- were more consistent in their narrowness. They limited their sphere to a town, or at the most to a country, and in cases of emergency accepted -- some say: asked for -- human victims as well as burnt offerings of animal flesh. Grim gods they were, most of them. But there was something outspoken and reassuring in their very limitations. One knew, with them, where one stood. One was not carried away in their name by prophets and saints who took one right along the path leading to universal love, only to leave one in the middle of it. The prophets of Jehovah might call them "abominations," but they were consistent. So was Jehovah, as long as he remained merely the tribal god of the Jews.

But when later Jews proclaimed him to be the God of all mankind; when he crept into Christianity as the Heavenly Father of Christ and the First Person of the Holy Trinity; and into Islam as the One God revealed to man through his last and definitive mouthpiece, the Prophet Mohammed; and finally, when he colored the ideology of the humanitarian theists -- and even atheists -- as the unavoidable remnant of a tradition hard to die, then the conception of him became more and more irrational. There was less and less any reason for his solicitude to stop at mankind. Yet it did stop there. There was, more and more, every reason for him to evolve into a truly universal God of all life. Yet he did not evolve that way. He could not drop the long-cherished propensity of picking out a fraction of his creation and blessing it with a special blessing, to the exclusion of the rest. That fraction of the great Universe had once been the Jewish people. It was now the human race -- a trifling improvement, if one ponders over it from an astronomical (that is to say, from what we can imagine to be the only truly divine) angle of vision.

The great creeds of the world west of India remained man-centered, it would seem, because they never could free themselves entirely from the marks of their particular tribal origin among the sons of Abraham. The Jews never were a race that one could accuse of giving animals too great a place in its everyday life and thoughts. Christ, who came "to fulfill" the Jewish law and prophecies (not to introduce into the world a different, more rational, and truly kindlier trend of thought) appears never to have bothered his head about the dumb creatures. We speak, of course, of Christ as the Christian Gospels present him to us. That Christ -- we have no means whatsoever of finding out whether a "truer" one ever lived -- never performed a miracle, never even intervened in a natural manner, in favor of any beast, as his contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana, not to speak of any more ancient and illustrious Master such as the blessed Buddha, is

supposed to have done. He never spoke of God's love for animals save to assert that He loved human beings a fortiori, much more. He never mentioned nor implied man's duties towards them, though he did not omit to mention, and to stress, other duties.

If the Gospels are to be taken as they are written, then his dealings with nonhuman sentient creatures consisted, on one occasion, of sending some evil spirits into a herd of swine, that they might no longer torment a man, and, another time, of making his disciples, who were mostly fishermen by profession, as everyone knows, catch an incredible quantity of fish in their nets. In both cases his intention was obviously to benefit human beings at the expense of the creatures, swine or fish. As for plants, it is true that he admired the lilies of the fields; but it is no less true that he cursed a fig tree for not producing figs out of season and caused it to wither, so that his disciples might understand the power of faith and prayer. Fervent English or German Christians, who love animals and trees, may retort that nobody knows exactly all that Jesus actually said, and that the gospels contain the story of only a few of his numberless miracles. That may be. But as there are no records of his life save the Gospels, we have to be content with what is revealed therein. Moreover, Christianity as an historical growth is centered around the person of Christ as the Gospels describe him. And, as Norman Douglas has timely remarked, it remains a fact that the little progress accomplished in recent years in the countries of North western Europe and in America, as regards kindness to dumb beasts, was realized in spite of Christianity, and not because of it.

To say, as some do, that every word of the Christian Gospels has an esoteric meaning, and that "swine" and "fishes" and the "barren fig tree" are intended there to designate anything but real live creatures, would hardly make things better. It would still be true that kindness to animals is not spoken of in the teaching of Jesus as it has come down to us, while other virtues, in particular kindness to people, are highly recommended. And the development of historical Christianity would remain, in all its details, what we know it to be.

That people whose outlook is conditioned by biblical tradition should put a great stress upon the special place of man in the scheme of life; that they should insist on man's sufferings, and on the necessity of man's happiness, without apparently giving as much as a thought to the other living creatures, one can understand. They follow the Book to which they may or may not add some secondary scriptures based upon it. They cannot be expected to go beyond what is prescribed in it or in those later scriptures.

But there are, in the West, ever since the Middle Ages, increasing numbers of people who dare to do without the Book altogether; who openly reject all divine revelation as unprovable, and who see in their conscience the only source of their moral judgments and their only guide in moral matters. It is remarkable that these people, free from the fetters of any established faith, still retain the outlook of their fathers as regards man's relation to animals and to living nature in general. Free Thought, while rightly brushing aside all man-centered metaphysics; while replacing the man-centered conceptions of the Universe by a magnificent vision of order and

beauty on a cosmic scale -- a scientific vision, more inspiring than anything that religious imagination had ever invented, and in which man is but a negligible detail -- Free Thought, we say, omitted entirely to do away with the equally outdated man-centered scale of values, inherited from those religions that sprang from Judaism. Sons of Greek rationalism, as regards their intellectual outlook, the Westerners who boast of no longer being Christians -- and the few advanced young men of Turkey and Persia, and of the rest of the Near and Middle East, who boast of no longer being orthodox Musulmans -- remain, as regards their scale of moral values, the sons of a deep-rooted religious tradition which goes back as far as some of the oldest fragments of the Jewish Scriptures: the tradition according to which man, created in God's own image, is the only living being born for eternity, and has a value altogether out of proportion with that of any other animal species.

