

WHAT IS RELIGION?

BY SWAMI VIJOYANANDA

On Sunday morning, in the lecture hall of our contemporary "El Diario," the Swami Vijoyananda gave his first address before a cultured and highly-interested audience, the subject being: "What is Religion?" The Swami spoke in English, his discourse being interpreted as he proceeded.

Vijoyananda is the first Swami to visit South America. He is here under the auspices of the Ramakrishna Mission of India, and he will be delivering lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy.

The full text of the Swami's first lecture is given below :

"My sisters and brothers of Argentina :

"I have a mixed feeling to-day : great joy and great suffering. I am thinking of the illustrious Swami Vivekananda on this day. Your Northern American brothers and sisters gave him a welcome in 1893. There was a great religious congregation there. He came there as a man without any credentials but he himself was his credential. He showed to your North American sisters and brothers what religion could be. Religion is never bounded by any geographical barriers. As the growth of Humanity can never be bounded by geographical barriers, so religion can never be bounded by dogmas and doctrines. There is only one religion, but it has many names. Real religion is the path towards divinity. Every man has two aspects of his nature. One is animal, and the other is divine. The animality and the divinity are constantly fighting in him. Sometimes the animality gets the upper hand ; sometimes the divinity gets the upper hand. Animality

has as its food in the idea of possession. If you fill yourself more and more with the idea of possession, believe me you will become more and more animal. And on the other hand, if you feed your divinity with the idea of non-possession, it will grow more and more. Now it is up to you, sisters and brothers, whether you are going to live in the world as animals or as divine beings. Do you like to be known as so many animals in human clothing, or do you like to be known as divine beings moving in the world? It is up to you. It is up to you to make this beautiful world either Heaven or Hell ! You can make it a place for divine beings, or you can make it a place for animals fighting and killing each other.

We have forgotten our real nature. And all the religions of the world always remind us to go back to our real nature. No religion in the world says that you are to remain animal. Not even the religions of the so-called uncivilized peoples say that you are to remain animal. Then why should we remain animal? Why, I ask you all? Why should we not trust each other as real brothers? Why should we not bring back the old ideal of reverence and faith? Why should there be so much enmity? Why should there be those ideas growing in men's minds which separate us? What is the point of difference? Our egoism. This egoism is the outcome of possession, grabbing, keeping, possessing and not allowing others to share the same thing. Our real property ! What is our real property? It is our divinity. Don't you think we have bartered our real property

for a little half-penny? Should we not be again magnificent and divine, and do you know what does not allow us to be so? The wrong religion. False religion. The religion of dogmas only. The religion which cannot transcend the barrier of morality and ethics. The religion which has forgotten that Religion is not only ethics and morals. Morals and ethics are the paths and not the goal. People with fixed ideas have fixed you, my brothers and sisters, on the path that does not allow you to follow onward to the goal. I want you all to become heroes and break that bond! You are sons of immortality. I want you to think always that you are immortal beings. Why should you always think that you have to die on the morrow? This body will die. The soul is never born and the soul will never die. It is through ignorance alone that this idea has been suggested to our brain by different religions that we shall have to die. But our soul never dies and that is the only reason why man loves man, women love men, and men love women. This is the point of similarity between all human beings; the idea that we are all immortal, is the point of contact amongst us. That shows that we are the children of the same Divine Father, but the 'priests' in different religions, who have no reverence, whose ideas are taken only from books give us wrong ideas, and you know that books only separate us. You know well, being born in a Christian country, how many divisions and sub-divisions have been made in the grand religion of Christianity. Each church has its own following. Is it good that the following of a certain church should hate the following of another church? When you find that the following of a certain church is hating the following of another church, you can be sure that they do not know what

real religion is. If religion teaches hatred, it is not the religion of divine people. It is the religion of animals. And we have become very cultured animals. Only our weapons are much finer and much more subtle and much more poisonous. Geographical divisions have made you Argentines, Paraguayans, Bolivians, Chileans and Peruvians, and within these divisions you have made Roman Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Mohammedans, etc., etc. Now I do not say that you are to forsake your faith or that you should be converted to another faith. I do not believe in external conversion. Those who become converted are like those fashionable creatures who change their clothes every day. You cannot change your heart every day. I believe in the conversion of the heart. I believe in conversion from animality to divinity. I believe that the real religion is what throbs in every human heart, and impels us to obtain freedom from bondage. If Christianity gives that, remain a Christian. If Roman Catholicism gives that, be a Roman Catholic. If any other religion gives that—be that. And always watch your mind, whether you are growing from your animal self into divine beings. Sisters and brothers, you have come to this world to remove your troubles, but instead of that you are creating fresh troubles! The knot that was tied through ignorance should be undone. You should take note of all the separate threads that have formed the knot. Instead of that, you are gathering complications and making the knot bigger and bigger every day. We have totally forgotten that our real purpose is to get beyond all these ideas of duality. When there are two persons there is either hate or love. When there is one person there is no hatred and no love. You must have that idea in yourselves.

