



Creation And Manifestation (I)

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ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS we have noted that the idea of “creation” understood in its proper and exact sense and without more or less stretching its meaning abusively, is really encountered only in the traditions belonging to a unique lineage, that of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and since this lineage is that of traditional forms which can be described as specifically religious, one can conclude that there is a direct link between this idea and the religious point of view itself. If the word “creation” were to be employed in any other context, it could only convey most imprecisely a different idea altogether, for which it would be preferable to find another expression; moreover, such usage is usually only the result of one of the confusions or false assimilations that are so often produced in the West concerning Eastern doctrines. However, it is not enough merely to avoid this confusion; we must also carefully guard ourselves from another and opposing error, that of wanting to see a contradiction or some opposition between the idea of creation and this other idea to which we have just alluded, and for which the most appropriate term at our disposal is “manifestation”. It is this latter that we now propose to examine.

Some people, recognizing that the idea of creation is not found in Eastern doctrines (with the exception of Islam, which, of course, should not be cited in this regard), and without trying to go more deeply into things, immediately assume that the absence of this idea is the mark of something incomplete or defective, and conclude that the doctrines in question should not be considered an adequate expression of the truth. If this is so from the religious point of view, which too often maintains a disagreeable “exclusivism”, one must recognize that it is also so from the anti-religious perspective, which would like to draw a completely contrary conclusion from the same observation; these people, naturally attacking the idea of creation, as they do all other ideas of a religious character, pretend to see in its very absence a sort of superiority; moreover, they obviously do this in a spirit of negation and opposition only, and not in order to undertake a true defense of Eastern doctrines, with which they scarcely concern themselves. However that may be, neither these reproaches nor these praises are worth much and neither attitude is acceptable any longer, since they finally proceed from one and the same error, exploited according to the respective contrary tendencies of those involved. The truth is that both the one and the other completely miss the mark, and in both cases there is an almost equal incomprehension.

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The reason for this shared error is, moreover, not very difficult to discover. Those whose intellectual horizon does not extend beyond Western philosophical conceptions ordinarily imagine that where there is no question of creation, but where it is nonetheless also clear that it is not a question of materialistic theories, there can be only “pantheism”. Now, one is aware how often this word is used indiscriminately in our day; for some it represents a veritable bugbear, to such a point that they believe they can dispense with a serious examination of that to which they are so quick to apply the term (the current expression “to fall into pantheism” is indeed characteristic in this respect), while, probably because of this very attitude more than for any other reason, others freely embrace pantheism and are immediately disposed to take it up as a kind of rallying-cry. It is thus quite clear that in the thinking of both of these groups, what we have just said is closely connected to the imputation of “pantheism” commonly made to Eastern doctrines, and which we have so often shown to be completely false, indeed, even absurd (since pantheism is in reality an essentially anti-metaphysical theory), that it is useless to return again to this subject.

Since we are speaking of pantheism, we should take this occasion to make an observation which has a certain importance here regarding a word that is commonly associated with pantheist conceptions. This is the word “emanation”, which some people, always for similar reasons and because of similar confusions, would like to use to designate manifestation when this latter is not presented under the aspect of creation. Now, this word must absolutely be set aside when speaking of traditional and orthodox doctrines, not only because of this troublesome association (whether or not the latter may in fact be ultimately justified, a point that does not interest us just here), but especially because in itself and through its etymology, the word does not express anything other than a pure and simple impossibility. Indeed, the idea of “emanation” is properly that of a “going out”; but manifestation must not in any way be envisaged thus, for in reality nothing can go out from the Principle; if something were to go out of it, from that moment on the Principle could no longer be infinite, being limited by the very fact of manifestation; the truth is that outside of the Principle there is not and cannot be anything but nothingness. Even if one wishes to consider “emanation” not with respect to the supreme and infinite Principle, but only in relation to Being, the immediate principle of manifestation, this term would still give rise to the following objection, different from the previous one, but no less decisive: if beings go out from Being in order to manifest themselves, one could not say that in reality they were beings, and thus they would literally be bereft of all existence, for existence, in whatever mode it may be, cannot be anything other than a participation in Being; this consequence, besides being as manifestly absurd in itself as in the other case, is contradictory to the very idea of manifestation.

Having made these remarks, we will now state clearly that the idea of manifestation, taken in the purely metaphysical way in which the Eastern doctrines envisage it, is not at all opposed to the idea of creation. The two terms merely refer to different levels and different points of view, so that it is sufficient to know how to situate each in its true place in order to realize that there is no incompatibility between them. The difference on this as on many other points is, in the final analysis, merely that between the metaphysical point of view and the religious point of view. Now, if it is true that the first is of a higher and more profound order than the second, it is no less true that it should in no way annul or contradict the latter, which moreover is sufficiently proven by the fact that both can well coexist within one and the same traditional form, a point to which we shall return later. Basically, then, what we have here is only a difference which, though somewhat more accentuated by reason of the very sharp distinction drawn between the two

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corresponding domains, is no more extraordinary or puzzling than the difference between the legitimately diverse points of view found in one and the same domain according to one's depth of penetration. Here we are thinking of points of view such as those of Shankaracharya and Ramanuja in relationship to the Vedanta; it is true that in this instance, too, incomprehension can find contradictions which do not exist in reality, but this only makes the analogy more exact and more complete.