

From Swami Kriyananda

(J. Donald Walters)

November 1992

Dear Ones:

It is no mere formality for me to address you that way. You are dear to me. I can visualize us looking back someday and laughing over certain episodes that, in this lifetime, have been painful to us all.

I don't know what attitudes you've expressed regarding this lawsuit during moments of informal discussion about it. On our part, and despite the fact that Ananda's very survival has been at stake, there's been a surprising amount of joy both felt and expressed. Recently, one of our Ananda legal team remarked, "You all may think this sounds crazy, but I'm going to miss this lawsuit when it's all over!"

At the same time, your suit has posed a serious challenge for us. I might add, moreover, that it hasn't been fun dealing with your lawyers' insults, or, for that matter, with yours. We've simply been determined to keep our spirits up, and to bear in mind that this earth life is, as Master taught us, only a dream.

No wish to harm SRF

We've felt like warriors in battle, fighting because duty called us to fight, but doing so only to defend the truth as we understood it, and not from any wish to harm you. In fact, we've never felt that we were fighting you, either individually or as an organization.

At the same time, wars are not fought with feathers. You have tried your best to destroy us, and are still trying to do so. From feedback we've received, you are, as Queen Victoria once put it, "not amused" with the vigor of our response. All I can say in reply is that when a person enters the boxing ring, he must be prepared to get hurt.

The first thing to face is the fact that you have entered the ring. You've thereby abandoned the right you previously assumed to sit in the judges' box. You can no longer wear the mask of judgment; still less, that of infallibility.

A point of truth: how I have spoken about SRF to the present

You continue even now to claim, in your letters to people, that you've never spoken against me or Ananda, and that I, by contrast, have spoken "freely" against you. In fact, I have never felt, or expressed, this alleged "freedom."

To explain what I mean, I might do well to quote a letter I received recently from an Ananda minister, written to elucidate this point.

“You have never,” the letter states, “set yourself up in the kind of unquestioned, unapproachable position SRF has. You interact with people all the time, and are constantly engaged in meeting them and in trying to relate to them on their various levels of consciousness. You accept their questions and, unlike SRF, have never ignored their genuine concerns. You’ve always tried to accept and to understand their realities, and have never tried to sweep inconvenient facts under the rug. On the subject of SRF, therefore, it has been your practice to give people some kind of an answer, when it was clear they sincerely needed to know.

“In the context of this need, however, you have been very restrained and always supportive of SRF. It is only that you haven’t been willing to pretend that the reality wasn’t there, as SRF has consistently tried to do. Is this willingness to address a painful issue as sensitively and supportively as possible SRF’s definition of ‘speaking freely’?

“Even your closest friends have been astonished to the point of disbelief by the facts that have emerged during this lawsuit. Though we have discussed the SRF situation with you countless times over the years, there is so much that you never even touched on, no matter how small the group or how confidential the discussion. And yes, we, your friends, have been exasperated by your continued support of SRF in the face of their unrelenting unkindness to you.

“In fact, your supportive energy has succeeded in keeping this conflict essentially one-sided. That is to say, SRF policy—substantiated in their legal papers and by countless other examples—is that you are despicable. Ananda members, on the other hand, have continued all these years to hold SRF in high regard, and, in fact, have only slowly been able to absorb the reality of this lawsuit—primarily because the picture we have always received from you has been so much more supportive than the facts warrant!”

Prior to your lawsuit, I was always, as this minister’s letter makes clear, extremely circumspect in my remarks both to you and about you. My “motive” (you had a heyday, thirty years ago, with my imagined “motives”) was rooted partly in love for you, mostly in love for God and Guru, and also in a deep belief that we must strive together to promote unity in Master’s work, and do everything we can to counter the forces of disunity. I must add that I know you all personally as few people do. I hold in my heart a deep and sincere respect for you. Beyond that, it simply is not my nature to fight—not against things, anyway; for what I believe in, yes. But what point is there in fighting, if the smallest opening can be found for resolving issues harmoniously?

I have also been afraid—I confess it freely—of erring karmically, and of displeasing Master by sowing seeds of disharmony in his work. Who among us, after all, is in a position to entertain absolute certainty on issues where something as important as his own, or anyone else’s, salvation is concerned? Compared to this eternally central issue, nothing else can have any

importance at all. This is a further reason why I've always refrained from striking back at you, even when sorely provoked.

People with whom I've worked directly since Ananda's earliest days used often to remonstrate with me for supporting you, as I persisted in doing—and not you only, but SRF ministers and other representatives of the organization who considered that they demonstrated their loyalty by denouncing me, publicly or in private.

The fact that I supported you doesn't mean I always agreed with you concerning the directions you were taking. I always felt, however, that the good that SRF did far outweighed its possible mistakes. It was, I believed, Master's place, not mine, to correct any such misdirections as might exist.

SRF's pattern of harassment

Your "Warning," which you publish yearly in your magazine, and with which you preface most of your books, fails to support your claim not to have spoken against me. Indeed, in one of our legal motions we listed some forty instances of defamation against us on SRF's part. In a more recent instance—one, at any rate, that has only just come to our attention—SRF telephoned one of the overseas publishers of *The Essence of Self-Realization*, our book of Master's sayings, and threatened to withdraw your books from his publishing house if he didn't himself withdraw this publication from the market. ("Essence," by the way, recently listed eighth on the best-seller list for esoteric books in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.) "Kriyananda," SRF told the publisher, "distorts the teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda."

I can't imagine that it is a matter for much pride on your part that the only victory you've won so far in your lawsuit is the judge's decision that you have a constitutional right to defame us if you want to—even (as he put it, citing one of our allegations) to call me the "antichrist." Indeed, if I may introduce a note of humor into a subject so essentially serious, in your claim not to speak against us you've been like the hostess at a dinner party who smiles at the guests, while giving her husband a well-aimed kick under the table.

The need for dialogue, rather than innuendo

I've written you a number of times regarding the lawsuit. Rarely have you responded. When you've done so, you've not seen fit to confront directly the issues I've raised, and have relied heavily on innuendo. Now I find that, in response to people's deeply felt inquiries about the court case, you've been pointing to Master's training of us in order to justify your secretiveness on the subject. It is true that Master didn't want us spreading negativity. He told us, for this reason, to keep negative issues confidential "between the parties concerned." What you seem to want to do, however, is exclude even the "parties concerned"! At any rate, you refuse to enter, or perhaps are simply incapable of entering, reasonable dialogue with them. Your failure to answer my letters, except rarely and by indirection, is an example, merely, of this unwillingness, or this inability.

You have yet to realize that, where the lawsuit is concerned, the number of people directly affected is legion. You cannot reasonably brush off with innuendoes those who question your legal actions, since it is you yourselves who placed the case in the public domain. Every sincere follower of Master's teachings must be counted among the "parties concerned" in this case.

The time for innuendo has passed. A lawsuit is a public affair. Our demise would be a public affair. I do not actually believe you'll succeed in bankrupting us. Your lawyers' tactics, however, could hardly have been designed with any other purpose in mind.

SRF's tendency to pursue its own way, as if it were the only one possible

I've no doubt that they, and you, expected in the beginning simply to blow us away. And I'm sure you had no idea of the depth of our commitment to serving Master through Ananda. Most of all, I'm sure it never occurred to you (though I can't think why your lawyers didn't bring this point to your attention) that the law of our country was not on your side, but on ours. We cannot claim any special brilliance in exposing this fact, though we've done our best to bring into the open all the points of law that touched on the case.

A defect in your legal arguments has been a defect also in your treatment of me all these years: Just as, thirty years ago, you refused even to give me a hearing in my own defense, and since then have rarely deigned to acknowledge my letters to you, so you've consistently ignored our arguments in this case. One might think we'd never voiced them. A number of fundamental issues that we've raised might, for all the attention you've given them, have been written in Sanskrit. Instead, you've continued stubbornly to pursue your own line of reasoning—as though no other line could possibly exist!

Avoidance of reality

This avoidance of reality is no way to arrive at the truth in any situation. The fact is, for years now you have devoted your powers of reasoning to finding ways of avoiding the truth. Your defense can aptly be described as the "Ostrich Method"—or, more elegantly in Italian, "Metodo da Struzzo." How do you expect to win in debate, if you limit yourselves simply to declaring your own point of view over and over again? Of course, debate, in a kangaroo court like that in which you tried me, is in any case ruled out as a possibility. In a court of law, however, there is no way to prevail except through debate.

When, over the years, you've treated me personally with such contempt, I've let it go. Your lawsuit, however, places me in the position of having to stand up to you whether I want to or not, and to confront you with whatever weapons logic places at my command. In the process, I've become increasingly astonished at the weaknesses in your logic. Frankly, your way of arguing a point lacks some of the essentials of clear reason.

Truth vs. Harmony

In short, your lawsuit has changed the relationship between us. It has subordinated the need for harmony to the deeper need for truth.

Your lawsuit has changed matters in other respects, too. For one thing, it has convinced us at Ananda of the vital importance of our own place in Master's work. Never again is any Ananda member likely to permit your ministers to have the last word in their calumniations against us—as, in the name of harmony, we've allowed them to have all these years.

What is a fair fight?

When I was a child in Teleajen, Romania, another boy attacked me in the sandbox by the swimming pool (I don't recall why; he may not even have had a reason). I turned out to be stronger than he, so I simply pinned him to the ground and waited for him to calm down. Meanwhile, another child, a little girl, took a wet towel, and, finding me in no position to defend myself, began whipping me, raising ugly welts on my back. It was a cheap way of affirming her superiority, which otherwise she'd have had to use more intelligence to demonstrate.

I vowed vengeance. Entering her room later that day—she was a daughter of family friends, and was visiting us for a few days—I announced grimly that I was going to “teach her a good lesson.”

“You can't hit me,” she cried in panic. “I'm a girl!”

To my utter frustration, I realized she was right: I really could not bring myself to hit her, simply because she was a girl.

Well, this is more or less the line you've taken with me all these years. And a very feminine line it is. You've been willing to strike at me from behind, or to kick at me under the table, all the while claiming personal immunity from retribution because of your own unique position in Master's work. I've chafed under your presumption, but I haven't seen that I had any choice but to accept your immunity as a fact, since I, too, wanted with all my heart to help further the growth of our Guru's work.

Your lawsuit, as I said, has changed the relationship between us.

The need for clarity

I wrote you last December 28th, saying, in effect, “I imagine you're all wondering what my [I really meant, ‘what our’] attitude is toward you during this lawsuit.” I continued, “Because it is Christmas, I've wanted to reassure you [that]..., far from feeling hostile toward you, I feel sincere love....Even while fighting, I bear you only good will.”

In your reply on January 21st you wrote, “No, Kriyananda, we are not wondering.”

Now let me ask you, Why on earth weren't you wondering? It seems unthinkable that anyone would go to war without wanting to know something, at least, of the opposition's strengths and weaknesses—including, of course, his basic attitude toward the struggle. Not to wonder at all about such vital matters strikes me less as preposterous than it does as impossible.

In fact, at the end of that very paragraph you stated, "... there has been a feeling of much hostility, if not from you, from those in your group." (In truth, there has been no such thing. The most negative feeling anyone at Ananda has expressed is an occasional exclamation of exasperation.) To form such an impression of us, it is obvious that you had indeed been "wondering." It would, moreover, have been too great a defect in your handling of the case not to wonder. So why this pose of "not wondering"? Was it to put me in awe of your "infallibility"?

You concluded that sentence by saying, "...yet we hold only good will...." Fine, you hold good will. We hold good will. So why don't we just call off our lawyers, shake hands, and be friends? If there is any point on which we can't agree, why don't we simply "agree to disagree"?

Your reply was written last January, in the full expectation that you'd soon be winning on all counts. Your letter stated that our defeat (merely anticipated by you at that time) was due to wrong attitudes on our part, and to "flaws that have put us in opposite positions" (our flaws, of course). To what, or to whose "flaws," then, do you attribute our subsequent victories—and your subsequent defeat?

What is Yogananda's will?

