FLEETING TIME AND SACRIFICIALLY PRODUCED CONTINUITY IN VEDIC BRAHMANISM AND IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

In the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas, the conception of time is intimately bound to the conception of causality. It begins with ordinary time, time as natural (prākṛta) and given to us in its fugacious, unorganized and fleeting multiplicity of instants, and therefore as a source of anxiety. But then, through a discovery which shakes off this anxiety, it conceives of constructed (samṣkrta) duration in which discontinuous time is made (krta) into a cohesive and continuous totality by the exact concatenation of sacrificial rites. It is only through organizing, constructive (abhi+sam+kr—) activities that temporal (and spatial) continuities arise and through many converging and concentrating acts that the datum of scattered, untied time is constituted into a stable and continuous duration. But what engenders synthesizing and purposive acts is thought (manas). And it is because duration proceeds from the activity of thought that it transcends organic life and tends in Vedism to culminate into the unlimited untemporality of thought itself. Let us detail these assertions.

1. TIME AND CONTINUITY IN THE VEDAS

A. Natural Time. Time as an immediate datum is discontinuous. It consists of successive moments the succession of which is only loosely regulated according to the free, loose-jointed

ABBREVIATIONS

A.B. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.
A.V. Atharvaveda.
J.B. Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa.
K.B. Kauśitaki Brāhmaṇa.
M.B. Maitreya Brāhmaṇa.
P.B. Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa.
R.V. Rgveda.
S.B. śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.
T.B. Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.
rhythm of days and nights. If we except the two late hymns of 
Atharva Veda XIX 53 and 54 which celebrate kāla as absolute 
time, first principle and universal cause, we find in the Vedas 
no per se time and no idea that the days and nights would be 
manifestations of such an absolute time. The term kāla appears 
only once, in Rg Veda, X 42 9, and in the sense of a gambler's in-
stant of success. The more frequent term abhīka similarly design-
nates a critical instant. The terms āyu and āyus mean primarily 
the vital energy and, hence, life or its duration which is naturally 
fugacious and ever in need of strengthening until it perishes in 
death. Life-time is unceasingly eaten up by days and nights. 
"Let not the two winged females [day and night] milk me up to 
exhaustion", prays a sacrificer (R.V. I 158 4). And dawn is called 
"the shackerl of the days of man" (R.V. I 124 2).

The dream of the Vedic ṛṣis is to escape this liquescence of 
time and the dissolution of death and to substitute for the cos-
ic lack of adjustment (nirṛti) a renovated (nāviyas) solidly ad-
justed (kīlp—) and prolonged duration. They pray: "As days appear 
in succession, as seasons follow after seasons regularly, O Or-
dainer, adjust their durations (āyuṁśi kalpayatsām) so that the 
next day may not leave the previous one" (R.V. X 18 5). From 
the daily drama of the birth and death of the sun they derive 
some hope that life can be renewed again and again. The sun 
is "the embryo which wanders among the deities; it is born, it 
ends its life, then it is born anew. Having been, it is now present 
and future; a father, it enters by its miraculous power into its 
son" (A.V. XI 4 20). When the dying sun disappears over the ho-
rizon, it enters the kingdom of Yama, which is personified Death, 
or of nirṛti, dissolution, which is the hidden domain (gūha pada) 
around which most of the mysteries and enigmas of the Vedas 
converge. There it must again become an embryo and get strength 
and increase from the milk of its androgynous mother (both 
bull and cow: R.V. I 160 3) so that it can reappear at dawn only 
to sink again exhausted at the end of its course into dissolution 
(nirṛti: cf. R.V. I 164 32). Thus it is Mārtāṇḍa, "born from a mor-
tal egg", the eighth son of Aditi (Unbound), whom she threw 
far away but "took back for death (mṛtyave), for procreation 
(prajāyyai)" (R.V. X 72 8-9). In the abyss of nirṛti is its procrea-
tive womb, the matrix (yoni) similar to the sacrificial altar from 
where the ritual fire flames up.

B. From anṛta to ṛta. Duration results from repeated impe-
tus and excitations (sava). The origin of this dynamism is to be 
found in the sun and various aspects of the sun. Sūrya, the Sun 
riding his chariot, conquers the long way of before and after by 
impetuous starts (jūti) (A.V. XIII 2 14-15). Thus he "is the inciter
prasūta, apasūva) of beings, the revoler of the eversame wheel” (R.V. VII 63 2). Usas, Dawn, “has cleared the road for the sun to move on; [thanks to her work] we have access to the regions where life (āyus) gets prolonged” (R.V. I 113 16).

But the Impeller as such is Savitr (from su- or sū-, to impel, excite, enliven), also a solar principle, who as cosmogoner (vidhātṛ) propped up space and sky in exact (satya) and normative (dharma) manner so that he is praised as satyasava and satyadharman. Therefore, he is requested to procure “every day” by his impelling (sava) riches, treasure and life-duration (āyus) (A.V. VII 14 2-3) and to make long the time of man’s life (dārghamta āyuh Savitā kṛnutu: A.V. XIV 2 75). “Constantly he supports the universe” (A.V. IV 54 4) for his impelling is not given once for all times but he provides “that impelling ever anew (śaśvat-tamam): this is his work” (R.V. IV 54 4 and II 38 1 and 4).

However, the primordial cosmogoner is Varuṇa, that ambiguous deity, both Asura and Āditya. As Āditya he has the power of binding and unbinding but as Asura he has the mysterious power of māyā by which out of the ‘unadjusted’ (anṛtā) chaos he measures out (mā-) the times and the spaces which, as Vidhātṛ, he constructs again and again into a well-adjusted (ṛta) cosmos.

