



Christianity and the Doctrine of Non-Dualism

By A Monk of the West, Translated by Alvin Moore, Jr. and Marie M. Hansen
Sophia Perennis, 2004, \$16.95, 148 pp.,
ISBN 0-900588-82-9

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

“As for ourself, we will say unequivocally that after more than forty years of intellectual reflection on this doctrine, having allowed it to impregnate us more and more profoundly, we have found nothing that has seemed incompatible with our full and complete faith in the Christian Revelation.” – A Monk of the West

This semi-anonymous work was written by ‘A Monk of the West’ who used the pseudonym of ‘Elie Lemoine’ (Alphonse Levée), a French Cistercian monk who, at the young age of twenty, found a copy of fellow countryman René Guénon’s *Orient et Occident (East and West)* in a second-hand book stall while he was posted in Asia. This event had a tremendous impact that endured for the rest of his life and was instrumental in his decision to take up the monastic vocation. ‘Elie Lemoine’ also worked as an editor of the distinguished traditionalist journal *Études Traditionnelles* that was central in making Guénon and other traditionalist writings accessible to wider audiences. It was in the discovery of the René Guénon’s works that ‘Elie Lemoine’—A Monk of the West—found an integral metaphysical doctrine that was universal in its principles, known in the West as the *philosophia perennis*—perennial philosophy. The metaphysical ‘doctrine of non-dualism’ (*advaita-vāda*) is not exclusive to Hinduism (*sanātana dharma*) alone but is also present in Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is in this universal light that *Christianity and the Doctrine of Non-Dualism* was articulated.

Though this book on ‘Christian Vedānta’ is modest in its length, it is dense in its scope and reflection. The book begins with a thorough and insightful Preface by the late “perennialist” Alvin Moore, Jr. (1923-2005). The work consists of eight chapters and a Forward: ‘Philosophical Monism and Non-Dualism’, ‘I am Brahma’, ‘In All Things Like Unto Men’, ‘Without Me You Can Do Nothing’, ‘Who am I?’, ‘I am not the Christ’, ‘East and West’ and the Conclusion.

In the first chapter the author makes important distinctions that are often confused in our current era: non-dualism is neither pantheism nor monism—“*the soul is not the Self*” or again “*the Self (Ātmā) is not the human soul (jivātmā)*.” In the following chapter the author makes it clear that the human individual as an empirical ‘ego’ or ‘I’ is not a

Christianity and the Doctrine of Non-Dualism

finality unto itself. It is not until a re-integration (*samskarana*) with what is Transcendent (supra-individual) that true identity can exist, for “*there is no true identity save in God, because God alone is Identity.*” The author continues to clarify this idea in chapter five—‘Who AM I?’—when he quotes from a traditional Hindu aphorism, “the I is *māyā* and the not-I is *Brahman*”. Without this total “dis-identification” from the ‘ego’ or ‘I’, writes the author in chapter six, it is impossible for the “re-integration” with the Self (*Ātmā*) to occur, let alone the identification with the Supreme Identity (*Tawhīd*) or the Supreme Self (*Paramātmā*). In the same chapter the author clarifies the modern misunderstanding of reincarnation, “*In reality, the reincarnationist illusion has its root in a confusion of the psychic and the spiritual.*” This perspective is in accordance with Ādi Śankarāchārya’s dictum, “In truth, there is no other transmigrant but the Lord” categorically denying the possibility of the human individual reincarnating *per se*.

In closing we would like to note that there is great merit in this work as a support in facilitating once again the expression of non-dualism (*advaita*) within the Christian milieu as this doctrine once did in the West. This book could also broaden the current understanding and outlook of the Christian tradition which has become more and more eclipsed in the present era due to modernity and post-modernity’s indefinite trend toward “progress” and secularization that radically contrasts from earlier epochs that were firmly rooted in the sacred. Such a perspective is polarized either to discredit the Christian tradition altogether believing that it has somehow failed the sapiential masses or to provoke fundamentalism asserting a pseudo monopoly on truth itself—blinded by the assumption that the only authentic religion is Christianity *ipso facto* negating the possibility of all other spiritual traditions as ‘paths that lead to the same summit’. Beyond such polarities the reader will be pleased to find that this book fosters religious pluralism, tolerance, inquiry and dialogue from a non-reductionistic point of view and yet simultaneously acknowledges the ‘transcendent unity of religions.’