Two years ago, at our settlement conference in Fresno, Daya Mata led the directors of SRF and Ananda in a prayer to Master that his will be done in this lawsuit. We joined you in that prayer, Daya Mata, quite as fervently, I'm sure, as the rest of you did.

Will you say, now that things are turning out so differently from what you expected, that Master has not yet answered your prayer? that his will in this matter could not possibly be other than what all of you envisioned? Is it reasonable to believe that Master will still give you what you want even now, despite the fact that, so far, he has allowed you to spend two or three million dollars for nothing?

Remember, the words of your prayer were not that your will be done in this case. They were that Master's and God's will be done. We all know, moreover, from our own experience, that such prayers work. For who among us has not received answers to them, sometimes miraculously, and even in relatively trivial matters?

So then, to what court of Spirit can you now appeal your case? Do you really believe that Master will demonstrate his will at last, provided you waste another million dollars in an appeal to a higher court of law? Does it not seem, rather, that his will has been demonstrated already? Considering that you've already lost considerable ground from the point at which you stood when you initiated this lawsuit, are you prepared to go further, and risk having to cede even more territory?

We, too, want only Master's will to be done. Were he to come to us even today, and tell us we've been wrong to contest your suit, we'd change our direction in an instant—yes, even at the cost of everything we've won so far. Our decision to stand up to you has been rooted in our sincere loyalty to him, and in our dedication to doing his will as we were best able to understand

it. We bear you no ill will. We'd have borne you no ill will had we lost, either. But our conscience obliges us to follow our own perceptions in this matter. Bear in mind, please, that we sincerely believe that Ananda, too, is Master's work. We are separate from SRF only because you've kept us so.

Establishing a firm foundation for Yogananda's work

I also feel that the lawsuit, owing to its public nature, has made it mandatory for me to address certain issues publicly that I was hoping would eventually clarify themselves on their own. The present time, remember, marks the formative years in the history of Master's work. The importance of resolving, if possible, fundamental issues of direction and policy during our present lifetime, and of resolving them with a full comprehension of the issues involved, far transcends your, my, or anyone else's individual importance in the scheme of things. In fact, this letter is being written not so much to you, personally, as to all the students and disciples of Paramhansa Yogananda, future as well as present, in the conviction that they belong to this work as much as you and I do. I'm addressing you, specifically, in this letter only because of your position as guides of the work. Otherwise this message is not to you, personally. Its purpose is to address certain impersonal and fundamental issues, in the sincere belief that they vitally concern the entire future of Master's work.

The monopoly issue

The booklet I wrote recently, "My Separation from SRF," addressed merely one of the issues begging for resolution: that of expansion vs. contraction. Much more important is the question of monopoly. Religious monopoly is, as you know, the essence of our counterclaim against you.

The future development of Master's work depends to a great extent on how the question of control is resolved. To what extent should it be enforced? To what extent should it be exercised only as an influence? And to what extent should people be won to a right understanding, not by imposing control on them, but by inspiring them?

I repeat, I have no personal desire in this matter. I want only to further Master's vision for the work. I do, however, have very deep convictions concerning that vision, and it would take a great deal more than your merely telling me what he wanted, against my own strong beliefs and actual knowledge to the contrary, for me to change my mind. Show me good reason why I am mistaken, and I will change my mind in an instant. Please, though, don't go on ignoring my arguments, while quoting Master out of context to others, or offering them his words carefully edited in your favor.

And please don't go on making innuendoes against my character. It makes you look bad. The present issues are too fundamental to be confronted with petty fusillades of attacks on my personality.

You risk losing nothing by at least hearing my side; you may even get to see things from a new perspective. For I, too, am following Master's will as I understand it--as I have a right to do my best to understand it, according to my own lights, and an eternal duty to follow it.

If, on the other hand, you persist in ignoring me, I will have to continue to argue my case publicly, as I am doing through this open letter, for the simple reason that, for thirty years now, you have hardly responded to my letters except indirectly, and have assumed a deliberate pose of wise, but long-suffering, patience in the face of my alleged "lack of attunement."

The time for assuming poses is over.

Are we on different paths?

I had a long talk a few years ago with the bishop of Assisi, in Italy. An article had appeared in the local papers condemning Master's teachings, among others, as "syncretist." (Webster's defines syncretist as, "the reconciliation or union of conflicting (as religious) beliefs or an effort intending such.") I decided to try to explain to the bishop that Paramhansa Yogananda in his teachings never tried to sew together a patchwork quilt of disparate concepts. What he did, rather, was show that the fundamental truths taught in the different religions, and particularly in the Hindu and Christian religions, are one and the same.

Well, the bishop was of course more concerned over the possibility of any threat to the faith of his parishioners than he was interested in my arguments. His mind, on the issues presented to him, had been made up years earlier. I doubt that he'd have been open to my arguments even had he been a simple professor of theology with no diocese to guide. A dedicated churchman is more concerned with church policy than with the truth. For the churchman, indeed, church policy is the truth.

To demonstrate the Church's broad-mindedness, the bishop eulogized Buddha, whom he described (as Catholic priests have been schooled to do) as a "wise philosopher, a great man, whose intellect took 'natural religion' to the greatest heights possible for the human mind." The bishop made it clear, however, that Buddha was only a human being, and incapable of speaking from divine revelation as Jesus did.

During our conversation I told him, "But I, who was raised a Christian, don't in any way feel that I have left my religion in the process of embracing a unitive view. These teachings have actually made me a better Christian."

To this he replied, "You're not a Christian."

I: "I certainly am!"

He: "No, you're not."

I: "My dear sir, it is for me to say whether I am a Christian or not."

He: “No, it isn’t. To be a Christian, you must fulfill three basic conditions: One, you must go regularly to confession; two, you must partake of the Eucharist; three, you must accept Jesus Christ as Savior and as the only Son of God.”

I: “As for the first two, do you imply that the early Christians were not Christian, either? Neither the confessional nor the Eucharist was included in their practices. And what about the Protestants, most of whom reject the confessional, and many of whom also reject the Eucharist? Are you saying that they, too, are not Christians?”

He: (evidently not willing to be too openly offensive to the Protestant sects) “Well, leaving aside those first two conditions, the fundamental and absolute requirement for every Christian is that he accept Jesus Christ as Savior and as the only Son of God.”

At this point it became necessary for me to explain Master’s teaching that the Infinite Christ, not Jesus Christ the man, is the Savior. It was necessary also to touch at least lightly on Master’s explanation of the Biblical expression, “the only Son of God.”

By this time I knew, of course, that the most I could hope to accomplish from our conversation would be to leave the bishop with an impression that we, the followers of these teachings, are at least good people, sincere (if deluded) in our beliefs, and moderately sane. I think I accomplished this end. At any rate, when, some time later, our center in Assisi applied for permission to make use of some of the local Catholic churches for performances of my oratorio, “Christ Lives,” the permission was granted. It was obvious, however, from everything the bishop said, that Catholic Church dogma has been woven too tightly to permit entry to Master’s refined explanations of fundamental Christian teachings.

What the bishop said in reply to my short and, I must admit, not very hopeful explanation of the Christ Consciousness was, “Well, that is, quite simply, heresy!”

My point here is not to discuss these general issues of dogma, but to point out that the bishop believed he had a right to tell me whether I am a Christian or not. I’m sure you all feel, as I do, that no one has a right to tell me, or you, any such thing. To us, Master brought back the teachings of original Christianity. A true Christian, he said, is one who follows the deeper teachings of Jesus. Mere belief does not define a Christian. Referring to the distinction Master drew between faith and belief, we might say that mere belief does not define a person’s faith. As Master’s disciples, we were taught to live the teachings of Jesus in such a way as to experience their truth ever more deeply. Experience is the definition of faith. One may believe in God, and still have faith only in what he actually knows: his worldly life.

Not Yogananda’s disciples?

Well, now, isn’t what you’ve done to me and Ananda quite similar to what that bishop did? You’ve told others, and have tried to convince us, that we are not even on Master’s path. You’ve actually denied Kriya Yoga initiation to some of our members with this incredible explanation.

In a recent letter to a friend of ours, you described me as “using” Master’s teachings. Well, what other teachings would I use? What other teachings would any true disciple use? Master’s teachings are our teachings. Only out of meanness of spirit could anyone suggest otherwise.

Perhaps the word use implies, in your minds, some sort of villainous presumption on the part of an ambitious outsider. In fact, in your legal papers you’ve dared to call me an “interloper.” Well, surely it isn’t necessary for me to remind you that I am Master’s direct disciple, no less so than you. He said to me, on the occasion of our first meeting, “I give you my unconditional love.” I would be dishonoring my role of discipleship to him if I did anything but “use” his teachings!

In your well-known “Warning” against other teachers, you describe those who give Master’s teachings outside of SRF as “using” Master’s name “to gain recognition” for themselves. I can imagine the bishop of Assisi saying the same thing about Master—namely, that Master “used” the name of Jesus to gain acceptance for himself in Christian countries.

Bigotry and narrowness are not Yogananda’s spirit

Well, we believe, because Master told us so, that it was Jesus himself who asked Babaji to send Master to the West in order to bring back the higher teachings of Christianity. And we know that the bishop of Assisi represents a dogmatic religion. Frankly, what I find difficult to accept is your taking as dogmatic a line as his in claiming that I’m following another path from yours, let alone in describing as an “interloper” one of your own fellow disciples, initiated by Master, made a minister by Master, told to teach Kriya by Master, and self-declaredly still Master’s disciple. Surely the guru we follow was too universal both in his human sympathies and in cosmic consciousness for such lack of charity, to say nothing of bigotry, ever to enter any of our minds.

And yet, I know that your discipleship, too, is sincere. For that matter, the bishop of Assisi’s discipleship is, in its way, sincere also. Indeed, he ended our conversation on a more charitable note, stating, “The important thing is that those of us who believe in God not fight one another. Our common task is to combat atheism. That is our real enemy, and the common enemy of mankind today.”

Even in that bastion of conservatism, you see, the winds of a new consciousness are stirring a few eddies of air.

Form vs. principle

Some of the advantages and disadvantages of institutional religion were summarized in my conversation with the bishop of Assisi. What is evident, on the positive side, is that institutional dogma preserves a united front in the face of outer challenges. Evident also is its capacity for preserving certain truths that might well have become forgotten, had religion been left to the discretion of merely anyone and everyone.

As I came away from the bishop's palace, however, I could feel the almost hypnotic power in the thought-form that pervades the entire Catholic Church: "There are a billion of us in the world who think this way. Who are you to think differently?" On the negative side, the unity preserved by institutional religion can very easily become a commonality in error.

Still more on the negative side, when power is emphasized rather than charity, as it has been through most of the long history of Roman Catholicism, the deeper purpose of religion is forgotten. Any thought-form that challenges the individual's need, and right, to think for himself is pernicious.

In fairness to you, I must affirm that I know you do subscribe to Master's oft-reiterated statement that SRF is not a sect. You write from your hearts when you state, as you did recently in a letter to another individual, "We sincerely believe in and strive to live by the ideals of harmony and divine love that [Paramahansa Yogananda] expressed in his teachings and his life."

The karmic result of SRF's organizational beliefs

At the same time, you find yourselves on the horns of a dilemma. For you also believe that only Self-Realization Fellowship should be allowed to spread Yogananda's teachings. That is to say, you believe you have a duty to prevent any other person or organization from teaching them. This ideological stance forces you to embrace certain repressive attitudes, and imposes on you certain modes of behavior that are in direct conflict with what you "sincerely believe" were Master's "ideals of harmony and divine love."

How will you resolve this dilemma? Evidently you imagine that, if you can deal your present opponents (as you perceive us to be) a quick and decisive blow by getting the law to declare itself on your side, no one else will dare to flout that precedent in future, and you'll be free to present the smiling face of divine love to everyone else. The immediate, and of course regrettable, controversy will have been swept under the carpet, and you will be in the happy position of being able to treat it as though it had never occurred.

There are several serious defects to any such assumption.

First, as a matter of simple psychology, a person's present acts and decisions determine to a great extent his future behavior. Uncharitable deeds leave lingering scars not only on the lives of the people one hurts, but on one's own consciousness as well.