Ṛta is the passive participle of the verb ṛ-, to adapt, arrange, adjust, or also to go, send, send going. Thus it designates the cosmos as adjusted by Varuṇa who, by propping up the sky above the earth, opened a free space. This free space is the sojourn and the path of ṛta across which ṛta is said to be stretched and woven (tāntu) as the warp and woof of duration, or to be yoked and to ride, or to flow (dharma), or to revolve as the cosmic wheel. Ṛta, the well-made (sukṛta) universe, whose nights and days are suitably constructed (sumeka), is the opposite of anṛta, the unadjusted cosmos, the liquefactual domain of nirṛti. In the anṛta chaos, there was as yet neither space, nor time, nor motion; the path of ṛta was blocked. As S.B. I 4 1 22-23 will say: “In the beginning the worlds were contiguous... one could touch the sky thus... The gods desired more space: they breathed across the worlds with the three syllables vi-ta-ye-, and the worlds parted asunder”.

The prop and main-stay of the ṛta is obviously the sun and thus it is a revolving stay whose basis is stationary but whose head moves (R.V. III 55 7) propping up the sky from East to West and thus measuring space and time (A.V. X 8 4 and 7 11-12).

The wheel of ṛta is thus constructed by the successive rotations of the sun into the mobile but imperishable cycle of the year with its 5 seasons, 12 months and 720 days and nights, a clear and simple symbol of perfect duration which will be the paradigm of later speculations. What makes it perfect is not,
however, its course but its hub (nābhi), the mysterious and triple nave which belongs most likely to the triple hidden pada and which confers perpetuity to the revolution of the year. This nave is the originative navel (nābhi) of the Father (R.V. X 138 6) i.e., of the future intemporal Prajāpatī of the Brāhmaṇas. Enfolded in it is the undivided “non-born (aja)” unique duration proper to the Father (R.V. I 164 6). This aja is also a wheel but spokeless and immobile, the property of the Asura Pipru from which it must be wrested free by Indra (R.V. X 138 6) who then fractions it into months before launching it into space.

There, as the wheel of rta, it must be kept revolving by the impelling bursts of the sun according to the rhythm of day und night, of rising and setting and rising again, which for the Vedic rṣis is the measuring unit of time. Day and night are the two weavers who repeatedly warp and weave the threads of time so as to constitute the moving fabric of duration. Thus it is through untiring efforts of weaving (tan-) that time is perpetuated into the year-duration. Is it possible for men to help towards this perpetuation and secure for themselves an immortal time?

C. The Ritual Construction of Duration. Since time immemorial, men keep the flame of fire which is like a parcel of the sun in their midst. Like the sun, this āgni is jātavedas: it “knows the begetting”. Provided it is well begotten (sujāta, susūta), it is “the embryo coming to birth day after day and month after month” (R.V. II 29 13). Thus, thanks to human efforts, it is like the sun the “provider of duration” (āyurdā): although “it rises and dies” it is eternal because, “immortal, it is begotten by mortals” (R.V. II 29 13). The whole conception of Vedic sacrifice seems to be rooted in this grasping of the connection between fire and the sun. The all-pervading technique of sacrifice (yajñā) is based on the perceived possibility of repeating around fire the efforts of the gods around the sun and thus securing a firm duration. From the earlier Vedic times, sacrifice appears as a vast construction totally geared to feeding and praising the devas, the functionaries of cosmic rta, and thus maintaining the regular succession of days and nights and the continuity of rta itself.

Like the Ādityas’ activity which props up the world and prolongs its duration, sacrificial activity is a kratu, an efficient intention, and a mantu, a projecting (sṛj-) activity of thought, characterized by exactness (sātya) and precise measuring (mā-, māyā) and adjusting (ṛ-) in the manner of Varuṇa, the forethinker and foreknower (pracetās). The priests who enact the sacrifice are such pracetās; they are rtvij, knowers of the ṛtus, i.e., of those well-contrived and converging ritual acts crucial moments, articulations and binding knots which make the sacri-
ficial weft and thus anchor and strengthen the *rta*. These *rtus* correspond to the joints (*parvan*) or articulations (*parus*) of the days and nights, half-months, months and seasons of the year.

The sacrifice well-made (*sukṛta*), exactly constructed (*sāṃskṛta*), secures *amṛta*, non-death, immortality, undying duration. Rather than a static state, *amṛta* means an indefinitely prolonged duration, a hundred years on earth, a thousand lifes (*āyus*) in heaven, these global numbers being expressive of its very indefiniteness. Like its cause, the well-made and perfected sacrifice, *amṛta* is *sukṛta* and *sāṃskṛta* and is the lot, not of the impious who go to *nirṛti*, but of the sacrificers whose efforts have secured the continuity of *rta* for the world of mortals and for themselves after death.

2. TIME AND CONSTRUCTED DURATION IN THE BRAHMAṆAS

Whereas in the Vedic hymns the emphasis is naturally on the cosmogonic work of the deities and only secondarily on its imitation by human sacrificers, in the *Brāhmaṇas* most of the texts analyze, deepen and systematize the sacrificial technique. They distinguish and even oppose the two aspects: impulsion and organization, which the Vedas easily confused in the one creative act of thought (*manu, kṛatu*). They are sharply aware that emission (*sṝ*), the originate activity which is all impulsion (*sava*), engenders only a discontinuous and evanescent time; whereas, on the contrary, sacrificial activity (*abhisāṃskṛ* or *nirmā*), which is all formal construction, engenders the Year as the sacred Time which is not made of natural days and nights but of *parvas* and *rtus* as a concatenation of ritual acts.

At the centre of their speculations stands the one procreative God, *Prajāpati*, the Master and Father of all beings by his seed (*retas*). He is *prajananavant*, the possessor of the whole procreative energy, and *pratiśṭhā*, the universal basis and support. He is the one (*eka*) which is also the all both as spread out (*vīśva*) and as concentrated (*sarva*). As one, he is pure spiritual actuality, absolute, concentrated, without manifestation. As emitting the manifold universe (*vīśva*), he is loosened, dispersed activity and natural time. As ritually reconstructed, he is the Year (*samvatsara*) (S.B. XI 1 6 13) and the Sacrifice (S.B. XI 1 8 3). The *Brāhmaṇas* see a correspondence (*bandhutā*) and even an identity between his body or person (*ātman*) with limbs and joints, the sacrifice with its ritual action and mantras, and the Year with its
own articulations (ṛtu). It is this identity which gives sense to Brahmanic sacrifice.