There has been, it is true, in the West, in recent years -- nay, there is, for nothing which is in harmony with the Laws of Life can ever be completely suppressed -- a non-Christian (one should even say an anti-Christian) and definitely more than political school of thought which courageously denounced this age-old yet erroneous tradition, and set up a different scale of values and different standards of behavior. It accepted the principle of the rights of animals, and set a beautiful dog above a degenerate man. It replaced the false ideal of "human brotherhood," by the true one of a naturally hierarchised mankind harmoniously integrated into the naturally hierarchised Realm of life, and, as a logical corollary of this, it boldly preached the return to the mystic of genuine nationalism rooted in healthy race-consciousness, and the resurrection of the old national gods of fertility and of battle (or the exaltation of their philosophical equivalents) which many a Greek "thinker" and some of the Jewish prophets themselves had already discarded -- politely speaking: "transcended" -- in decadent Antiquity. And its racialist values, solidly founded upon the rock of divine reality, and intelligently defended as they were, in comparison with the traditional man-centered ones inherited, in Europe, from Christianity, are, and cannot but remain, whatever may be the material fate of their great Exponent and of the regime he created, the only unassailable values of the contemporary and future world. But it is, for the time being, a "crime" to mention them, let alone to uphold them -- and their whole recent setting -- in broad daylight.

The opposite ideologies, more in keeping with the general tendencies of modern Free Thought from the Renaissance onwards, have only broken off apparently with the man-centered faiths. In fact, our international Socialists and our Communists, while pushing God and the supernatural out of their field of vision, are more Christian-like than the Christian Churches ever were. He who said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" has to-day no sincerer and more thorough disciples than those zealots whose foremost concern is to give every human being a comfortable life and all possibilities of development, through the intensive and systematic exploitation by all of the resources of the material world, animate and inanimate, for man's betterment. Communism, that new religion -- for it is a sort of religion -- exalting the common man; that philosophy of the rights of humanity as the privileged species is the natural logical outcome of

real Christianity. It is the Christian doctrine of the labor of love for one's neighbors, freed from the overburdening weight of Christian theology. It is real Christianity, minus priesthood -- which Christ thoroughly disliked -- and minus all the beliefs of the Church concerning the human soul and all the mythology of the Bible -- which he surely valued far less than a single spontaneous movement of the heart towards suffering mankind. Christ, if he came back, would probably feel nowhere so much "at home" as in the countries which have made love for the average man as such the very soul of their political system.

And that is not all. Even Christian theology will perhaps not always remain as totally worthless to them as our Communist friends often think. It may be, one day, that they will bring themselves to use it. And, if ever they do, who will blame them but those nominal Christians who have forgotten the out and out "proletarian" character of their Master and of his first disciples? The myth of the God of mankind taking flesh in the son of the carpenter of Nazareth may well be interpreted as a symbol foreshadowing the deification of the working majority of men -- of the "masses"; of man in general -- in our times.

In other words, the rejection of the belief in the supernatural, and the advent of a scientific outlook upon the material world, has not in the least broadened the Westerners' moral outlook. And, unless they be consistent Racialists, worshippers of hierarchised Life, those who today openly proclaim that civilization can well stand without its traditional Christian (or Muslim) background, stick to a scale of values that proceeds, either from a yet narrower love than that preached in the name of Christ or of Islam, (from the love of one's mere individual self and family) or, at most, from the same love -- not from a broader one; not from a true universal love.

The generous "morality" derived from modern Free Thought is no better than that based upon the time-honored man-centered creeds that have their origin in Jewish tradition. It is a morality centered -- like the old Chinese morality, wherever true Buddhism and Taoism have not modified it -- around "the dignity of all men" and human society as the supreme fact, the one reality that the individual has to respect and to live for; a morality which ignores everything of man's affiliation with the rest of living nature, and looks upon sentient creatures as having no value except inasmuch as they are exploitable by man for the "higher" purpose of his health, comfort, clothing, amusement, etc. The moral creed of the Free Thinker today is a man-centered creed -- no less than that of Descartes and Malebranche and, later on, of the idealists of the French Revolution, and finally of Auguste Comte.

We believe that there is a different way of looking at things -- a different way, in comparison with which this man-centered outlook appears as childish, mean and barbaric as the philosophy of any man-eating tribe might seem, when compared with that of the Christian saints, or even of the sincerest ideologists of modern international Socialism or Communism.

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The preceding text is excerpted from the opening chapter of Devi's *Impeachment of Man* (Calcutta, 1959). The book was written in 1945-46.