Second, the way we confront our tests in life does more to reveal, and also to reinforce, our own deep-seated attitudes and beliefs than our most carefully thought-out statements of policy.

Third, victory through the exercise of power, in preference to winning by love, even if victory through power is sought in one instance only, establishes in the mind the thought of power as a quick and easy solution to any new problem that presents itself.

In the present instance, the power sought has been power through the process of law. In future centuries, as SRF becomes institutionally entrenched, who knows: military power?

pogroms? mob incitement? mass persecutions? These have all happened before—not in the Catholic Church only, but in religion generally. Why should they not happen again?

What a vast tragedy, however, if the seeds of such conflict were to have been planted by the direct disciples of Master, from whom this religion of divine love derived!

Inevitably, your present legal action, in the unlikely event that it should prevail, would have a far-reaching influence on SRF's future behavior towards anyone with whom it disagreed, or of whose actions it disapproved.

For the above reasons, among others perhaps, our lawyer has characterized your lawsuit as, in his opinion, “the most important religious freedom case of the century.”

Fourth, therefore, were you to succeed in getting the law on your side, and thereby in establishing a legal precedent through this case, it would amount to a serious blow to religious freedom in America. The Constitution in this country is set up to protect this essential liberty.

The fact that this last aspect of the case obviously never occurred to you, fundamental and self-evident though it certainly is, suggests that you have not considered other important and far-reaching implications in your decision to sue us.

Lawsuits—or “Only love can take my place”?

Leaving aside, for the time being, the question of whether Master really wanted only one organization to represent his teachings, let us address a related question: Even supposing he had wanted SRF to be his only teaching vehicle, would he therefore have wanted SRF to enforce this policy—even to the extent of instituting lawsuits for the purpose of such enforcement? Let me put it another way: Would he have wanted SRF to move so very far away from his dictum, “Only love can take my place”?

Would he have wanted you to set out to bankrupt, destroy, or otherwise quash the devotional activities of any person or group of people who, out of love for him, “dared” to work outside the bounds of SRF? You simply cannot believe that he did. Nothing he ever said, and no example that he ever gave throughout his life, supports your placing such a mean construction on his words.

I believe that, in your devotion to him and to his work, you have become so much attached to its outer form that you've lost sight of certain basic, universal, and timeless principles. Indeed, your very beliefs are contradicted by your actions. You cannot possibly continue in this contradiction. For your charitable beliefs must inevitably shift until they align themselves with your uncharitable deeds.

Institutional pride

In Fresno, when we met there two years ago, I quoted Master's statement, “Self-realization will become the universal religion of the world.” “Obviously,” I continued, “Master didn't mean that Self-Realization Fellowship Church, Inc., would become the new, universal

super-church, to which all mankind must eventually become converted—in this total dominance out-Catholicizing even the Roman Catholic Church. Master can only have meant that all religions will, in time, come to recognize that their own teachings rest on the timeless principle of Self-realization.”

Daya Mata, you stunned me with your reply: “That’s—your opinion.” What, pray tell, is your opinion? Could you possibly believe that SRF, the institution, will be the future religion of the world?

Again, I mentioned that you had told me Master wanted us to unite the various Kriya Yoga lines that trace back to Lahiri Mahasaya. I expressed my conviction that Master could not possibly have meant for us to try to unite all those groups under the banner of Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga Society of India. In other words, I concluded, what he wanted us to do, self-evidently so, was try to inspire the different groups to recognize one another in a spirit of love and brotherhood; to work together whenever possible; and when not possible, at least to give one another tacit support. It would have been utterly unrealistic for Master to expect more than this. No one, certainly, with any awareness at all of the realities involved could have expected the members of all—or, indeed, of any—of those groups to become card-carrying members of SRF/YSS.

Again, Daya Mata, you amazed me with your reply: “That’s—your opinion.” As if my opinion were not worthy of even the dignity of a reasoned reply. Again, therefore, I ask: What is your opinion?

Perhaps you felt that yours is no mere opinion, but infallible knowledge, to which I must adjust my thinking on pain of being judged to be out of tune with Master. Well, if this was your meaning, I have an answer to it: Master was idealistic, yes, but he was also realistic. (I well remember him scolding me once, “You must be practical in your idealism!”) He knew, far better than any of us Americans did, the natural distaste that Indians feel for religious organizationalism. He himself shared some of this disinclination, as he often made clear to us. He cannot have failed to be familiar also with that curious trait of the Indian character: its penchant for disorganization. Most importantly, he knew, as he made quite clear in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, that Lahiri Mahasaya himself never wanted an organization to be founded in his name.

For all of the above reasons, it would have been impossible for Master to expect the different lines of disciples deriving from Lahiri Mahasaya to place themselves voluntarily under the aegis of any organization, let alone the American-based one, Self-Realization Fellowship/Yogoda Satsanga Society of India. Given the realities we ourselves encountered in India, it would have already been asking a lot for those groups to support one another in a spirit of mutual friendship and respect. Frankly, after having lived in India several years myself, I am perfectly certain that Master could have held no such idea as you implied by rejecting my assessment of the situation as merely an “opinion,” and, if I understood you correctly, a wrong one at that.

Well, but let us suppose that you really do believe (though, frankly, I find it difficult to accept that you do) that Self-Realization Fellowship is destined some day to become the super-church of the whole world. Let us, then, examine the pros and cons of institutional religion, and see how well these fit the realities of Master's mission, of the new age we've entered, and of humanity as we know it to be. You might counter that humanity will change. Well, I wouldn't bet on it. I might add, though, that the more it does change—for the better, at any rate—the less need it will have for religious institutions of any kind.

Religion as an institution

Probably the best-organized religion in the world is the Roman Catholic Church. It isn't surprising that you have patterned yourselves after that Church, since you seem so thoroughly bent on institutionalizing your own organization.

A certain SRF center leader, visiting Mt. Washington several years ago, exclaimed to one of the monks, "Mt. Washington is becoming just like the Catholic Church, with the SRF President as the Pope." This remark was not intended, believe me, as a compliment. The monk, however, took it as such. "Oh, you're so right," he exclaimed fervently. "That's exactly what it is!"

The Roman Empire was a product of Kali Yuga—the Dark Age according to Hindu tradition. Mankind as a whole was less capable than it is today of grasping subtle spiritual truths, except as those truths were taught in the form of parables, clothed in elaborate rules and rituals, and encased in rigid, dogmatic formulae. The absolutes of Roman Law were a necessity in those times: They helped to hold Western civilization together in the face of widespread social disintegration.

The Roman Catholic Church drew many of its basic premises from certain general assumptions of that time. Even in monasteries, the Rule became the guarantor of spirituality. (I am reminded here of Master's words to me when he placed me in charge of the monks: "Don't make too many rules. They destroy the spirit.")

The Catholic Church is superbly organized. It presents, as I said earlier, a united front in the face of heresies and other doctrinal challenges. It does its best to preserve the purity of Christ's teachings, and has, I think, done a better job of it than the Protestant churches, with their claim that it suffices merely to read the Bible to understand it. The Catholic Church insists, and not without reason, on its own primacy as the defender of the Christian religion.

Master stated, however, that he had been sent to teach the original teachings of Jesus Christ. This implies, obviously, that those original teachings have become diluted. It is clear also that Master was sent from Hindu India, rather than born into the Church as a reforming Christian saint, because such reform from within would have been impossible, given the realities of the present Church with its rigid institutionalism.

Saints: the true custodians of religion

Padre Pio, a modern Christian saint, and well known, certainly, to you, gave confession many years ago to an SRF member in Italy, a friend of mine. This friend related the story to me.

“During my confession, I told Padre Pio that I practiced Kriya Yoga.

“‘Oh, hush!’ Padre Pio replied. ‘You shouldn’t talk about such things. But,’ he added with a conspiratorial smile, ‘you’re doing the right thing!’“

Saints themselves, you see, are powerless to change the teachings of their own church, heavily institutionalized as it is. They must go along with its policies if they are to do whatever good they can in the world.

Master, in the process of reviving the higher teachings of Jesus, shattered to powder the very cornerstone of Roman Catholic theology—perhaps without even realizing, in his reasoning mind, that he was doing so. The bombshell he dropped demolished the basic premise upon which St. Thomas Aquinas, centuries ago, claimed the unique authority of the Roman Catholic Church to represent the teachings of Jesus. St. Thomas’s conclusions have been given paramount importance by the Church. Indeed, they established the direction that all Catholic theology has taken since his time.

Jesus himself, St. Thomas proclaimed, gave his stamp of eternal authority to the Roman Catholic Church when he declared to Peter: “Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Master’s explanation of this passage was devastatingly different from that of Aquinas. Jesus, he said, was commending Peter’s intuitive insight for having recognized, within the Master’s human form, the eternal, living Christ. On the bedrock of that insight, Jesus promised him, he would be able to construct his “church” of cosmic consciousness, which would be Peter’s eternally, in God.

According to Paramhansa Yogananda, Jesus wasn’t referring to the future Catholic Church at all, any more than he’d been referring to the temple in Jerusalem when he declared earlier, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days.” (This, as the Bible itself explains, was a reference to his physical body.)

It is probable that the Christian teachings would have become diluted anyway with the passing of so many centuries. The fact, therefore, that Paramhansa Yogananda was sent by God to bring back “the original teachings of Jesus” does not in itself signify that the Catholic Church has betrayed its perceived mission to preserve the purity of Christ’s teachings. The Church has done what it could. It has been hampered, however, quite as much as helped by its dedication to acting as the sole and uniquely authorized institution for preserving that purity.

For what can a religious institution, complete with real estate holdings, political power, social prominence, and an enormous army of prelates do to preserve spiritual truths, except—well, institutionalize them? display its theological concepts in neat, orderly rows, like glass cases in a museum of archaeology?

For contrast, look at religion in India. There, in keeping with the Indian preference for what we in the West would call disorganization, religion is not really organized at all—not, at any rate, as we understand the concept. Yet the original teachings of the Vedas—thousands of years older than the New Testament, and indeterminately older than the Old Testament—are still offered in a relatively pristine form. It is true that Master came also, as he told us, to bring back the original yoga teachings of Krishna. The basic truths expounded in the Vedanta, however, are widely known in India, and are as purely and sublimely expressed today as they ever were.

The difference is that, in India, the purity of the teachings has been preserved from age to age not by some smoothly run institution, but by living saints. There is no official hierarchy in the Hindu religion; no one to enforce dogmas on the great masses of worshipers. The Hindu religion is based on realized truths. It is understood, and universally accepted, that Self-realization is the common destiny of all mankind, and that this destiny, once achieved, bestows on the awakened saint the right to declare the Eternal Truth himself, ever afresh, with no less certainty in this, our own skeptical, scientific age than in any other.

Master made it clear in his teachings that the saints are the true custodians of religion. In fact, of the many times I heard him tell stories from the lives of Christian saints, I never once heard him praise them for having been “true sons [or daughters] of the Church.” He spoke, rather, of their inner relation to Christ and God, and ignored completely their relation to the Church—except perhaps when making passing references to its persecution of them.

Now, how can you claim that Master wanted his teachings placed in the straitjacket of organized, hierarchical institutionalism? It is enough that he created an organization for their promulgation, an organization in which, he said, he wanted everything to be kept simple.

SRF—A punitive body

In recent years especially, you’ve tried to make a shrine out of his organization. And now you have actually taken the step of trying to make it a punitive body, like the Catholic Church during the medieval ages, arrogating to yourselves the duty of preventing anyone outside the SRF organization from ever speaking in Yogananda’s name. Apart from the fact that I’m personally certain he never meant for you to do anything remotely like this, and that I never heard him so much as hint at such behavior, reason itself militates forcefully against any possibility of such an interpretation. Even were you to reply that he said it to you, if not to me, I would feel constrained to reply to you as you did to me in Fresno, “That’s—your opinion.” For it happens constantly in life that we hear what we want, or are prepared, to hear.