A. Prajāpati, the self-dispersing Procreator. In the Vedas, the term praṇāpati is only an epithet of Savitṛ (R.V. IV 53 2). But there exists a Nṛpati, the Father Sky, Lord of men, who by mating with his daughter engenders, through his seeed (retas) scattered over sky and earth, the universe and its rta so that both are his gift (rāḍha) (R.V. X 61 5-6 and 11; I 71 5 and 8). And there is the cosmic Puruṣa who by being both sacrifice and victim dismembers himself into the various parts of the universe and by the immanent fourth of his person spreads everywhere the eatable and the non-eatable so that he becomes virāj, dispersed sovereignty (R.V. X 90).

In the Brāhmaṇas, Prajāpati-Puruṣa first creates the waters; then he enters them and arises as an egg the embryo of which is fire; from the waters he forms the earth and spreads it so that it becomes the ‘vast’ (prthivi); as fire he mates with earth and the resulting egg becomes the wind while its shell becomes the air; from the union of air and Prajāpati is formed a new egg whose embryo arises as the sun and the shell as the sky; a new union of Prajāpati as sun this time with the sky produces a new egg wherefrom the moon and the cardinal directions arise; finally by his mind uniting with voice Prajāpati creates the devas. “And then, having engendered everything, he disjoined himself (S.B. VI 1.1. 10 to 1 2 12).

This description of creation ending in the dispersion characteristic of natural time is a source of anxiety. The reaction of the Brāhmaṇas is to concentrate all their thinking and effort in order to achieve the reconstitution of Prajāpati. When Prajāpati finished emitting the creatures, his joints became dislocated. Now Prajāpati is assuredly the year and his joints are the two junctions (samādhi) of day and night, the full and the new moon, and the beginnings of the seasons (ṛtu). With his joints thus dislocated, he was unable to rise up. The gods healed him by means of the agniḥotra; they healed this articulation [which consists] of the two junctions of day and night; they joined them together (samadadhuḥ)” (S.B. I 6 3 35-36).

Prajāpati’s procreation had issued forth from his desire (kāma) (cf. R.V. 129 4 and S.B. VI 1 2 12-13) and resulted in a universe of creatures in confusion (T.B. 2 2 7 1), fearful of Death lying in wait for them (S.B. VIII 4 2 1) but devouring one another (P.B. XXIV 11 2) for lack of concord, of form, of norm. He must be redintegrated by the act contrary to procreative and emptying kāma, namely by a concentrated (samāhita), intentional and normatively efficacious act of manas (mantu, kratu).
B. The Ritual Reconstruction of Prajāpati. To the vitalistic causality which under the dynamism of desire goes from the centre to the periphery is opposed the formal, ritual causality which is mensuration and structuration and which redintegrates the peripheral dispersion into the centre, the equinoctial central day (vīśvat) of the year and the internal self (ātman) of Prajāpati. This is the same act of sacrifice as the agnihotra by which the gods healed the broken down and emptied (riricāna) Prajāpati. The difference between verbs with initial vi and verbs with initial sam marks the distinction of these two activities. Sacrifice is the karman par excellence which 'restructures perfectly' (abhisamskr-) Prajāpati and makes him again sarva (healthy, wholesome, hence, integral, whole). By the sacrifice he is given a foundation (pratiṣṭhā):

"Prajāpati emitted the creatures; having emitted them, he fell to pieces... vital air escaped from him... there was then no longer any foundation (pratiṣṭhā). The devas said: 'Assuredly there is no other foundation than this; let us reconstitute him, our same Father Prajāpati; let him be our foundation'. By being heated in the sacrificial fire, his escaped vital air came back to him... they restored Prajāpati entire and complete, and while they were setting him up, simultaneously they were setting up the worlds. This same foundation that the gods thus restored is the foundation here below, the foundation which has endured to this day and [which will endure] in the future eternally" (S.B. VII 1 2 1-8).

To restore this foundation, to "reconstruct Prajāpati whole and entire" (sarvam kṛtsnam praśāpatim saṃskaroti: S.B. VI 2 2 11; VII 1 2 7-8) is the typical activity of the devas and the priestly brahmans. It is done through an organization, commanded by thought (manas), of words and actions setting up the forms (rūpa) or the names-and-forms (nāmarūpa) which are the structures of reality (not yet the perishable forms despised by the sages of the Upaniṣads). But it is not easy to discover these forms and the secret of their perfect organization:

"The devas being afraid of death which is the year (i.e., the procreating Prajāpati in his dispersion) intended to obtain immortality but all their rites proved inefficient: they built up the fire-altar and set down bricks in unlimited number, they performed the agnihotra, the sacrifice of soma... Consulted by them, Prajāpati said: 'You are not placing me in all my forms (na vai me sarvān rūpāṇy upadhattha). You are making me in excess or in default. Hence, you will not become immortals'. And he showed them the way of setting down the bricks and taught them their exact number" (S.B. X 4 3-38). This text shows that norm
and measure are required rather than unlimitedness and indefiniteness and that the organization of the total (limited) number of forms must be exact (satya). The undertaking, indeed, aims at overcoming the indefiniteness of time.

