

CATHOLIC ASHRAMS

Sannyasins or Swindlers?

(Enlarged Edition with New Appendices)

*Now it is not good
Foe the Christian's health
To bustle the Aryan brown
For the Christian riles,
And the Aryan smiles
And he wearth the Christian down;
And the end of the fight
Is tombstone white
With the name of the late deceased,
And the epitaph drear,
"A fool lies here
Who tried to bustle the East."*

- Rudyard Kipling

Sita Ram Goel

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Preface

Preface

It was early in 1987 that *Hinduism Today*¹ sent to me reprints of four articles that had been published in its issue of November/ December, 1986.² Based on extensive research, the articles told the story of some Catholic missionaries establishing "ashrams" in different parts of India and doing many other things in order to look like Hindu sannyasins. They also pointed out some glaring contradictions between Hindu spiritual perceptions on the one hand and the basic Christian beliefs on the other. One of the articles quoted from Vatican sources to show how Church proclamations disagreed with the professions of Christian "sannyasins". Another asked the Christians as to how they would look at a Muslim missionary appearing in their midst in the dress of a Christian priest and adopting Christian rituals in a Church-like mosque, but teaching the Quran instead of the Bible.³ I wrote to *Hinduism Today* that Voice of India would like to publish the articles in the form of a booklet for the education of Hindus, many of whom had been hoodwinked by this form of mission strategy. The permission was readily granted.

While these articles were getting printed, a friend in Madras informed me that a dialogue on the subject of Christian ashrams had developed through correspondence between Swami Devananda Saraswati and Father Bede Griffiths. He sent to me an article and some letters to the editor which had appeared in the *Indian Express* of Madras in March and April 1987, and triggered the dialogue. The article, *An Apostle of Peace*, was the summary of a talk which Dr. Robert Wayne Teasdale, a Catholic theologian from Canada, had delivered in Madras on March 12, 1987. Fr. Bede Griffiths had been presented by him as "Britain's appropriate gift to India".⁴ The letters to the editor were reactions from readers of the *Indian Express*.

I wrote to Swami Devananda and obtained from him copies of the letters exchanged. He also supplied a letter from Dr. Teasdale that had appeared in the *Indian Express* of June 1, 1987 and was a defence of Teasdale's earlier

presentation. I found the material illuminating and immediately relevant to the subject I was planning to present for public discussion. Swami Devananda had no objection to Voice of India publishing the correspondence provided Fr. Bede Griffiths also gave his permission. He wrote to Fr. Bede who agreed readily and with grace. Swami Devananda then sent us copies of the last letters exchanged in October, 1987.

As I developed the Preface to the first edition and surveyed the mission strategies in the history of Christianity in this country, I realized that I was dealing with not only Catholic Ashrams but, in fact, with a whole movement known as the Christian Ashram Movement in the Christian Mission. Various Protestant missions were also practising the same fraud. But it was too late to change the title of the book because its main body had been already printed. I have retained the old title in this edition also because it has become well-known under this name not only in this country but also abroad, particularly in circles that control the Christian missions in this country. But I have made the subtitle more apt.

In this second edition, while all the old material has been retained, a lot more has been added. The earlier Preface has been expanded and rearranged into chapters with suitable headings. It now forms Section I of the book. In Section II which carries the earlier articles from *Hinduism Today*, two more articles from the same monthly have been added as appendices. In the earlier edition, there was only one dialogue, that between Swami Devananda and Fr. Bede. Now there are three dialogues, two more having been put together by Swami Devananda and brought to my attention. The dialogues form Section III of the present edition. Another valuable addition is Section IV which comprises letters exchanged between Fr. Bede and Shri Ram Swarup in early 1990. Three articles written by Ram Swarup in different papers and referred to by him in his letters to Fr. Bede have been reproduced as appendices to this section. Section V of this edition is more or less the same as Section III of the old one except for some changes in the numbering of the appendices and addition of a new appendix. The information which this section had carried earlier about Robert De Nobili has been transferred to the appropriate chapter under Section I. The other new features in the present edition are Bibliography and Index.

II

The first edition of *Catholic Ashrams* drew two sharp but opposite reactions from Hindu and Christian quarters.