Now, please wait before you try to turn that statement against me, as it would be perfectly easy to do if you wanted merely to be clever. Let us proceed a little further into the history of the Catholic Church, and see what happens when a religion becomes over- institutionalized.

Meanwhile, let us bear in mind that, in the prayer to the Gurus that Master taught us to repeat daily, we pray also to the “saints of all religions.”

Institutionalism feeds on itself

I ask you to look ahead to the future. For it is towards future generations, even those centuries from now, that we must direct our present thinking.

Like attracts like. People with institutional natures attract others with similar natures. People who join highly formalized institutions are, more often than not, people who are comfortable with formal structures, who feel secure when hemmed in by unbending systems of rules, and who, perhaps, actually believe that the larger and more imposing a cathedral, the more important it has to be in the eyes of God.

These are all things that Master explicitly eschewed. He told me, “Too many rules destroy the spirit.” Again, he told us, “I love Lady Simplicity.” And I recall him remarking on more than one occasion, “We don’t want to be organized like [that is, with the smooth but cold efficiency of] General Motors.”

Consider the matter in a practical light: The larger the institution, the greater its need for good accountants, good clerks, good administrators—for good bureaucrats, in short. If it is a religious institution, the hope may be that all its servitors will be saints. Suppose, however, that enough saints can’t be found to fill all those positions: What then?

If there should happen to be two candidates for a post, the first one competent but by no stretch of the imagination saintly, and the second one saintly, but, even though divinely willing, incompetent, who would be selected? Would anybody select the saintly soul, if what was needed was simply someone to balance the books? And would anyone opt for the saint with no gift for administration, when what was needed was someone with administrative skills?

No doubt it does happen sometimes that a saintly devotee is also a good accountant or administrator. He will certainly be the exception, however. The chances are overwhelming that most of those running the organization will owe their positions not to their spiritual qualifications, but to their mundane efficiency.

Like, again, attracts like. Mundane administrators, once ensconced in positions of responsibility, are naturally more inclined to favor others with similar dispositions. Thus, even if there happens to be a saintly soul in a group of candidates for an accountant, it is altogether likely that he’ll be passed over in favor of someone less saintly, not necessarily more efficient than he, but with a more businesslike approach to life—someone, in short, not likely to worry his superiors lest he be found someday writing hymns in the margin of his ledger book.

And if, among candidates for an administrative post, there happens to be a deeply spiritual person with a talent for management, his candidacy may nonetheless be filed away “for future reference” should there happen to be another candidate, no more suitable for the job, but more inclined to enjoy swapping worldly anecdotes with his not-so-saintly superior.

Many a superior, certainly, especially in religious institutions, will not want to have someone under him whose very presence serves as a constant reproach to his own lack of spirituality.

Thus, the church cannot but become, in time, top-heavy with bureaucrats. Indeed, the Catholic Church completed this evolutionary process long ago. It hasn't changed since, except in the direction of an ever-denser forest of bureaucracy. And this, I remind you, is the Church that was created ostensibly to preserve the purity of the teachings of Jesus Christ, including the subtlest and most esoteric of them.

The lot of saints in a bureaucracy

Look now at what happens in the individual Catholic churches.

Let us say that a priest develops a reputation for holiness. Naturally, people flock to him from all over, in many cases neglecting their own parishes for the opportunity to get the blessings and wise counsel of a saint.

The priests of other parishes, naturally also, resent his popularity. (After all, they have their own parishes to keep up.) That saintly priest may appear, in their eyes, to be stealing away their parishioners. In time, they may band together against him, and eventually complain to the bishop. (St. Jean Vianney received, by mistake, a copy of such a complaint against him, and cheerfully affixed his signature to the document!)

What can the bishop do, faced with this embarrassing contradiction between dogma and reality? Church dogma insists that all priests are ordained equally. And so indeed they are—by the Church. Here, however, is one priest who appears to have been more ordained than the others—not by the Church, but by God. Under the circumstances, what can the bishop do? The ideal solution, of course, would be to make all those other priests saints, too. Such a solution is, however, beyond the powers of man; only God can make a saint.

Ah, well, one can't argue with God, of course, but there may be ways around some of the problems He poses for His servitors.

After all, who knows whether this saintly-seeming priest really is as holy as people say he is? Even to conduct an investigation into the matter, during his lifetime at least, would mean only giving more weight to the glaring contradictions between him and his fellow prelates. The obvious solution, surely, looking at the matter carefully from an institutional point of view, would be somehow to rid the diocese of this outsider.

And so it is that the priest finds himself being shipped off to Spain, or to France, or, better still, to some remote mountain village, far from neighboring parishes (the congregations of which might, on learning of his presence nearby, become “confused”).

The remote mountain villagers may be only dull-minded peasants, incapable of appreciating holiness even if it were ladled into their thick potato soup for dinner. If, however, a few quick spirits among them should, by some fluke, catch on to what a treasure they've had

dumped in their midst—well, after all, there are always other remote mountain villages to push him off to.

This is what they did, as an example merely, with St. Joseph of Cupertino. In his case, it was people from all over Italy and Europe who, on learning where he'd been smuggled off to, sought him out again and again, necessitating his repeated removal to parts unknown under the cover of night.

This treatment is so common that Catholics even have an expression for it. They call it, “putting him in prison.”

The time to do right by a saint, according to Catholic policy, is after he is safely in his grave. There, he ceases to be an embarrassment at last, and can be added proudly to the Church's “crown of glory,” his sainthood proclaimed in churches throughout the world. The Church, of course, claims the credit for his sanctity, and to some extent it deserves the credit, too. Persecution is, after all, a recognized means by which people evolve spiritually.

Meanwhile—so goes the prevailing hierarchical sentiment—if one must pray to a saint, better pray to a dead one.

So then, what opportunity do Christian saints ever get to act as custodians of the Christian religion? It is true they have some influence, especially after their death. That influence is kept carefully reined in, however, by the bureaucrats.

It must be added that even in the posthumous recognition it gives to its saints, the Catholic Church remains more faithful to the higher, spiritual teachings of Jesus than those churches which deny the state of sanctity altogether, or else belittle the practice of rendering homage to the saints by insisting that all believing Christians are “saints,” too, the only condition for their sainthood being that they “believe”—and, of course, that they sign up faithfully as tithing members of their churches.

What is most consistently and carefully emphasized in the Catholic Church is not the lives and utterances of the saints, but the essential role of the Church itself as the true and only mouthpiece for Christ's teachings. It is always, Catholic dogma insists, to “Mother Church” that primary reverence is due.

In justification of this position, the Catholic Church claims to trace its lineage of popes back uninterruptedly to apostolic times. The fact that this lineage has, as a matter of record, been interrupted several times over the centuries is of secondary importance to my present discussion. Of primary significance is the clear and obvious fact that, even had the lineage never been broken, excessive dependence on an outward apostolic succession as the means of preserving the purity of a teaching is the surest way of preserving the form, perhaps, but losing touch with the spirit.

No formal institution can, by itself, preserve the purity of a divine teaching. Inevitably, the evolution of church dogma, without the continuous influence of living saints, will be toward

binding people to the institution as the vehicle for propagating the teachings. Less and less will emphasis be placed on the teachings themselves.

It is an interesting fact that, until the Protestants forced matters into the open by urging their congregations to read the Bible, the Catholic Church actually discouraged its members from reading it—lest they “get ideas”!

Energy, once established, perpetuates itself

About one thousand years ago, a question was put to the abbot of a certain Christian monastery. “What should a monk do,” he was asked, “if, while praying to God in his cell, he finds himself uplifted [‘translated’ was, I believe, the expression used] into a state of ecstasy; and then, while still in that state, he hears the monastery bell toll the hour for communal prayer? Should he leave his ecstasy and go join the other monks in the chapel?”

“No,” the abbot replied, “he should remain in his ecstasy. For it is above all with the aim of helping all our members to attain that state that we engage in communal prayer.”

What is particularly interesting in this account is that that same question was posed, in the present century, to the abbot of another monastery, and was given a diametrically opposite reply. “The monk should immediately leave his ecstatic state,” this abbot replied. “Whatever ecstasies God gives a monk in the privacy of his cell should be considered a foretaste, merely, of what will be his to enjoy for eternity, in heaven. Here on earth, meanwhile, his primary duty is to obey our monastic rule.”

This modern abbot’s response was in keeping with the official position of the Catholic Church today. A thousand years ago, that other abbot’s response was in keeping with the official Church position of his time. It is not that the teachings of Jesus have changed. The change has been in the emphasis given them by the Church during its many centuries of institutionalization.

Is institutionalization in any way a good thing? Has time enabled the Catholic Church to clarify certain of Jesus’ original teachings, more or less in the way the reevaluations of historians have corrected erroneous myths surrounding past events?

St. Teresa of Avila commented, “Priestly confessors do incalculable harm in their guidance of souls by their lack of understanding in spiritual matters.” She herself suffered serious setbacks for years because of the bad advice she received from her priestly counselor. Unfortunately perhaps, she felt obliged to obey him out of loyalty to the Church, regardless of his ignorance in spiritual matters.

The official Church position on obedience in the face of ignorance is to say, “God protects the obedient devotee. Everything will work for the best for him in the end, if only he remain faithful to his vow of obedience.” Maybe so. St. Teresa, however, certainly had nothing good to say about the results of her formal “training.”

In India, too, emphasis is placed on the importance of obedience. Because, however, no hierarchical system exists to impose an institutional rule on devotees, these seek the guidance of

men and women of divine wisdom, and give their obedience to them as their superiors in spiritual attainment. The question of obedience to a mere superior in a hierarchical order hardly arises. Obedience, after all—so the Hindu mind reasons—should be an apprenticeship in wisdom.

I am not saying that St. Teresa ought to have rebelled. And I'm not saying that the superiors in a Western monastery ought not to be obeyed, though certainly I don't believe that obedience should be given them unconditionally as it would be to a wise guru. What I'm saying is that the Western system itself is mistaken in its over-emphasis on institutionalism.

The Catholic Church was founded in an age when the average person could not conceptualize things unless they were invested with material forms. Even Aristotle believed that air is immaterial, since it can't be seen. (The modern mind wonders how he reconciled the air's supposed "immateriality" with the fact that the wind is so clearly a mighty force, on which, even when it is motionless, the birds soar so freely and joyously.)

God Himself, in past centuries, was conceptualized as an old man with a long white beard. Even today, so I have read, many people imagine Him as we see Him depicted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, in the act of creating Adam. Heaven was conceived of in times past, and still is conceived of in popular fantasy, as a place entered through pearly gates, with a royal castle in the midst of it wherein God is ensconced on a throne of gold, Jesus at his right hand, and the angels ranged shinningly, in descending ranks, on either side of them: a sort of frozen tableau, like the paintings of Beato Angelico. Divine teachings could not be understood in those times except symbolically, their subtle essence encased in the militant armor of dogma. Dogmas had, moreover, to be free of gray areas, of any ambiguities, like legal decisions. The living subtleties of divine truth had to be frozen into immobility by the cold north winds of analytical reason. Reason itself was viewed not simply as a tool for achieving clarity, but as Ultimate Truth, forever binding upon the universe and upon the Lord Himself.

We know now, because Sri Yukteswar told us so, and because modern science itself has made the discoveries he predicted more than a hundred years ago, that matter is energy. Matter, then, is not fixed, but mutable. Ultimately indeed, matter is not even real except as a manifestation of Infinite Consciousness. Dogmas, similarly, are no longer acceptable as absolutes—except by churchmen, whose ideological conservatism prevents them from adjusting to new perceptions of reality.

All this new liberalism of thought is due, as you know, to the fact that we have entered what Sri Yukteswar explained is a new age: "Dwapara Yuga."

Under the rays of Dwapara Yuga, with its radically different insights into reality, the Catholic Church is losing ground rapidly as a religious institution. Unless it can manage in time to undergo a radical transformation away from the rigidities of institutionalism, it will not be able to adjust to these new rays of awareness, and will crumble and disappear. Unfortunately, the very institutionalism of the Church is so deeply ingrained in the minds of the hierarchy that it seems

highly improbable that they'll ever succeed in metamorphosing it into a more Dwapara Yuga kind of institution.