The vocabulary of the texts brings forth this basic idea of exact composition: one must measure (mā-), commensurate (saṃnir-mā-), set down in composition (saṃdāhā-), articulate anew (pra- tisamatāhā-), bring together (saṃbhr-), fashion and shape out (saṃ’-ṛ-), consolidate (saṃsthā), achieve and perfect (saṃskṛ-, abhisamskṛ-), and sacrifice integrally (saṃyaj-). There is a constant search for congruence (salōma) and equilibrium of forms (vividha) but their mere repetitive uniformity (anukūla) is avoided because an element of differentiation is indispensable to the establishment of correspondences of levels and structures.

The terms used to designate these correspondences are nidāna, brāhmaṇa, bandhu/bandhutā and upaniṣad. Nidāna is the connection by which two entities pertaining to different levels are identified on the basis of the similarity of their roles, e.g., the sacrificer (yajamāna) with the animal victim (A.B. II 11 5), the officiating āgnidhra with the god Agni (S.B. I 2 4 13), etc. Already in R.V. X 130 3 and 6 the question was what was the connection (nidāna) between the prototype (pramā), namely, the primordial sacrifice, and its copy (pratimā), the sacrifice offered by the human rṣis. Brāhmaṇa is the universal principle “by which the three worlds have been commensurated” (A.V. XII 3 20). The brāhmaṇa itself is anciently the type of enigmas proposed by the rṣis concerning the mysterious connections between the hidden domain of the ‘unadjusted’ (anṛta) and the various parts or aspects of the adjusted cosmos; then it tends to designate the improvised verses by which the poets (kavi) solve such enigmas after apprehending by thought (manas) anyone of those secret connections; hence, it comes to mean the totality of all archetypal connections and, as such, “the brāhmaṇa is the essence (tattva) of the sacrifice” (A.V. XIX 42 2). Bandhu or bandhutā no longer refer in the Brāhmaṇas to the hidden originary domain but only to the ritual connections and already to the correspondences between the sacrifice and man, the microcosm. The Āranyakas will then search more exclusively for the correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm (adhidaivata and adhyātma) and the Upaniṣads will endeavour to interpret these correspondences in in terms of identity; hence, their name which could be rendered as ‘transcendent equation’.

C. The Construction of the Fire-Altar. In the Vedas, sacrifices were meant to feed and praise the devas, those permanent engineers of cosmic rta. In the Brāhmaṇas, all sacrifices are said
to be summed up in the construction of the fire-altar (agnicayana) (S.B. X 1 5 1) and this is called the reconstitution of the dispersed Prajāpati. It lasts one year because Prajāpati is, by ritual connection, the Year which itself is, again by ritual connection, the total duration and thus the universe as sarva. By the end of this ceremony, the sacrificer also ritually identified with Prajāpati finds himself become whole and wholesome (sarva).

The details of agnicayana are as follows: “The 5 bodily sections [of Prajāpati] which had become dislocated are the 5 layers [of the mahāvedi, altar]. When one arranges the 5 layers, one reconstitutes him by his 5 bodily sections and, because one lays down (ci-) the layers, [one calls them] layers (citi). And... these 5 sections ...are the seasonal joints (ṛtu) for there are 5 ṛtus and the layers are 5; so when he constructs the 5 layers of bricks, he constructs him by means of the seasonal joints... And his Prajāpati, the year, which had become dislocated, is that same wind (vāyu) that blows over there; and these 5 bodily sections, the ṛtus, which had got dislocated, are the diś, the directions in space, for 5 are the diś... And the fire (agni) that one is laying on the built up [altar] is the sun up there; assuredly, this same fire is on the altar because Agni did reconstitute Prajāpati. The [equinoctial] day on which Agni, the sun, entered the altar is the central day (vīșvat), the day when the gods raised up the sun in the sky”. (S.B. VI 1 2 17-21).

The five layers correspond to the five parts of the universe: earth, atmosphere, sky, etc., which are their prototypes (pramā) and this is why “he who knows the spiritual connection (āṛṣeya bandhu) of the layers gets his own [bodily and mental] structures provided with connection (bandhu)” (S.B. VI 2 3 10). Thus, thanks to his science of the connections, the sacrificer situates himself at the intersection of the different levels: cosmic, divine, sacrificial, of reality and from their correspondence he derives his powers.

“Fivefold is the sacrifice and fivefold the victim; there are 5 seasons in the year, this is the unique measure (māṭrá). The 5 formulae consist of 17 syllables: of 17 parts is made Prajāpati and Prajāpati is the sacrifice...” (S.B. I 5 2 16-17).

The agnicayana begins with the measurement which determines a circular sacred area. Then, an enclosure of 360 stones or bricks is made by laying a stone each night and a brick each day: “every time one lays an enclosing stone, one lays one night and thus 15 muhūrtas; and every time one lays a brick with a ritual formula, one lays one day and thus 15 muhūrtas [the 30 muhūrtas are hour-like divisions]” (S.B. X 4 2 27). Because there are $360 \times 30 = 10,800$ muhūrtas in the year, the total sa-
crifice requires 10,800 bricks. The encircling is meant to provide a solid foundation (pratiṣṭhā) and a delimiting measure (mātrā) as a spatial and temporal frame (tantra) to the sacrifice which must be a well-determined and finished totality (pūrṇa), a closed system with definite temporal rhythms and spatial limits.

At the beginning of the agnicayana, 2 fires are prepared. The first, calle gārhapatya (ancestral and domestic), is laid in a circular hearth which symbolizes the matrix and the universe; in this matrix sand is scattered, symbol of the seed, and enclosed with protecting stones; then fire is lit and made continuous (santan-) by the blowing of (vital) air (cf. S.B. VII 1 1 10-26). Thus is constituted the bodily self of the ritually obtained immortal personality of the sacrificer.