Hindu readers by and large reacted favourably and welcomed the Hindu view of Christian missions. Some readers whom I had known for years and who had thought that Christian missions had undergone a change of character, were unpleasantly surprised. The only Hindu with whom I failed to carry weight was a noted Gandhian who refused to concede that there was anything wrong in what the Christian mission were doing. So unlike Mahatma Gandhi, I thought. I have found that for the Gandhians, by and large, Muslims and Christians are always in the right, and Hindus always in the wrong. I wonder if anyone of them has ever cared to read the Mahatma's works, and know that, no matter what his strategy of serving Hinduism happened to be at any time, his commitment to Hinduism was uncompromising.

On the other hand, my Christian friends whom I had known for many years, expressed pain and resentment at what I had written, particularly about Swami Abhishiktananda who had met me in 19

8 and known me rather well for years till he died in 1973. In our very first meeting I had told him in so many words that Jesus came nowhere near even the most minor Hindu saint, and that the missionary attempts to foist him on Hindus with the help of Western wealth, was nothing short of wickedness. He had never mentioned Jesus again, and our discussions had centred on Hindu philosophy of which he knew quite a bit, at least better than I did at that time. I had never suspected that he himself was a missionary and a part of the apparatus. It was only when I read his writings that I learnt the truth. I happened to be Treasurer of the Abhishiktananda Society in Delhi at the time the first edition of this book appeared. I told my Christian friends that we were in the midst of a dialogue, and that personal relations should not obscure ideological differences. But I have failed to impress them. Our relations are now correct but cold. Having been a student of Christian doctrine and history, I should have known that the post-Vatican II talk about tolerance and dialogue was intended to be a one-way affair.

A friend (not Koenraad Elst) has sent to me the relevant pages from a book written by a Christian lady and published from Leuven in Belgium. She has been rather kind to me. "While there has been," she says, "much sympathy and support from both the Hindu and Christian communities in India, Catholic ashrams have also confronted opposition. In *Catholic Ashrams*, Sita Ram Goel, a member of a fundamentalist movement within Hinduism which seeks to return to the pure Vedic religion, severely attacks and ridicules the phenomenon of Catholic ashrams... As long as Christians are not prepared to question their own fundamentals of faith, more precisely the belief in the uniqueness of Christ, Hindus, according to Goel, will remain suspicious of Catholic motives for starting ashrams." [5](#) I do not know what she means by "return of the pure Vedic religion". I know of no such movement in India at present. At any rate, I should like her to guide me to the movement to which I am supposed to subscribe. But she has represented me quite correctly when she says that I consider the Christian dogma of Jesus Christ being the only saviour as a devilish doctrine which Hindus will never accept. Readers of the two sentences I have quoted from her book can judge for themselves as to who is a fundamentalist. In any case, I should like to point out to this Christian enthusiast that fundamentalism is as foreign to Hinduism as honesty is to Christian missions.

Coming to Jesus Christ, I had written an essay on what the Christological research in the modern West has done to this mischievous myth. The essay was intended to be a Preface to this edition of the *Catholic Ashrams*. But owing to the wealth of detail which was needed to tell the full story of the Jesus of History yielding place to the Jesus of Fiction and finally leaving the fast dwindling number of believing Christians with the Christ of Faith (blind belief), the essay became too long and did not look suitable as a mere Preface. I have had to make the essay a separate book, *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression*, which is being published simultaneously with this edition of the *Catholic Ashrams*. Readers may regard the two books as companion volumes.

I end by mentioning a happy coincidence. When I sat down to write the Preface to the first edition of *Catholic Ashrams*, I ran into a lot of source material which enabled me eventually to write *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters* (1989), which, in turn, brought Koenraad Elst to me in

December, 1989. This time, as I sat down to write the Preface to this edition, I ran into another lot of material which has enabled me to write *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression*. I look forward to my next book on Christianity which I hope will enable me to write yet another.

SITA RAM GOEL

Vasantotsava

New Delhi

27 March 1994

Footnotes:

[1](#) This periodical is published by the Saiva Siddhanta Church which has its international headquarters in Hawaii, USA. Starting as a quarterly, *The New Saivite World*, on January 5, 1979 it became a bimonthly in September 1985 and a monthly from July 1987 onwards.

[2](#) December 1986/January 1987 issue of the Indian Ocean Edition published from Port Louis, Mauritius. Recently an Indian edition has started coming out from New Delhi.