The religion of the present age

Paramhansa Yogananda told us clearly and repeatedly the kind of religion that will predominate in the new age. He said it would be free from dogmatism, free from rigid institutionalism, and strong in its emphasis on Self-realization.

The kind of religion needed today is, in fact, that which has existed since time immemorial in India, stated simply, with the added advantage of modern, Western organizing skills to give it a new, but not a frozen, focus. As Master said, his message of Self-realization is a new expression of religion.

An organization can prove to be of inestimable value, if it doesn't slip into old Western habits of dogmatism, of domination over its members, and of control over people's thoughts, practices, and beliefs. If it succeeds in following a liberal pathway to inner freedom, it can bring clarity to teachings that otherwise are not likely to be preserved by saints so much as muddled by fools. The important thing is that the organization serve joyfully, and that it not impose control on others. All this, from everything Master ever said or wrote, has to be what he visualized for the future of his work.

Jesus taught freely, outside of an institutional framework

The Western Church was, in many ways, less a Christian phenomenon than a cultural one. Jesus himself moved freely and informally from town to town, in the traditional manner of the East, teaching as he went. Both he and his teachings were purely Eastern in form as well as in content. He had little in common with formalism even in his own religion, and shunned the rabbis of his day, though he was himself a rabbi.

It was upon Christianity's entry into the Greco-Roman world that the religion of Jesus changed, becoming Westernized. As so often happens under similar circumstances, in the process of conquering it became, in its turn, the conquered. Virtually its first step was to adopt the trappings of Western rationalism, and thereby of Western institutionalism. Jesus Christ's teachings became re-cast in a system of dogmatic absolutes, for such was the Greco-Roman approach to truth.

Placing Yogananda in a straight jacket

This approach was very different from the intuitive one Jesus took. Indeed, the Church made a point, increasingly over the centuries, of avoiding intuition, for reality, to it, was something forever fixed and absolute. Things had to be either this, or that. They couldn't be permitted to bleed over into gray, shadow areas in between.

Is this what you want to do with Master's teachings? with his organization? Paramhansa Yogananda, too, was an Easterner. He himself was outspokenly against any excess of rationalism. And he was uncomfortable with too much organizationalism—so much so, indeed,

that he threatened several times to walk away from his own organization, “and never look back.” You have set out to confine his teaching in a rigid system of “either...or,” as the early Greco-Romans did to the teachings of Jesus. And you say that this is what our Guru wanted?

One interpretation, or many?

I will tell you, one of the early tests I went through on the path was when, with my Western education, I read Master’s interpretations of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and discovered how many different, unrelated meanings he could find in a single quatrain. My thought at that time, no doubt reprehensible in a disciple, was at least honest: I asked myself, “Why doesn’t he make up his mind?”

It was only much later, after I’d lived some time in India, that I came to appreciate the subtlety in this ability to discern many meanings in a single passage of Scripture. Master’s approach was, I then realized, far truer to spiritual reality with its countless facets than our Western way, which seeks to establish the one, definitive, final meaning of any passage, and to discard all other interpretations as invalid.

Now you want to reduce everything Master said to one interpretation, and to one only. You want to place his teachings in a straitjacket. That is what the Catholic Church did to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus, on the other hand, constantly made the point that his teaching could be taken on more than one level at a time. He addressed each listener’s ability to comprehend him. (“He that hath ears to hear,” he often said, “let him hear.”)

You present the SRF organization, and the dicta of the SRF President, as your means of ensuring that one interpretation, and one only, be accepted as the authoritative, definitive, true, and absolute teaching of Paramhansa Yogananda. You insist that Master himself taught you to do so. In this very insistence you limit everything he said to one track on every issue, like a train. You ignore the many roads, and the countless flowered trails, that lead off fascinatingly toward other voyages of spiritual discovery. You limit his teaching to one level of understanding, and ignore his own deliberate practice of reaching out to people on different levels of experience and understanding. And I, who am, I think, as orthodox to his teachings as anyone can be, am accused of “distorting” them.

Master did not want institutionalism

I say you are wrong. And not wrong only, but wrong in a way that will, if your manner of interpretation succeeds in silencing alternate voices, prove devastating for the future of Master’s mission, and for SRF itself. In an age when the power of church institutions as institutions must necessarily diminish—is already diminishing rapidly—your insistence on becoming the one true and universal church—a new Roman Catholic Church, if you will (and as, evidently, you do will)—cannot but leave you in the dust, as mankind moves on toward ever-broader perceptions of reality.

Master never wanted this kind of institution. He didn't want institutionalism. He didn't want dogmatism. Referring to the dogmatism he'd encountered in some of the fundamentalist Christian churches, he said, "We don't want to 'dye people in the wool' of sectarian dogmas. Let us instead 'dye them in the wool' of their own Kriya Yoga practice! Let us hold them by their own soul-perception of truth."

Repeatedly he told us, "SRF is not a sect!"

What is a true disciple?

You actually accuse people of not being true disciples if they try to interpret his teachings. What on earth do you mean? Have I perhaps somehow misunderstood you? Is the apparent absurdity of your statement merely a matter of semantics? I would say, No one is a true disciple if he does not interpret his guru's teachings! The disciple must do his best to understand his guru's teachings in all their ramifications, that he may apply them, and help others to apply them, to life at every level. How often Master told us, "I don't want our ministers to be spiritual victrolas"! What else would we become, if we didn't do our best to interpret his teachings, and apply them creatively?

The more meanings we can find in a single teaching, and the more the applications we can find for it, the more fully we'll have realized its true import. Even so, I doubt that many of us will ever come close to understanding these teachings fully on any of their levels, even the most superficial.

If, moreover, we ourselves, who lived with him, don't do this work, the task will get done anyway—although, more probably in this case, in a hybrid manner.

Even now there is much that none of us, who knew him, is capable of doing. A work of this importance demands, for instance, that Master, his mission and his teachings, be presented also in the context of history and of the development of religious thought through the ages. Speaking for myself, I know that I will never be sufficiently schooled to do more than suggest new directions to others who are equipped with the necessary knowledge. Moreover, though with some regret, I'm not really interested in studying these subjects as exhaustively as they need to be studied. Yet the job begs to be done, and the sooner the better. (When Master told me, "Your job is lecturing and writing," I inquired, "But haven't you already written all the books that are needed?" Appearing slightly shocked at my obtuseness, he replied, "Don't say that! Much more is needed.")

Truth cannot simply be nailed to a wall

One thing we must get away from is the Aristotelian, and subsequently the Roman Catholic, practice of dividing every concept into "either this, or that," a practice which assigns everything to an absolute category. If there is one thing that is emerging more and more clearly in this Dwapara Yuga—in physics as much as in ethics and in everyday human affairs—it is the growing realization that truth simply cannot be nailed to the wall, dead but well defined and

classified. Master never tried to do so. In fact, he made it very clear that it couldn't be done. SRF, however, is trying to do so, and insists that divergent expressions be labeled "distortions." Any such claim only demonstrates a philosophical and spiritual naiveté that Master contradicted by everything he ever said, did, or wrote.

Dogmatism is like still photography. Truth is like a movie: ever fluid, ever changing even when the underlying theme remains the same.

In science, it is a universally recognized fact that the greatness of a discovery lies not in the promise it may hold of offering a Final Solution, but in its capacity to open up new fields of discovery. This is what made Einstein's discoveries so great: They opened the way to an infinity of investigations, not only in science, but in philosophy, in social thought, in religion; the list appears to be never-ending. And the greatness of Master's teachings definitely lies, at least in part, in the fact that they have within them the potential to change and spiritualize an entire civilization. I wonder how many people have any conception of how far-reaching his teachings are in their implications. I myself, though admittedly able to scratch only their surface, am continually in awe at the vastness of their potential completely to re-shape the destiny of mankind.

Dogmatism represents an effort to embalm the truth. This it can do only after the spirit has departed the truth's once-living form. You accuse me of distorting the teachings because I am dedicated to presenting them in all their robustness and vitality. Well, I accuse you of distorting them by, among other things, stripping them of their vitality.

Here's an example of SRF's efforts to "embalm" Master's teachings. I am particularly familiar with this example, for I heard Master speak the words myself; I recorded them, and later submitted them for publication to the Editorial Department.

The actual statement Master made was within the context of a longer saying. His words were, "The dreamer is not conscious of his dream."

Now, it is obvious that the dreamer must be conscious of his dream, or else he wouldn't be dreaming at all. It is equally obvious, then, that this sentence requires editorial clarification. Clearly, Master's meaning was, "The dreamer is not conscious of the fact that he is dreaming."

As this sentence appeared in print, after a laborious process of editorial mummification, it read, "The dreamer is not cognizant of the hallucinatory fabric of his dream."

Whose, please tell me, is the "distortion"? I'm tempted to say of this "official" version that it would take a master even to be able to speak like that!

Why not put it, simply: "The dreamer is not conscious of the fact that he is dreaming"? The process of editing ought not to be viewed as giving the editor license completely to re-write what he edits.

A much more significant alteration occurred in another instance, one with which I am equally familiar since it was I, again, who recorded Master's words and submitted them to the Editorial Department.

Troubling changes to Yogananda's sacred words

One evening at Twenty-Nine Palms, a disciple expressed a desire to hear details of a vision Master had had in Encinitas of a certain saint.

"I don't know to whom you are referring," Master replied.

"It was in the garden," the disciple explained, "behind the hermitage."

"Well," Master answered, "so many have come there. I often see them." Noting the disciple's astonishment, he continued, "Why be surprised? Wherever God is, there His saints come." He went on to tell us, almost casually, how Sri Ramakrishna had appeared to him—"materialized" was the word he used—that very morning in his bedroom.

In the book, *Sayings of Yogananda*, his statement, "Wherever God is....," was changed to read, "Wherever a devotee of God is, there His saints come."

I can think of two possible reasons why that statement might have been changed. The first would have been that, since God is everywhere, the words Master used failed to indicate that he was speaking of God's presence in a particular sense. To address this concern, however, it wouldn't help very much to say, "Wherever God is manifested." After all, the whole universe is God's manifestation!

To make the point unmistakably clear to the most literal mind, an editor might decide to elaborate on the phrase, changing it from its divine simplicity to something complex, pedantic, but admittedly explicit. For essentially what Master was saying—if one insisted on spelling it all out—was, "The consciousness dwelling within this physical form is that of one who, having achieved the state of perfect union with God, attracts those spiritually advanced souls whose sainthood has been ordained by the Divine and not merely by a religious institution. Wherever such an exalted being is to be found, there such divinely recognized saints love to come, and to render homage."

Were an editor, however, to presume so greatly to alter Master's words in the name of clarification, not only would he deprive the statement of every vestige of immediacy, but he'd make Master himself look more like a lawyer than like an "exalted being."

Personally, I see no better way of phrasing his thought than in the words he actually used: "Wherever God is, there His saints come." Sometimes, let's face it, it is better simply to let the reader grapple with the teachings as best he can. Only by stretching for the truth can he make it eventually his own. It won't help him to be forever spoon-fed.

The other reason for an editor to feel a need for changing Master's statement would have been to emphasize Master's humility. And this was, I believe, the real reason for the change. In

other words, the editor felt that Master's statement, "Wherever God is," in reference to himself might make him appear boastful in the reader's eyes.

The trouble with this change is that it dilutes the truth Master was trying to convey. Indeed, "Wherever a devotee of God is" actually blunts the whole point of his statement. Aren't we all devotees of God? But do His saints appear to us "often"? If not, why not? Although we can, of course, take the edited version as indicating how much greater Master's devotion was than our own, still, Master's clear implication was that more is needed than being a mere "devotee of God" for so many saints to be attracted to one. What drew those saints to Master was the fact that God was so perfectly manifested in his human form. As he told us often, "I killed Yogananda long ago. No one dwells in this temple now but God."