To this earthly fire is opposed the celestial fire āhavaniya (the fire ‘for oblations’) which is to the first what vital sap is to the body. By this fire the sacrificer is born to the celestial world and attains immortality: “At the time when he constructs Agni, the hearth, the sacrificer takes it within himself, for it is from his own self that he makes it to be born and one becomes alike to that from which one is born. Were he to construct Agni without assuming it, he would engender the mortal from the mortal... but when he assumes it he makes Agni to be born from Agni, the immortal from the immortal, then he makes it his own [by whispering: ] ‘Within myself I take the fire’. Thus he assumes all that he is going to engender from his own Self” (S.B. VII 4 1 1-2). Then he imbibes himself with satya, exactness, as with water and on this water he symbolically lays the earth by laying a lotus leaf on the centre of the altar as the matrix from which Agni will be born. On this leaf he lays the golden plate which he had carried from his neck from the first day of his initiation. This golden plate is the sun. “On the sun he then lays the man made of gold who is Prajāpati and Agni and the sacrificer. Gold is immortality and fire is immortality” (S.B. VII 4 1 1-15).

In parallel with the construction of the altar, the initiation or sacralization (dīkṣā) of the sacrificer has progressed in order to turn him into an integrally sacred personality made of satya (cf. S.B. X 2 13 and XI 1 8 6). It is “a self made of meters, hymns, breaths, deities, brāhmaṇ and immortality and, in one year, his self is thus constructed entire and complete” (S.B. X 4 2 26). “Thus this sacrifice being completed becomes the Self of the sacrificer in the hereafter and the sacrificer is born in the hereafter with a complete body” (S.B. XI 1 8 6). “On account of this it is said that man is born in the world which he has made for himself (kṛtam loka)” (S.B. VI 2 2 27).
Not only does he make for himself a desirable self and space but also a coherent duration, the year, which is immortality. Indeed, the natural days and nights are ritually concentrated into one Day: “How many days are there truly? Truly there is but one day; the total year is just this day after that day. Such is the connection (upanisad) of the year, and he who knows this connection of the year is endowed with a self (atman) and becomes more and more glorious until the end of the year; he becomes the year, and having become the year he unites himself with the gods” (S.B. XII 2 2 23). His year long dikṣa is a fabrication of his immortal self (atma-saṃskṛti) from the stage of embryo through the fashioning (saṃkīlp-) of his vital airs (prāṇa), senses, manas and atman itself to his birth from the matrix of the perfected sacrifice (A.B. II 40 1-7).

The last day of his initiation, one builds up the great altar (mahāvedi) as the centre of the universe, the centre of the year, the central place of sacrificial fire, which is the universal principle of continuity, and the centre of the atman of the reconstituted Prajāpati which is also the atman of the sacrificer.

D. The Constructed Hyper-Self (Adhyātman). The human self born from the womb is simply mortal. But the hyper-self which results from sacrifice is immortal. Man can fabricate it by the sacrificial process of adjusting exactly a system of ritual acts (karman).

In the beginning, Prajāpati immolated himself to the devas by giving them his own atman. When he was lying down, all cut up, and was only a heart (hrdaya), it is his self that he bewailed: “Ah! my atman!” he said (T.B. II 3 6 1). Then he emitted a counterpart of this atman, namely, the sacrifice and, by the sacrifice, he redeemed his self “and thus made it immortal” (S.B. XI 1 8 3-4). In the same way the sacrificer redeems his own self by the sacrifice and is to be reborn in the hereafter with a complete and immortal atman (S.B. XI 1 8 6). More precisely it is by the establishment of the fire that he becomes immortal:

“The devas and the asuras, both sons of Prajāpati, were rivals; they were without atman for they were mortal and he who has no atman is mortal. Among them all, Agni alone was immortal and it is from him, the immortal one, that both groups were living. Now whosoever among them was killed, he was getting life again. But at the end the devas remained the weakest. They went to worship, moaning: ‘Ah! if we could overcome the asuras, our mortal rivals!’ Then they saw this immortality, the agnicayana... they established it in themselves, in their inner atman (antarātman), and... became immortal, became invincible” (S.B. II 2 2 8-14).
In the same way, the performer of the agnicayana can sing: “I have set all the worlds in my antarātman and my antarātman in the midst of all the worlds ...and all the gods, ...all the Vedas, ...all the prānas, ...for those are imperishable (aṅkṣara) and imperishable is the All. Truly who knows this passes from the perishable to the imperishable, he conquers repeated death, and attains the full measure of life” (S.B. XII 3 4 11).

Hence, in the Brāhmaṇas, the sacrifice to the self is exalted above the sacrifice to the gods: “It is asked, which one is better, he who sacrifices to the ātman or he who sacrifices to the devas? The answer must be, he who sacrifices to the ātman. Who is he who sacrifices to the ātman? It is he who knows thus: By this (rite) such limb of mine is fashioned (saṃskṛtyaya), by that (rite) such other limb of mine is set in place (upadhiyaya). As a snake gets rid of his dead skin, he too gets rid of this mortal body which is evil. By getting fashioned out of ṛc, out of yajus, out of sāman, out of oblations, he comes to possess the celestial world. But he who sacrifices to the devas does not conquer as great a place” (S.B. XI 2 6 13-14).

Of this ritually fashioned immortal ātman, the year is the perfect symbol because it is totality. Integrating 48 substructures (26 half-months, 13 months, 17 seasons, day, night) it is the “whirling wheel of the gods” (devacakra pariplava: K.B. XX 1) “by which one goes where one desires to reach and he who knows this reaches the extreme end of the year” (A.B. IV 15 6-7). As a complex structure, the year is also a body with lissom joints (the dhāyyā verses of the lighting), adjusted articulations (the sacrificial days which the sacrificer binds as articulation to articulation: parvanyeva tat parva karoti S.B. VI 2 2 24), seasonalṛitus (which are the joints: saṃdhī, of the fingers, arms, legs, etc. S.B. XI 5 2 1-9), etc. Thus it is sumeka, well-constructed, and, hence, sveka, perfectly one, and, therefore, aṅkṣara, imperishable. The result is that by the sacrifice the sacrificer obtains all (sarpa): “the worlds, the year and the ātman of the sacrificer pass into the ‘sacrifice of man’ (puruṣa medha) for the acquisition and secure possession of all; for the worlds are all, the year is all, the ātman is all, and the puruṣa medha is all” (S.B. XIII 6 1 11).