The growth of religion in the human mind is always going on and on. The old superstitions are still there within us. They have only taken a new form, a civilized aspect with the growth of civilization, but they are still there. The object of dress is to cover the body and in the same way, our superstitions have changed their shape, but they are still lying there. Religion grows in the mind first through fear. We are afraid of a superior being: those who are physically superior, mentally superior, spirituality superior. We worship them—not through love but through fear. We feel we are very weak and we always pray, "Please do not cause any harm to us." This is the worst form of duality in religion. And in all religions there is this form of worship which grows through fear. They worship strong men; they worship the elements; they worship departed spirits—through fear. The same thing is going on still to-day, because fear is still in the human heart. The real religion says: You must not be afraid of anything because there are no two souls. If there were two souls, one would be afraid of the other. But in reality there is only one soul. We, through our ignorance, think that souls are different, and through this ignorance all our sorrows are created. Then, the idea of religion grows from hatred slowly towards love. Human beings try to establish some kind of relationship with some superior being. They begin to think there is one Permanent Being and they think themselves as non-permanent. They want to make a connection between the permanent and the non-permanent. Because though their outside world shows they are non-permanent, in their hearts sometimes some voice says: "No, we are also permanent." So they want to make a connection with the Permanent Soul and they give it the name of 'God.'

And they call Him by the name of 'Our Father!' They call Him the Primal Energy. The Hindus call Him sometimes the 'Mother of the Universe.' The Zoroastrians called it the 'Divine Light.' But as some naughty children are afraid of their parents, so some naughty human beings are afraid of the Divine Father. They think that the Divine Father—Who is all mercy, all kindness—has a grave face. They imagine in their minds, they paint Him, as a school-master with a rod in His hand always trying to inflict punishment. It is through your own fear, it is through your own imperfections, that you turn the Divine Father into a bigger animal than yourselves. But the Divine Father does not change at your own sweet will. The Divine Father is always merciful. No dogmas, no churches, no religions can change the Divine Father. He stands high above all the saints, and the so-called philosopher can never touch Him. The philosophers who do not live the life, have no realization. They create more troubles than finding a real solution of the real problem. There are philosophers and philosophers. There are religious philosophers; there are scientific philosophers; there are medical philosophers; and there are commercial philosophers! This being the age of commerce, most of these philosophers have taken up the attitude of commerce. Even some of the so-called great philosophers sell their knowledge to suit the needs of some party, and in the religious field also they have fallen into the grooves of a party spirit. So one party-religion hates another party-religion. Religion, whose ideal is to show to the suffering humanity the way out of sorrows—the path of joy and the path of freedom—has brought in new conflicts. Instead of making more friends they create enemies.

My dear sisters and brothers, you must not believe in a religion which says that that religion is false and this religion is the only true religion. All religions are merely so many paths which lead to the Goal. If one path is true, what is the logic in saying that other paths are not also true? Don't you see that the commercial idea has entered into religion also? They want to make a patent on religion? They want to sell religion with a patent stamp! They want to say that "my" religion has so many grains of this and so many grains of that, and that it is a panacea for all troubles. But the real panacea of the human mind is simplicity. You should be simple, and if you want to be simple, you must be pure. And if you want to be pure, you must throw aside all ideas of possession. Every human being wants joy; no one wants sorrow. This shows that we are in reality children of joy, yet what do we really feel to-day? We have forgotten even to smile and to laugh. Our laughter rings painfully; we are constantly suffering and we try to hide our suffering with more complicated feelings. Instead of tearing away one veil of ignorance after another we are covering ourselves up more and more with fresh veils of ignorance. You must know the real truth, and this truth is in every religion. It is in Christianity; it is in Hinduism; it is in Mohammedanism, and it is in all the other "isms." Nobody holds any patent on this real path of joy. I repeat: nobody can make a patent of this path. Beware of those false preachers who say that theirs is the only path for everybody.

You are becoming very independent in everything, but alas! you have lost the main issue. You have overlooked the "One" and you are adding zeros to make it a million and towards the end

of your life you find that you have nothing in your bank but zeros. Why? Because you have forgotten yourselves! Because you have forgotten that you are really immortal. You have amassed ignorance upon ignorance only; you have amassed a wealth which is nothing but a carcase of ideas. Without being free from these ideas, which cause bondage, you have added more to them. Don't you think the time has come when you should seriously consider whether it is possible or not to free yourselves? Don't you think that all of you want to be free? Don't you really suffer from the bondage? If you do not feel it, I pity you all.

I think that you should no longer bother yourselves with false ideas; your real desire should be to break the bonds. My dear sisters and brothers, you have very strong weapons with which you can cut these bonds. The bondage that has separated you from the Divine Father, the bondage that has separated you from your real selves! The bondage that has separated you from man to man! You can cut it. The first weapon is sincerity; the second weapon is purity; and the third, and the most important weapon, is knowledge. You must have knowledge. Don't remain ignorant any more. Don't feel like the pigs which wallow in the mud and think that they are happy! You must feel that you are divine beings—not animals. It always pains me when I see you, divine beings, finding joy only in animal pleasures. You have forgotten your real nature. Go back to the real nature. This going back is religion. If Christianity gives it, thank Christianity. If any other religion gives it, thank that religion. If you find that a certain religion does not give it, still thank that. Don't be inimical towards that religion. Do you know that when you create

enemies, you become weaker and weaker? Strong people never create enemies, because they are afraid of nothing.