SRF dilutes Yogananda's teachings

SRF accuses others of diluting Master's teachings. Yet this change from expressing Master's divine greatness to admitting only to his being a great "devotee of God" affords an extraordinary example of dilution on SRF's part. I grant that Master spoke more frequently toward the end of his life in advaitic, or non-dualistic, terms—as Brahman Itself (aham brahm asmi), rather than as a humble devotee of Brahman. Nevertheless, this was his true and permanent state of consciousness, as he clearly explained to us. He spoke that way especially during those days out at Twenty-Nine Palms, after he'd completed his commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. It was during that period, in the spring of 1950, that he told me, "Write down my words. I don't often speak from this level of absolute wisdom."

The damage done by changing that single statement might not give serious cause for alarm, did it not demonstrate a basic editorial direction that SRF has taken over many years: away from presenting Paramhansa Yogananda in his full vigor as a great master of yoga, and toward a policy of reassuring people that he remained always true to a limited—sweet, but entirely human—image of him as the "ideal saint," one to which no Christian could reasonably object. As a certain journalist once wrote me, "What comes through the SRF literature often seems like 'Norman Vincent Peale Goes to India.'"

SRF's effort to "sanitize" Master

Worse still, this effort to "sanitize" Master's image makes him out to have been not only sweetly humble (which of course he was), but also a person too timid to make any statement that could not actually be proved. As you yourselves have often put it, "We can't say that! What would people think?" Declarations that he made with divine authority have become all too often emasculated, editorially.

I tremble to contemplate how many of the gloriously bold statements he made in his commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita may fail to appear in that book. As you know, I myself worked with Master at Twenty-Nine Palms on the original manuscript of that book. And I recall quite a few passages that seemed to me important at the time, and that still seem important, but that didn't make it into the supposedly complete commentaries which appeared for years in

“Self-Realization Magazine.” You will recall how Tara Mata, SRF’s editor-in-chief, assured you that the material in this series was complete.

A great Master spreads many seeds of inspiration among his disciples

To return to my main theme: SRF is not growing significantly, considering the vast relevance of Master’s teachings to the needs of this age. Nor will it be able to grow, unless and until you change your suffocating policy of institutionalizing everything: words, people, policies, precedents—you name it.

You seem to want to forget that I too was with Master. Admittedly, he told you many things that I didn’t get to hear. He also told me things you didn’t get to hear. All of his more important pronouncements, however, were consistent with everything else he ever said and did throughout his life. I cannot accept, and I don’t believe for a moment, that some of the things you quote him as saying, which contradict those lifelong teachings, were actually his words, or were meant by him in the sense that you claim.

The time has passed for insisting on private knowledge in these vitally important matters. Master simply cannot have made certain statements all his life, both publicly and in private, only to renounce them at the end as you now claim that he did. (One thinks here of deathbed confessions!) You insist that he made this about-face during his final year in the presence of a select few of you, whom he then authorized to pass along to the world what amounted to a totally new “gospel.” I say it is you who have misunderstood his intentions, and who have interpreted them in keeping with your own personal predilections.

Did Yogananda change his mind about communities at the end of his life?

One of the changes he is purported to have made “at the end” concerned the forming of spiritual communities (“world-brotherhood colonies,” as he called them). All his life he campaigned for this idea. You will recall, Mrinalini Mata, that you told me not long after the founding of Ananda, “Master changed his mind at the end of his life on the subject of communities.” Well, I disagree with you.

Kamala, in her book, *The Flawless Mirror*, reports his enthusiasm for this idea in a conversation she had with him only four months before his passing.

Master’s autobiography, in its first two editions, ended with a stirring call to form such intentional spiritual communities. His book was changed in its Third Edition, dated 1951, which was the last to come out during his lifetime. This edition described such communities as already existing: “A Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) World Brotherhood Colony in Encinitas...serves as a model for several smaller SRF colonies.” It goes on to insist on the universal need for such colonies: “An urgent need on this war-torn earth is the founding, on a spiritual basis, of numerous world-brotherhood colonies.” These statements continued to appear through the Seventh Edition, which announced that it included changes made by Master himself during his

lifetime. It was not until the Eighth Edition, which appeared, I believe, in 1958, that Master's statements about world-brotherhood colonies were omitted from the book altogether.

At that time also, Master's basic "Aims and Ideals of Self-Realization Fellowship" were changed. Master had originally written one of these eleven "Aims and Ideals" to read, "To spread a spirit of world brotherhood among all peoples and to aid in the establishment, in many countries, of self-sustaining world-brotherhood colonies for plain living and high thinking."

For the Eighth Edition of the Autobiography, and in all subsequent editions, this "aim and ideal" was changed to read: "To encourage 'plain living and high thinking'; and to spread a spirit of brotherhood among all peoples by teaching the eternal basis of their unity: kinship with God." All mention of world-brotherhood colonies was omitted; nor has it appeared in any of your other literature for the past thirty or more years.

It was you, not Master, who changed this statement concerning one of the basic aims and ideals of his world mission. I remember approaching you, Daya Mata, I think it was in 1956, with the question, "When will we start developing Master's 'world-brotherhood colonies'?" Your reply to me on that occasion was, "Frankly, I'm not interested." (Wouldn't you have replied differently, had you known that Master himself had renounced the idea?)

I didn't fault you for your own lack of interest. Master said we'd find God if we followed even a hundredth part of his teachings. I do fault you, however, and I fault all of you, for claiming that he "changed his mind at the end" on the need for colonies—something which, as you very well know, he never did.

Did Master want SRF to be organized along church lines?

I recall also how you, Mrinalini Mata, insisted that Master had decided—again, "at the end of his life"—that the work should be developed more strictly along church lines, with the members being required formally to renounce any prior church affiliation. Master's successor, Rajarsi Janakananda, remarked, "But that's just what I've always loved about his teachings: their universality; the fact that this isn't a church and that it isn't exclusive." I myself was present on that occasion, and have quoted his sentiments here exactly; his words, more or less exactly.

I've no doubt that Master told you he wanted SRF to be organized more as a church. What I contest is the further meaning you've read into those words. I know, because Master said so, that you personally have strong Roman Catholic tendencies brought over from past lives. As nearly as I was able to observe in India, you feel little kinship with that country's informal traditions in these matters, and with the freedom of religious expression there. It is owing, I think, to your influence that SRF has come more and more to resemble the Catholic monastic orders: rules, dogmas—everything.

I have it on what I believe to be good authority that Master was distressed, in 1935, at the very need for incorporating SRF as a church. This was simply a legal requirement, to obtain tax exemption for SRF as a religious work.

I am aware of the fact that, at the end of his life, he stressed the need for emphasizing more strongly the religious aspects of our work, and that in this context he used the word church. Anything he said “at the end,” however, must be weighed against all that he ever said previously. For a true Master is never motivated by whim. His every utterance in the name of truth—and even, perhaps, when he appears to be speaking lightly—is part and parcel of the teaching he has been charged to bring into the world. Never would he change his mind in the sense you’ve implied.

I happen to know what he did say on this subject “at the end of his life.” He was concerned that too many people, after taking Kriya Yoga initiation, failed to appreciate its spiritual significance, and didn’t understand the importance of belonging to the spiritual family of a line of great masters. “They leave here after taking initiation,” he said, “and go back to supporting their own churches. They should be shown the importance of supporting this as their spiritual work.”

What you have done is take a perfectly sensible admonition to involve people more in the work, and make it a basis for binding people hand and foot. You’ve turned what might have been an expansive concern for their higher welfare into a contractive concern for the supreme and central position of the Church itself. (“Ask not what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church.”!) Really, it’s a question of emphasis. The emphasis, however, on what we can get out of people instead of on what we can give to them cannot but change this religion of divine love into one of worldly power and universal control.

Signs of an unhealthy organization

I discussed the contractive consciousness in the booklet, “My Separation from SRF.” SRF, as I wrote there, is ambivalent in its attempts to be expansive. Though missionary by intention, what it actually does is not so much reach out to people and touch their hopes and aspirations as seek to control the spread of the teachings. Such an attitude is not expansive, but contractive.

Generally speaking, SRF’s influence, both internally and externally, is not supportive, but suppressive. The monks and nuns themselves complain that they can’t meditate enough. They dream nostalgically of a more cloistered life, and wish they were free to devote themselves to simple tasks that would permit them, even while working, to think one-pointedly of God. To them, their administrative duties are a burden, not a joy. This is what happens when people view their duty with a contractive consciousness. Were they to view it expansively, nothing they did would seem burdensome to them. They’d welcome it all gratefully and view it as a blessing, as an opportunity to grow in God. Any work that one does for Him ought to inspire joy. And so it will, if one accepts his duties as being truly the Lord’s will for him.

The SRF monks and nuns, with their nostalgia for the cloister, are actually biased against pursuing their missionary activities with expansive zeal. Who could maintain for long a division between serving outwardly on the one hand, and rejecting outward involvement on the other? A

devotee would more easily fulfill his inner, spiritual aspirations if he developed a spirit of self-offering both inwardly and outwardly, giving of himself in both worlds with an attitude of expansive joy. But if he sacrifices the joy of inner expansion in spirit for the joylessness of outer contraction, he ends up substituting a desire to rise through the organizational ranks for the desire to soar inwardly in God. The desire for position is, unfortunately, quite common in SRF. Contractiveness, if it isn't made a means to inner expansion, is spiritually unhealthy. It cannot fail in time to produce a desire for power, in the process feeding such spiritually harmful, pride-affirming attitudes as spiritual narrowness, lack of charity, and fanaticism.

Is any of this what Master wanted? I put it to you boldly: Is the process of institutionalization what you yourselves want, really? I cannot believe that it is. I think you've accepted this direction because you believe it is what you are supposed to do. But it goes against your own grain, spiritually; that is why you find so little joy in it, and why there is so much stress and tension at Mt. Washington. (Your ministers, so I was told, admitted publicly to the tension during this year's SRF Convocation.) It is also the reason you so often refer to your work as a burden to you. There is no room, when the attitude is right, for talking—still less for complaining—of one's "heavy responsibilities."

What did Master mean by, "We Are Not a Sect"?

A sect is a group of religious worshipers with a system of beliefs that sets them apart from other groups. Usually, this group is a separate body within a larger body of worshipers. Often it is considered heretical by the larger body, or by others to whose beliefs it does not conform.

When Master said, "We are not a sect," obviously what he meant, first and foremost, was that our faith rests not on any system of beliefs, but on the direct experience of God. Secondly, what he meant was that he didn't set his teachings apart from other religious teachings. When I asked him once, "Is this a new religion?" his reply was, "It is a new expression." The true religion of mankind, in other words, is one and eternal (sanatana). All religions are but variant expressions of that one, eternal religion (sanatan dharma).

He called SRF a "Church of All Religions." In so doing, as you of course know, he didn't at all mean that his teachings were eclectic. In other words, they didn't draw from other religions to create a sort of macédoine of ideas in the name of some new, supposedly universal teaching, much as certain modern artists have done in sticking bits and pieces of paper together in a meaningless jumble and calling them "art."

John Ball, the noted novelist, wrote an interesting book titled *The Fourteenth Point*. In it he imagined a congress of the heads of the major religions of the world. Their purpose was to see whether points of agreement could be found in their teachings that they might present to the world in the form of a universal statement on the meaning and purpose of religion. The idea was to show religion as possessing that degree of universality which is encountered today in the physical sciences.

Unfortunately for the plan, the different representatives couldn't agree on a single issue, not even on basic ones such as the existence of the soul, of life after death, or of God. The tenets of every religion were, in some way, exclusive and unique.

Finally, the Dalai Lama broke the deadlock by proposing a teaching to which all of them agreed. It was the universal teaching, variously phrased in every religion: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

I remarked to the author after reading his book, a copy of which he'd graciously presented to me, "It's a fascinating study, John. But you've touched too lightly on the real point of unanimity between the different religions. What this 'universal teaching' demonstrates is that when a religious tenet rests on universal human experience, its truth is instantaneously recognized. When it rests on abstract beliefs, however, even if those beliefs derive from the spiritual experiences of a great master, the interpretations that are given to those experiences by spiritually unenlightened minds will be numerous, mutually exclusive, and untrustworthy. Beyond this single 'universal teaching' of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, but well exemplified by it, what we find in all religions is their dedication to uplifting the consciousness of humanity.