E. Towards the Upaniṣads: the ritual dimension of the Unlimited. In all that precedes, structure has been the commanding theme. But the All (sarpa) is not only structure: before and beyond being structure it is also unlimited (amitta, aparimitas), endless (ananta), undefined (anirukta): “Truly this sacrifice is Prajāpati and Prajāpati is both defined and undefined, limited and unlimited. With a [distinctly uttered] yajus formula, one constructs his defined and limited form; in silence, one constructs
his undefined and unlimited form. He who, knowing this, acts thus reconstitutes Prajāpati entire and integral” (S.B. XIV 1 2 18).

A diversity of ritual elements serve to crown the limited with the unlimited: the scattering of numberless grains of sand (śika-
tāḥ), which represent the seed, the ‘lost part’ of the brāhmaṇ, and its indefinite multipliability; words which are indistinct (ani-
rukta) and pronounced in a mumbled way (jalpa) or with a low voice (upāmsu) to signify the hidden energy and growth of life (āyus) (S.B. V 4 4 13; VI 2 2 20-22); restrained voice (vāgyamana) (S.B. III 2 2 26); and silence (tūśnim), which is uncommensurable thought (manas) and, hence, the formless (arūpa) concentrated original Prajāpati.

Silence is the prerogative of the priest called brahmān. Seated south of the altar, “he conducts the sacrifice” (S.B. X 107 6). Enclosing in his mind all the intentions by which it is ordained, he supervises every rite, silent and immobile, signals their begin-
nings, repairs any incorrectness (by means of the words bhūḥ,
bhuvah, svar or of expiatory oblations: A.B. V 32 7; S.B. I 7 4 19;
XI 5 8 6; XII 6 1 37) and by his triple science articulates the sacrifice joint to joint (parvanā parva samadhāya: J.B. I 358 10). While the other priests (hotṛ, adhvaryu, udgāṭṛ) “organise (sam-
śkr-) one path of the sacrifice by their words, he organizes the other path by his thought (manas); this is why he sits in silence (tūśnim)” (K.B. VI 11). “In him the entire sacrifice finds its sup-
port” (A.B. VII 26 5). ‘Om’, the mental and finally inaudible syllable, which stands for the imperishable essence of the sacrifice, the brāhmaṇ, is his assent upon the ritual activities of the other priests (S.B. X 4 1 9). By his knowledge of the total brāhmaṇ, he imposes perfect harmony (samvidāna) over the whole ritual and sees to it “that nothing remains incomplete (asamsthitā)” (S.B. I 7 4 18).

In the concentrated (samāhitā) silence of the brahmān, thought appears as what excites and conducts the sacrifice: “There
is breath, voice and thought, which is Prajāpati. One acts by
the voice, one directs by prāṇa, and one excites by manas” (J.U.B.
33 2 4). The one (eka) Prajāpati, silently meditating in thought (manasādhyāyat) and restraining his voices during one year (P.B.
VII 6.1.3; T.B. II 2 9 10), is Thought which, “in order to manifest itself and to become more definite, endeavoured to construct an ātman, acquired consistency, by intense meditation (paryālokana), and perceived the 36,000 fires [i.e., the days of a perfect life of 100 years] of his own ātman, [fires] composed of thought and constructed by thought” (S.B. X 5 3 2).

As a system of acts, sacrifice like any act, perishes as soon as it
has been accomplished. But what does not perish is its mental
structure (saṃsthā) and connection (nidāna), i.e., its conformity to its Archetype and Norm, the brāhmaṇ. The sacrificer having assumed and interiorized this brāhmaṇ is now endowed with an immortal hyper-ātman. This is as it were the condensation of all ritual acts and thus a condensation of all fleeting times, the formal and intemporal Year. Between the three terms, ātman, brāhmaṇ and samvatsara (year), a fundamental equation is established already in the Brāhmaṇas. These texts still stand by the conception that ātman is to be constructed and brāhmaṇ is the condensed mental unity of all times and thus of all realities. This, however, ushers in the problem whether brāhmaṇ should not be absolutized as self-existing Substance of the nature of Thought. In a late Brāhmaṇa, Kausitaki seems to have an inking of that new problem. For "he used to say that thought is Prajāpati: Prajāpati is the sacrifice, [and] sacrifice itself rejoices in the sacrifice as thought in thought" (K.B. X 1). But it was reserved to the Upaniṣads, in the wake of the Āranyakas, to explore in new fashion the equation of the Adhyātman with this Thought-Brahman and to posit it in an altogether new sense.

3. CREATED TIME AND REDEEMED TIME IN THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Far from being farfetched, a setting in parallels of the views about time embedded in the Christian liturgy and exposed by the early Fathers of the Church with the above Vedic and Brāhmaṇic conceptions will appear a rewarding task.

The basic text which gave them birth is Ephesians 1:9-10, "He has made known to us the mystery (mysterion) of his will: the loving design, which he had set forth in him (Christ), to bring about the fulfilment of the times (tōn kairōn), namely, to bring back all things both in the heavens and on the earth under the headship of Christ".

The mysterion is both revealed and put into effect. It is revealed as the purpose "hidden from the beginning of time in God who created all things" (Eph. 3:9) but also as a final goal to be reached through an oikonomia, a concert of efforts directed and given success to by Christ (see 'oikonomia' in both 1:10 and 3:9). The liturgy is par excellence the locus of what this implies, the regeneration of created time and the advent of a new duration which is to be our glorious participation in God's very eternity.