You will find that only One Soul vibrates through everything in this world, then where do you find a cause for enmity? Outwardly, we are different from each other—from man to man, from man to animal, from man to tree, from man to stone; but all these differences are solely in outward manifestations. And as on the outside our faces are not similar, our dresses are not similar, but still we feel that we are all the same human beings; so if we go a little deeper, we will find that there is in reality no difference between a man and an animal. The difference lies in the process of manifestation only, in the outside manifestation which the scientists call the process of evolution. In the inside there is the one Soul, and this is never changed or destroyed. The Vedantists declare and describe it as the Immortal and the Unchangeable one, that which the wind cannot move, fire cannot burn, and water cannot liquefy, that which can never be destroyed by any instrument the world has produced or will produce. It was never born, so it will never die. It never undergoes any change. The change is in the outside and it is through ignorance. The real Self is never changed.

If you think that you need a change; if you really feel that you are suffering; if you really feel that you are not satisfied with your present life, know that religion has already been born in your heart, and give it the real food. The food is non-possession; the food is purity; the food is love; the food is to think that It (the Soul) has no bondage.

My dear sisters and brothers, I wish you success; I wish you joy; I wish

you freedom; I wish you to really become religious; I wish you to outgrow all creeds and dogmas. You should always grow beyond all dogmas. And with all my best wishes for you, my sisters and brothers, I want to warn you about one thing. Do not allow yourselves to be tools in the hands of others. Always keep your strength in your own hand. Don't sell your body or soul for a miserable half penny. Always think of strength and purity. Don't allow your mind to become weak. Test everything and then accept. Test a man inside and out, before you accept his dogmas. The trouble is that the excessive reading of books has spoiled our real capacity for knowing things. We are a bundle of books, and those who read more and more have to shoulder heavier and heavier burdens. I want to ask you, What have you to give to civilization? What is your quota? Great saints and great teachers have given something. Will you simply cram like parrots what they have said? Will you remain beggars all the time? Wouldn't you rather think that you are "givers" and not "beggars?" Don't you know that your Divine Father is the King of kings? If you do not feel yourselves to be princes and princesses, then you are not the sons and daughters of the Divine Father—you are something else. If you call your Divine Father King of kings, then you must take that attitude and you must live the life of real princes. You must be pure. You must not bear any hatred. You must be free from all ideas of jealousy. And all these things can only be true if you have less and less the idea of possession. When the idea of possession creeps into our mind, then friends slowly become enemies. We create tariffs. The Argentine people are creating tariffs and putting up heavy customs duties; and similarly,

they are putting up heavy tariff duties on their religious ideas also. So, as you put more and more tariff duties, the real thing will never come to you. If you will remove all the tariffs from your mind, then the real thing will appear to you. If you go on creating this barrier of differences between man and man, between father and son, between husband and wife, between children and parents, you will commit slow suicide. You must turn back from the path of death to the path of life. This turning back from the path of death to the path of life is Religion. And this path is the only path. I repeat again: We are the children of Immortality. If our Father in Heaven is Immortal, why should we be called mortal beings? If we always think that we are mortals, we ought to be sincere and not call Him our Father; and if we sincerely believe that He is our Divine Father, we should sincerely think of ourselves as Immortal. And really, we are Immortal.

My dear sisters and brothers, I wish you again peace; I wish you again freedom; I wish you again real joy; I wish that you be free from all false ideas or false ignorance; that you become all-knowing, all-loving, absolutely free; and may all the blessings of all the great saints in the past, who never thought about any difference of religion, be showered upon you, and let this shower of real water help you in the

growth of your real soul and enable you to really follow your great brothers and sisters who have the real religion! May you be glorious! If our brothers and sisters have been glorious, we also have the claim and the right to become glorious. Always think of that. We want to become glorious, and the only way is to sacrifice our egoism. Study all the great souls of the world and you will find one answer: Sacrifice your little ego and grow into the bigger Ego; the bigger Ego is the Divinity. Sacrifice your animality and become divine. If you want to possess the world, sacrifice your little possessions. If you want to be the Giver of Givers, you must throw away the idea that you are slaves. You cannot bring light and darkness together. If you want light, you will have to forget darkness. If you want love, you will have to forget hatred. If you want purity you will have to forget impurity. If you want to be sincere, you will have to forget insincerity. If you want to become Immortal, you will have to forget that you are mortal. Now, sisters and brothers, I have given you the choice whether you want to be divine or animal. If you want to be divine, you will find that the road has already been started in your own mind, and that is Religion. God Bless you. —*The Standard* (Buenos Aires), 11th January, 1933.

ARE THEY CONTRADICTORY?

BY SWAMI AKHILANANDA

Religious force is the greatest cohesive element. The bonds of religion have proved stronger than anything else. Yet, the people are quarrelling in the

holy name of religion. We find there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings of love and peace than religion, yet, at the same time, there is nothing