"One way of uplifting it," I continued, "is by broadening people's sympathies, as this 'universal teaching' aspires to do. Systems of abstract belief don't really define a religion. The very goal of religion is to take people, wherever each of them may be in his spiritual evolution, and help them to grow toward the experience of Ultimate Truth. It is this fact which places religion on a par with, and even far above, the modern physical sciences."

Master's teachings made this explanation self-evident. He showed us that, even as the people in medieval times believed the world to be flat although their mere believing didn't make it so, in the same way, mere belief in God is not proof in itself of His existence. We must, Master taught, realize the truth for ourselves, even as the old explorers proved that the world was round by circumnavigating it. That faith which St. Paul described as "the proof of things unseen" is the intuitive conviction which comes as a result of actual, divine perception.

Yogananda emphasized individual self-realization

This need for realizing the truth personally in one's Self was reiterated by Master so frequently that it might seem foolish of me to emphasize it to you, of all people, were it not with the intention of making a further point. And yet, I must admit that this point is one I wouldn't have thought needed making, either. Certainly, you speak often enough of man's need to realize God. Why, then, have you treated Master's work as though it were a sect? It was not founded on any system of unilateral dogmas and beliefs. Why, then, this hostility to any expression of his teachings other than your own? Why must any such expression, according to you, by very definition represent a "distortion," even a "betrayal"?

The further point is that Paramhansa Yogananda gave his very religion the name, "Self-realization." This can only mean that its primary emphasis is, as he consistently said that it was,

on the spiritual development of the individual, and not on the outer form of the organization. “Fellowship,” he said, in the name, “Self-Realization Fellowship,” means “fellowship with God and with other truth-seeking souls.” “Fellowship,” in this sense, is an English rendering of the Sanskrit word, *satsanga*, “good company,” the importance of which the Indian Scriptures stress again and again—not as an organizational structure, but as a practice for the spiritual development of the individual devotee.

Master’s emphasis, as was Lahiri Mahasaya’s, as was Sri Yukteswar’s, as has ever been that of every saint and master in India, was on what the individual seeker must do to find God. The devotee must endeavor to realize the Self in deep meditation. He should also keep company with other devotees—preferably with wise devotees, and most preferably of all with a wise guru; and he must carefully avoid association with worldly people.

When Master said that Self-realization will become the new religion of the world, did he mean that the organization, Self-Realization Fellowship Church, Inc., would in future become the official religion of mankind? that this religion would have a single Board of Directors as its supreme authority, guided by a universal pope in the person of the SRF President, and a single voice, the President’s, authorized to speak for the line of SRF Gurus to the whole world?

Is this what you really believe? It certainly is what you seem to imply.

Such a world church could not possibly avoid the pitfalls attendant upon worldly power, with which the Christian religion has been afflicted throughout its nearly two thousand years of history.

Only those with “status” in the organization may “see” Master

A woman in Germany some years ago received, or at least believed that she’d received, a vision of Yogananda. She told me how deeply offended she was with Mt. Washington when it sought in letters to disabuse her of what it labeled her “delusion.” (Surely SRF didn’t mean to imply that only members of the Board of Directors may expect to be granted true visions of Master!)

As she spoke, I was reminded of an article that appeared many years ago in a Catholic journal. The article commented on Yogananda’s description, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, of his visit to Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth, in 1936. “As if a Hindu yogi,” scoffed the author of that article, “could have a true Catholic vision!”

Perhaps what your letter intended was only that visions granted to people with no official status in the work cannot be accepted as bearing the weight of revelation, to which you might then be obligated to listen. (There’s a whole system of dogma to be woven around that single thought! But why bother, if Master didn’t want dogmas anyway? Why insist on creating permanent precedents?) I don’t know whether that woman’s vision was genuine. She seemed humble enough about it, and had shared it, she informed me, with only one other person, an SRF

devotee and confidante of hers. But the question of its genuineness isn't the issue here. What is the issue is your apparent presumption that it could not have been genuine.

You advised her to seek psychiatric help. It is not for me to judge the wisdom of your advice, though I must say she seemed normal enough to me, and has continued to seem normal in our subsequent years of association with her. It worries me, however, that her lack of standing in the organization may have been the real reason you rejected her vision as delusional.

Master made it clear in his teachings that it is the saints who are the true custodians of religion. Not popes. Not cardinals. Not hierarchies of clergy of any description. And certainly not institutions, which, once they assume the mantle of custodianship, make it serve institutional ends far more than spiritual ones.

All roads now lead to SRF, since Yogananda's passing

I've noticed even in the numerous editorial changes you've made in *Autobiography of a Yogi* since Master's passing that, by and large, they serve the end of boosting SRF as Master's official mouthpiece on earth.

When I first read his autobiography in 1948, I didn't even get the clear impression that there was an organization, except a peaceful hermitage in Encinitas where devotees lived serenely for God, sent out weekly lessons to fellow seekers, and enjoyed a life of God-remembrance and divine love. Nothing big. Nothing important. Nothing—God forbid!—that would take to suing others in the name of institutional monopoly.

If saints are the true custodians of religion, they should be encouraged to flourish within the bounds of SRF. They should not be allowed to find themselves pushed out in the name of sectarian exclusiveness.

Too many rules kill the spirit

I remember a story of Ramana Maharshi, whose brother was, I gather, rather a martinet. This story was told me by Sri Rama Yogi, whom I'll be mentioning again later on. The disciples often complained to their guru that they felt suffocated by the rules and regulations imposed on them by his brother. Paul Brunton, a highly advanced disciple, finally couldn't take it any longer, and actually left the ashram. (Master's comment to me: "He couldn't forget that he was English!")

One day this brother made a new rule: Ashram residents were no longer to pass through the office at lunchtime on their way to the dining room; they must walk around the building. This particular rule might not be considered to have been unnaturally oppressive. Perhaps office work was being disrupted by the daily invasion. Still, it was during lunchtime that people passed through there. And the shortcut did save them a fair amount of walking. Anyway, they complained to Ramana Maharshi. The master replied, "This place no longer feels like ours. Let us leave here." (Needless to add, the brother hastily rescinded his regulation!)

What saint would want to put up with the petty restrictions of institutionalism? Oh, he might follow along in the name of humility. The chances are, however, that he would withdraw from outer involvement. Catholic saints haven't felt they had the option of withdrawing from the Church. Self-confessedly, however, they've found its rigid institutionalism a heavy burden. In most cases, the very persecution they've endured has been instigated by the Church itself. Hindu saints, who have not been raised under such limitations, would simply bless the institution and leave it—as, indeed, a number whom I've known personally have actually done.

Our own tradition as Paramhansa Yogananda's disciples is more Hindu than Christian in the sense that all our Gurus were Indian (except Jesus, who, so Master said, spent his legendary "missing years" in India). In addition, all our role models were either Hindu or else were held up to us for their spiritual kinship to the Indian saints in their emphasis on personal devotion to God. The Catholic Church praises its saints for the devotion they demonstrated to the Church. Master, on the contrary, as you'll recall, drew many a scathing contrast between Christianity and what he termed "Churchianity."

If Master's work should become so institutionalized that true saints, and true seekers bent courageously on finding the divine Self within, became an institutional embarrassment, or came to be considered mere anomalies, even heretics, what would happen to the "purity of the teachings" that you are so bent on preserving through a process of rigid institutionalization?

Yogananda's advice for SRF will save it—if followed

The only possible way for this work to grow in attunement with the message he consistently taught throughout his lifetime is for it to become more all-embracing, more tolerant, less rigidly organized. Obviously, there is a need in SRF for centralized authority of a kind. The main emphasis, however, should be on inspiring others, not on controlling them. In this respect, centralization must be offset by a corresponding process of decentralization. That is to say, a certain latitude should be given to individual members in the expression of their own inner inspiration.

For this reason, Daya Mata, I countered your emphasis on centralization, in India in the fall of 1961, by remarking, "But I feel we need a balance to our efforts at centralization by giving space also to decentralization." Your reply to me on that occasion was, "The Board feels differently: Don't you think you ought to go along with the Board?" (Of course, I was on the Board myself at the time. I was, in addition, the First Vice President of SRF/YSS. Are not even Board members, what to speak of Vice Presidents, permitted to think for themselves?)

Master's way of controlling us should be our role model. He disciplined us not with anger or intolerance, but with the simple admonishment, "What I tell you is for your own good. Follow me, if you want what I have to give you, but if not, go your own way with my blessings." Can you imagine him ever taking a disciple to court?

You've cited in justification for your lawsuit the example of Sri Yukteswar, who initiated one or two suits against his own relatives in order to protect his properties. In the same spirit, I

heartily approved your suing Swami Hariharananda when he seized Sri Yukteswar's ashram property in Puri. And I was delighted when we learned last year from you, Daya Mata, that SRF had won that case.

But what has taking the name of the religion in which we both believe, and to which we both adhere, got to do with stealing? Despite all your claims to the contrary, the only people who have been "confused" by the alleged similarities between SRF and Ananda have been those loyal SRF members whom you've persuaded to write declarations stating that they find the "similarities" between us confusing. Confusing to whom, I ask you: to them? They already know the differences! In our legal briefs we've offered abundant proof of the impossibility of confusion for anyone interested in informing himself even superficially about our two organizations.

I cannot take the space in this letter to consider all the ramifications of an organization that is so set up as to encourage individual freedom in people's search for God. Essentially, however, what this must imply is adherence to the example Master himself established for us. It must imply offering people the truth, forever freely and lovingly, and not bludgeoning them into accepting your version of it with an entire armory of stern rules, restrictions, and admonitions in the name of loyalty and humility, and into doing nothing beyond what the SRF Board of Directors specifically permits them to do.

Here is a true story: An SRF center wanted to place a candle on the altar for the birthday celebration of one of our Gurus. Someone suggested, as a simple formality, that Mt. Washington be consulted. A telephone call was made. In due course a reply was received informing them that, no, a candle was outside the official regulations and would not be appropriate. This is an example, merely, of what I mean by a plethora of unnecessary restrictions.

Here is another example. An Ananda member used formerly to work in the retreat dining room at Encinitas. During her time there, the door leading from the kitchen to the dining room got broken. Six months later, at which time she finally left Encinitas to come to Ananda, that door had not yet been repaired. The reason? Permission to do the work had not yet been received "from the Board of Directors at Mt. Washington."

If we believe that SRF is destined to become the super-church of the world, well, I guess we might as well hitch up our trousers or skirts even now, and wrestle everything to a standstill in the name of total crystallization. But if we want the living, breathing, serviceful, inspiring organization Master always talked about, it is vitally necessary that we provide room for a little movement, for a reasonable amount of creativity, for initiative, for individual inspiration. I'm not talking about egoic self-expression. I'm talking about emphasizing Self-realization over institutional conformity.

The SRF president as representative of the Masters

SRF's present dogma is that there is only one representative of the Masters living on earth: the President of Self-Realization Fellowship. Are you really saying that Master himself

made that statement? I don't question that he said certain things that we didn't all get to hear. But this? Well, for starters, I myself never heard him say anything remotely similar. Nor is this statement in keeping with anything I ever heard him say. What I believe you've done is, again, impose the role model of the Catholic Church on some of the things he said, giving them thereby a meaning altogether different from anything he ever intended.

For the idea of one, sole representative defies the very principle of Self-realization. It also contradicts everything he ever taught about churches in general, and everything I ever heard him say about SRF in particular.

The notion of one, sole representative implies, first, that no one else has a right to trust his own inner, soul-guidance. What happens, then, to the principle of Self-realization?

The dogma that there is one special representative of Master on earth implies that every President will be not only Self-realized, but more highly realized than any other SRF member.

To boost this requirement for a spiritual shortfall among the ruck of Master's disciples, one of the SRF monks (so I learned recently) told a group of members during a retreat in Indiana, "None of us will be liberated in this lifetime." He cited you as his authority.

A member who was present inquired, "What about us?"