A. The Meaning of the Seven Days of Creation. The backdrop of the Christian liturgy depicts the seven days of creation. Thanks
to the revelation of the mysterion, these represent the creative work of God, including his salvific purpose. The primordial words, "In the beginning God created..." resound with the victory-cry of the end, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). In between is the proclamation of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was turned towards the Father... It was through the Word that all things were created... And the Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us".

The Christian intuition of the originality of this revelation that "the end is in the beginning" and, thus, of the eschatological dimension of hope, prevented early theology from floundering in the Greek flux of the circularity of time. Rather, like the Vedic speculation, it became immediately shot through with the dynamism of the task of adjusting mankind to the action of God divinizing it. Beginning and end are not relative, as in the Greek conception of a self-repeating cycle, but absolute. Creation is a true beginning which inaugurates the process of salvation history and which is fulfilled by a true end.

The Adversus Hereses of St. Irenaeus presents the six days of creation as followed by the seventh day when God rested not so much from his work as in his work. It is the day about which Jesus says, "As my Father has continued working to this hour, so I work too" (Jn 5:17). God is not inert but rests in his work so that his work may finally rest in him. The seventh day is the active transition which leads to the eighth day when all labourers whether of the first or of the eleventh hour will receive the same full salary of their labour. The seven days of Genesis are the archetypal time, the figure and the model of the days of history, which is to be sublat ed into the eighth day, the day of fulfilment in eternity. In the expectation of hope, we watch for this day to dawn.

The correspondence between the week of the Genesis and the days of the Lord's passion is expressed in literalistic fashion by Irenaeus and others:

By resuming in himself man entire from beginning to end, he has resumed man's death too. Hence, it is clear that the Lord suffered death in obedience to his Father on the very day when Adam had died for disobeying God. Thus resuming in himself that very day, the Lord suffered on the eve of the Sabbath, which is the sixth day of creation, the day when man was moulded, so that by means of his passion he moulded him anew after he had died. (Adversus Hereses, V 23 2).

The Lord resumed the first time itself when he restored man so that while purifying man and by this very purification he could also make pure the following age starting from its initial point; as a result, he displayed simultaneously man's renova-
tion and the purification of time, and he proved by the very symbolism of the successive times that the restorer of nature was its very creator. (Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Seventh Easter Homily*, 28).

The first homily in this collection connects Easter with the first day of the year, and it notes in almost Vedic fashion that “the year is the symbol of eternity because in its rotation it always returns to itself and comes to no stop”.

The beginning of the year [on this Easter Day] means for us that the beginning of eternal life is found in the immolation of the true Easter, that Christ offered as a victim for our salvation is ‘Father of the eternal future’, and that making obsolete all previous life he lays down the ‘beginning’ of another life through the baptism of rebirth in the likeness of his death and resurrection. (Id., *First Easter Homily*, 6).

Easter is thus the true New Year Day which inaugurates a new duration more stable than the cyclic recurrence of our earthly days. It is the *mysterion* of the eighth day.

But St. Irenaeus sees more in this than a mere reduplication of creation time into Easter time. He perceives an essential continuity between the two beginnings, though he expresses it in the doubtful category of millenarism:

As many days did the creation of the world comprise, as many millennia will its total duration comprehend... It is simultaneously a narration of the past event as it occurred and a prophecy of the future. Since, indeed, ‘a day of the Lord is like a thousand years’, and creation was performed in six days, it is clear that the consummation of things will take place on the six-thousandth year. (*Adversus Hereses*, V 28 3).

There is an interval (the seventh day) between the perfection of the creative act (performed in six days) and the consummation of its effect (on the eighth day). What happens during this interval is “the maturation of man’s freewill in view of immortality” (*ibid.*, V 29 1). It is for this, says St. Gregory of Nyssa, that man is subjected to the ‘passion’ of time. And St. Irenaeus centers this growth on the act by which Christ restores in man the divine image and similitude which marked him at his creation:

In the past, it was said, indeed, that man had been created in the image and similitude of God, but this was not apparent for the Word had not yet appeared in whose image man had been made; this is why the similitude got easily lost. But when God made himself flesh, he conformed the one with the other: he made the image appear in its full truth by himself becoming
that itself which was image; and he restored the similitude in stable manner by making man altogether similar to the invisible Father through his henceforth visible Word. *(Ibid., V 16 2).*

B. The Meaning of the Three Days and Nights of the Lord’s Pascha. The triduum sacram of the liturgy does not coincide exactly with the triduum mortis of Christ but is like its imprint in our chronological temporality. The triduum mortis is the axial point in the mysterious temporality of the Christ-event. This temporality is theandric. In Christ, man’s salvation by God is not an a-temporal activity but an act of the Eternal in time. It is willed as such by God. Christ calls it the ‘sign of Jonah’ and says that ‘no other sign will be given’. “For, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” *(Matt. 12:40).* This is his Pascha, his passage, his transit, by which we transit from our days of alienation to the eternity of our glorious freedom.

In the primitive church, the Pascha (Easter) is focused on Christ’s sacrifice, “our Pascha, indeed, is Christ immolated” *(I Cor., 5:7)* and, in the manner of Hippolytus, ‘pascha’ is derived from the Greek ‘paschein’, to suffer. But, from the 3d century, after Origen has restituted to it its Hebrew etymology as ‘passage’, it is in the writings of the Fathers the designation of the triple event, Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. Only from the 5th-6th century will it designate the Resurrection Day alone.

There were thus difficulties about determining the limits of the triduum sacram with regard to the triduum mortis. Should it include the Holy Thursday and its Last Supper and, at the other end, the Resurrection only in terms of Matthew’s Gospel where the ‘opse sabbatōn’ of 28:1 seems to imply that the evening of Holy Saturday was the time of Christ’s resurrection? Or should it start from the evening of Thursday and end on Sunday morning? This embarrassment prompted some writers to delve deeper into the ‘mystic’ meaning of the paschal triduum.

First of all, they paid attention to the holistic meaning of the number three:

Three days he remained underground in order that the entire mankind be saved, those who lived before the promulgation of the Law, those who lived under the Law, and those of his own time; or perhaps in order that he may rise up in integral life of soul, spirit and body. *(Pseudo-Hippolytus, Easter Homily 58).*

For Gregory of Nyssa, it is a temporal sequence of healing which reverses the temporal spreading of sin from the serpent to the woman and then to the man. On the first day of the
triduum, man is “purified”, on the second, woman is “healed”, and, on the third, death and all the serpent’s powers are “destroyed”. Thus the three-day “ordered progression of the good” (tou agathou taxis) is “to be discerned from the earlier ordered progress of the infection” (dia tēs en tō kakō taxeōs katanoēsai). (De Tridui Spatio, ed. E. Gebhart, p. 285) This is the therapeutic of fallen man’s time being healed by the time of the crucified Christ. “Because our life is comprised between two extremes, the beginning and the end, there is found at each one of these extremes the Power that sets our nature upright; it came into contact with the beginning, it has extended itself unto the end, and has occupied the whole interval”. (Catechetical Discourse, xxvii, 2).

As to the triduum mortis, Gregory adopts the computation already found in the Syrian Didascalia, V, 9-12: it begins on Thursday evening with the last Supper which anticipates mysterically the death of Christ; then, Friday is divided into two days by the darkness which covered the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour, as by a night; finally, the night of Friday and the day of Saturday make up the third day of the mors Christi, so that his resurrection may be seen to occur early in the night of Saturday in agreement with Matthew’s opse tōn sabbatōn. (De Tridui Spatio, pp. 287-289).

More than this odd reckoning the reasons given for it are of interest. For they show Gregory’s conception of the archetypal temporality of this paradoxical triduum of Christ’s death:

It was fitting that the works of the Ruler of the ages be not subjected to the established measurements of time. On the contrary, the measures of time had to be cut out for the needs of his work; the more compact the operation by which the divine power did us good, the shorter had to be the measures of its time. If this time had not to be inferior to three days and nights, since a mystical and ineffable reason requires this number, yet the divine power was not to be hampered in the celerity of its operation by observing the procrastination of the usual intervals of days and nights. For he who had “the power to lay down his life of his own accord and the power to take it up again” (Jn 10:18) had the power as Creator of the times not to be subjected to them by his works but to create time in function of his works. (Ibid., pp. 289-290).

Thus the time of the redemption is not a brutal irruption of eternity into created time but a theandric temporality, the Pascha or transit of Christ which ushers in the Eighth Day.

C. The Mysterion of the Eighth Day. The Resurrection Sunday is the Today of Christ himself, to which every Sunday of the year
and every summit of the liturgy is immanent and contemporaneous. "This is the Day that the Lord has made". This is the Day which Christ is, he who is the Lord of the days and the times. This is the Day when of his own accord he took up his life again. This is the Eighth Day which is really the First Day of the victorious dispensation of his redeeming love.

This day does not add up to the three days of the redemption; it is not simply a fourth day in sequence with the other three. Rather, it is their very ternary. It is the kairos of theandric temporality, the time of the radical re-beginning and re-creation of all things in the sabbatical repose of the active providence of God over the whole of his creation. It is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the fulfilment, as Revelation says of Christ himself.

[It is about the Resurrection-Event that] the great Zachariah says, 'It is not a day, and it is not a night'. It cannot be called day because the sun is absent, but it cannot be called night because there is no darkness. According to Moses, indeed, it is darkness which God called night... If, therefore, according to the prophet, this moment is neither day nor night, it is a blessing which assuredly differs from these and requires a different appellation. Do you want me to tell you my deep feeling? 'This is the Day that the Lord made', a day different from our created days which measure time, a day which is the dawn of another creation: for, on this day, the Lord creates a new heaven and a new earth, as the prophet says. Which heaven? The firmament of faith in Christ. Which earth? The good hearts which earthlike drink the rain falling on them and ripen up an abundant harvest, as the Lord said... What is created too in this creation is the true man, made in the image and similitude of God. You see, then, of which world the beginning is taking place... But my discourse has not yet declared the distinctive character of today's blessing. It is a blessing which has dissolved the pangs of death, brought to light the First-born from the dead, shattered the iron gates of death, and broken open the brazen bolts of hell. Now the prison of the dead is wide-open, now the liberation is announced to the captives, now the blind recover their sight, now the sunrise from above is described by those who had been lying in the shadow and the darkness of death. (Ibid. pp. 278-280).

Conclusion

The universe of thought of early Christianity is widely different from that of early Brahmanism. Yet there are coordinates which link their respective conceptions of empirical time and of the superior kind of time which is engendered by sacrifice. The
sacrifice of Christ is altogether distinct from the Vedic sacrifice but both have a transformative function. The first initiates a new creation which resumes the primeval one to cleanse and elevate it to a divinization which is an absolute novelty. The second is focused backwards and attempts to recover the integral fullness of the primeval age. The first is a theandric operation the efficacy of which is due to the divinity of Christ. The second is a protracted process in which many men, acting in the name of the whole people, play diverse roles in a cooperation by which they try to reconstitute Prajāpati, the Father of the creatures; the weakened Prajāpati is not the principal agent of that process but rather its object and beneficiary. The Vedic rites are constitutive of the desired redintegration. The Christian liturgy is commemorative and re-presentative of Christ’s sacrifice; it does not constitute it but distributes its efficacy all along the ages and for every human being. Common to both the Brahmanic and the Christian worlds is the conception of twin-durations, the first a profane and alienating time, the time of our fugacious days, and the second a transforming and integrating sacred continuity produced by sacrifice. The new ātman issuing from the concentrated silence of the sacrificial brahman, according to Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, seems to prefigure “the true man, made in the image and similitude of God” created in the silence of the Resurrection night by the victorious power of the sacrificed Christ.

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