"Well, obviously," the monk replied, "if none of the renunciants will find liberation, no one else will find it, either." (For the renunciants to insist on their own spiritual superiority, incidentally, is a discouraging commentary on the arrogance that seems, alas, to be creeping into the organization.)

Contrast that monk's extraordinary statement, so denigrating to Master and to his teachings, to some of the things Master himself told us.

I myself heard him declare, during the Kriya Initiation at Mt. Washington in December of 1948, "Of those present, there will be a few siddhas, and quite a few jivan muktas." Rajarsi Janakananda and Sister Gyanamata, his two closest disciples, were absent on that occasion.

In Autobiography of a Yogi, Master defines a siddha as a fully liberated being, and a jivan mukta (meaning, literally, "freed while living") as one already liberated, but still having past karma to work out.

On another occasion, he said, "You should all strive at least to become jivan muktas in this life."

He constantly encouraged all of us to hope for liberation in this life. A young man once came to Mt. Washington to see if he could live there. Master asked me to convey this message to him: "Tell him that he can find salvation in this life, provided he remains faithful to this path to the end."

I've already pointed out earlier that rank in a spiritual organization is no guarantee of spiritual advancement. I don't mean to imply that SRF Presidents in future may be worldly, as

some of the Catholic popes in history have been. Tara stated at a Christmas banquet not long after Yogananda's passing, "Master prophesied that no SRF president would ever prove unworthy of his position." I see no reason to challenge this statement. Tara's announcement has, however, been embellished over the years to become a prophecy that every future SRF President would be Self-realized. Somehow, I would find that statement difficult to believe even if it had a separate source, which it doesn't. It is already cause for rejoicing that Master promised that every President would be a true devotee. This is, I think, all that needs to be read into his prediction that no President would ever prove "unworthy of his position."

Position in the organization has nothing to do with a person's depth of Self-realization. Rather, it has everything to do with the particular karmic patterns he needs to work out. This point was expounded to me by no less a master than Sri Rama Yogi, the most advanced disciple of Ramana Maharshi, and the only saint, so Master told me, that he'd ever met outside our own line of gurus (and two of Lahiri Mahasaya's most advanced disciples, Swami Pranabananda and Ram Gopal Muzumdar) who had attained final liberation.

Sri Rama Yogi (Yogi Ramiah, as he is named in Paul Brunton's *Search in Secret India*) had asked me, "What are Daya Mata's responsibilities?" I briefly described them to him. "What a burden!" he exclaimed. But he then went on to explain that it was actually her blessing to be in a position where she could work out her past karmas more quickly, because so intensely. "That doesn't mean," he added, "that another person would be similarly blessed were he placed in that position. It depends on the specific karmas that the individual has to work out."

There is absolutely no need for SRF to have an "infallible pope" as its president. Even in the Catholic Church, the doctrine of papal "infallibility" is limited to those very rare occasions when the pope proclaims a new dogma. (The last such event occurred more than a century ago.) To attribute total infallibility to any SRF President poses the further danger that it cannot but suppress all thought, all questioning, and encourage mindless obedience on the part of everyone, including even the other SRF Directors. Frankly, I think this is a dangerous doctrine, particularly so in an organization the very name of which proclaims its dedication to the principle of Self-realization.

Did Master really want only one organization?

I don't think there is really any question but that Master wanted his teachings to be promulgated by his own organization. It also seems clear to me that he wanted the spirit of his organization to remain so broad, and so charitable, in keeping with the example he himself established during his life, that it would allow for a variety of expressions of his teachings.

Who wouldn't want the organization he founded to remain faithful to his principles? Still, he did say, "How you all will change this work! I just wonder, were I to come back in a hundred years, if I'd even recognize it." And it was to you that he uttered those words—not, I might add, with approval, a fact which you have many times made clear to us.

It is because of Master's desire to preserve unity in his work that I have pleaded repeatedly through the years for unity between SRF and Ananda. I cannot believe, however, that he wanted unity at the cost of the high truths he had brought into the world.

Unity, moreover, must be predicated on certain essential conditions.

I don't for a moment believe, for example, that he wanted limitations to be imposed forcibly on others. There are currents in the affairs of men that can no more be controlled than the ocean tides. A teaching cannot achieve widespread popularity without its concepts becoming, in consequence, widely quoted. A teacher cannot achieve widespread acceptance without at the same time being claimed everywhere by everyone who loves him. The Buddha belongs as much to the whole human race as he does to Buddhists. Jesus belongs as much to Hindus, Moslems, Jews, and all others who love him as he does to devout Christians, and much more so than to so-called Christians who lack the essentials of faith and devotion.

I once said something to Anandamoyi Ma, the great woman saint about whom Master writes in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, concerning "my" Kriya Yoga. (This was my attempt, limited as my command was of the Bengali language, to emphasize that I was talking about Lahiri Mahasaya's kriya, as distinct from other practices that also bear the name, Kriya Yoga.) Anandamoyi Ma, in order to emphasize the inappropriateness of anyone's claiming proprietorship of the timeless yoga techniques, interjected smiling, "My [Amar] Kriya Yoga!"

Inevitably, others will claim Master as their own. And why shouldn't they? What a waste of time to combat the inevitable! The most that SRF will ever be able to do is exercise a certain moral authority. Preferably it will do so by offering people a measure of clarity and inspiration that they won't be able to find anywhere else. Master came for the whole world, not for a small band of close disciples. What can we do but let the world have him? To give him freely to all mankind ought, indeed, to be our pride and joy.

This brings us to the question of my own position in Master's work. Since I myself consider it desirable that there be one organization to promulgate Master's work, and that that organization be the one Master himself founded, why don't I simply defer to you and let you get on with the job?

Well, the first and most obvious answer is that you aren't getting on with it, except in the sense of marching with majestic deliberation down a dead-end street.

The second answer is that I, too, belong in the game. I'm just as much a disciple as you are. To ask me not to serve our Guru is contrary to the very dictates of dharma (right spiritual action).

There is, moreover, a valid place for Ananda in Master's work. You aren't committed to building world-brotherhood colonies: We are. You aren't interested in reaching out to people where they are, but only in giving them official pronouncements on SRF teachings and policy, purported to be coming through you in their pure form from Paramhansa Yogananda. We try to

make his teachings intelligible to people on their own levels of understanding, however multifarious those levels. In many ways Ananda addresses a void in Master's work and in the lives of truth seekers, and is bringing people to Master in droves, filling that void.

The greatest need Ananda addresses is that of giving people the kind of spiritual support they all crave.

You wrote a devoted member years ago, telling him to remove Master's photograph from the wall of his office. Why in the name of common sense would you do that? If you make such unreasonable demands of people, why should they even obey you?

You drove me out of my Guru's ashram with the stern warning never to set foot on any SRF property again, never to contact any SRF member, and never so much as to let anyone know that I am his disciple. So what did you want me to do, commit suicide? Death was virtually my only alternative to continuing my service to him, to whom I'd dedicated my whole life.

You might simply have allowed that devoted member to keep Master's photo on his wall. You might have accepted that I simply had no other choice than to continue serving my Guru. You might have sought ways of accommodating these and countless other realities, albeit different from your own, into an expanding understanding of how Master's work would spread. Instead, you excluded every reality but your own from your scheme of things—like King Canute, who futilely forbade the ocean tide to advance. The fault is yours. You cannot hope to get the world to adapt itself to your wishes, any more than you can realistically expect the courts of law to re-write the Constitution to accommodate you.

Master once said to me, "Someday those who leave here will have groups of their own—Jan, David, et cetera, et cetera." I don't know whether Jan (Savage) and David (Smith) ever started their own groups. I think Master was making it clear to me, however, that I would someday have a group of my own, and that it would have his approval.

There is a further aspect of this matter. It is perhaps understandable why I would start my own group when faced with no alternative. Master hinted to me that such a group would have his blessing. But would it have his support as an alternative work to that of SRF?

Here—if not much sooner!—is where your thinking on this subject and mine definitely come to a parting of the ways. Frankly, I think he is not pleased with SRF's contractive energy. I think he took me out of SRF because the expansive outlook I championed was being choked by a spirit of contractiveness that will, in time, destroy SRF unless it is corrected. I think he saw me, in this connection, as his safeguard against such a disaster.

You don't accept that he told me, repeatedly in fact, "You have a great work to do, Walter." In other words, you must think I'm either lying, or else so obtuse as not to realize that he might have been referring to the work we all have to do. Well, that is your lookout. If he said it to me personally, the truth must become manifest in time. I'd say it had become pretty well manifest already.

The test of Master's approval is whether any enterprise on which he is supposed to have bestowed his blessings actually flourishes. If you don't believe Ananda has flourished on all levels, spiritually above all—well, all I can say is, stick around. In any case, you don't have to persecute us. If we aren't acting with Master's blessings, we'll simply fade away in time. But if we are acting with his blessings, we'll continue to inspire thousands and bring them to Master's path, and nothing you nor anyone else can do will be able to stop us.

Each disciple serves his Guru, in his own way

There is a well-established and ancient tradition in India that endorses the disciple's serving his guru in his own way, rather than as his fellow disciples are doing. As a direct disciple, I have a definite edge over anyone who, after merely reading Yogananda's books, is inspired to spread his teachings on his own.

The acid test of my sincerity, however, is my willingness to renounce this work in the name of unity. Many times I have offered Ananda to you. It is you who have kept me, and Ananda, at arm's length.

I didn't want to leave SRF. I have always known that you had no good reason for dismissing me. You yourself told me, Daya Mata, after Tara's death in 1970, "I never agreed with the things Tara said against you." I expected you, after that, to bring me back into SRF in some capacity. Why didn't you?

Misleading others about our differences

Recently a letter was composed at Mt. Washington in answer to certain inquiries about the court case. The letter states, in part: "Through the many years since Donald Walters's resignation [the emphasis is mine], we have remained silent as to the specific reasons for his having left the SRF Order. Yet he has freely spoken of and written about his view of the circumstances. To protect him and to follow Guruji's ideals, we have continued to refrain from entering into discussion about this matter. Suffice it to say that it was not merely 'a misunderstanding of motives and circumstances,' but that there were sufficient grounds for his dismissal. Also, he has since said he really needed to have his own organization."

It is difficult to feel charitable in the face of such a guileful statement. You reiterate—as always, without support—your old refrain that I resigned, although you prepare the ground three sentences later for admitting that I was dismissed. You talk about the "freedom" with which I have spoken. The fact is, I've done my best all these years to protect my Guru's organization. Even now, on finding myself forced to oppose, not you or SRF, but the lawsuit that you initiated, the ideals for which I am pleading are for the protection of my Guru's work. Much of what I've written recently I kept for many years from my closest friends. It is news to them, as it is news to all those others who have been reading these papers.

You pretend to be "protecting" me—yet you launch a damaging lawsuit against me! You hint at "sufficient grounds" for my dismissal, but again, as always for the past thirty years, all

you offer is innuendoes—like the standard line you’ve taken with inquirers over the years, “Oh, if you only knew!” I say to you, if you have something to say, say it! Enough of these hints, which have no higher motive than to make a molehill look like a mountain without actually stooping to telling blatant lies.

As for my needing an organization of my own, I’ve never said I wanted one. Nor did I ever want one. All I’ve ever said is that Master must have wanted me to have an organization of my own, since he so arranged circumstances that I had no choice but to found one.

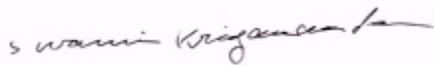
What would please Master more?

There are right ways of doing things. You’ve concentrated on my “flaws.” Why not consider other possibilities—such as expressing appreciation for the little bit of good that I may possibly have done in my life? or treating me with a measure of good will as a fellow disciple: well-meaning, perhaps, if bumbling and ignorant?

Daya Mata, you told us in Fresno two years ago, “I can’t face Master [after death] until this legal issue has been resolved.” Well, there are two ways of resolving it. One is to beat us into the ground, as you’ve been trying to do, losing at every step of the way. The other is to make friends.

Which solution, do you think, would please Master more?

In his love,



Swami Kriyananda