[3](#) Christian reaction to the main article in *Hinduism Today* came out in the September 1987 issue of *Religion And Society*, published from Bangalore. It is one of the six most important Christian journals in India. The editor dismisses as "conservative" those Hindus who suspect Christian ashrams as a new strategy for conversion. "While this attack is nonsense or worse," he concludes, "it does show clearly how Hindus of a kind, probably on the increase, view some Christian ashrams." Obviously, the other kind of Hindus the editor has in mind are either "progressives" who welcome everything hostile to Hinduism or those simple people who know nothing about the missionary apparatus and machinations and who, therefore, never ask any questions.

[4](#) Dr. Teasdale's *Towards A Christian Vedanta: The Encounter of Hinduism and Christianity according to Bede Griffiths* has been published from Bangalore in 1987.

[5](#) Catherine Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism: Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation*, Louvain, 1990, pp.192-93.

New Labels for Old Merchandise

CHAPTER 1

New Labels for Old Merchandise

The emergence of Catholic ashrams in several parts of the country is not an isolated development. These institutions are links in a chain which is known as the "Ashram Movement", and which different denominations of Christianity are promoting in concert. The Protestants and the Syrian Orthodox have evolved similar establishments. Taken together, these institutions are known as Christian ashrams. Several books and many articles have already been devoted to the subject by noted Christian writers.

The Ashram Movement, in turn, is part of another and larger plan which is known as Indigenisation or Inculturation and which has several other planks. The plan has already produced a mass of literature¹ and is being continuously reviewed in colloquies, conferences, seminars, and spiritual workshops on the local, provincial, regional, national, and international levels. High-powered committees and councils and special cells have been set up for supervising its elaboration and implementation.

What strikes one most as one wades through the literature of Indigenisation is the sense of failure from which Christianity is suffering in this country. Or, what seems more likely, this literature is being produced with the express purpose of creating that impression. The gains made so far by an imperialist enterprise are being concealed under a sob-story. Whatever the truth, we find that the mission strategists are trying hard to understand and explain why Christianity has not made the strides it should have made by virtue of its own merits and the opportunities that came its way.

Christianity, claim the mission strategists, possesses and proclaims the only true prescription for spiritual salvation. It has been present in India, they say, almost since the commencement of the Christian era. During the last four hundred years, it has been promoted in all possible ways by a

succession of colonial powers - the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and the British. The secular dispensation which has obtained in this country since the dawn of independence has provided untrammelled freedom to the functioning as well as the multiplication of the Christian mission. Many Christian countries in the West have maintained for many years an unceasing flow of finance and personnel for the spread of the gospel. The costs of the enterprise over the years, in terms of money and manpower, are mind-boggling. Yet Christianity has failed to reap a rich harvest among the Hindu heathens.

"It is a remarkable fact," writes Fr. Bede, "that the Church has been present in India for over fifteen hundred years² and has had for the most part everything in its favour, and yet in all this time hardly two in a hundred of the people has been converted to the christian faith. The position is, indeed, worse even than this figure would suggest, as the vast majority of Christians are concentrated in a very few small areas and in the greater part of India the mass of people remains today untouched except in a very general way by the christian faith. It is necessary to go even further than this and to say that for the immense majority of the Indian people Christianity still appears as a foreign religion imported from the West and the soul of India remains obstinately attached to its ancient religion. It is not simply a matter of ignorance. This may have been true in the past, but in recent times there has been a remarkable revival of Hinduism, which is more or less consciously opposed to Christianity, and the educated Hindu regards his religion as definitely superior to Christianity."³

The state of things described by Fr. Bede would have caused no concern to a normal human mind. There is nothing obstinate about Hindus remaining attached to their ancient religion which has given them a large number of saints, sages and spiritual giants, and enriched them with an incomparable wealth of art, architecture, music and literature. There is nothing wrong with Hindus who find their own religion more satisfying than an alien faith brought in by imperialist invaders. Moreover, Christianity has yet to prove that it has something better to offer in terms of spiritual seeking, or vision, or attainment. But the missionary mind, unfortunately, has never been a normal human mind. It has always suffered from the hallucination that it has a monopoly on truth and that it has a

divine command to strive for the salvation of every soul. That alone can explain why the mission in India, instead of dismantling itself, is making determined efforts to regroup and return for yet another assault on Hinduism.

Coming to the causes of Christian failure in India, one searches in vain for a single line in the voluminous literature of Indigenisation which tries to examine the character of Christian doctrine vis-à-vis what the Hindus expect from a religion. In fact, the doctrine is never mentioned in this context. It is assumed that the doctrine has been and remains perfect and flawless. What is wrong, we are told, is the way it has been presented to Hindus. "These facts," continues Fr. Bede after mourning the failure of the mission, "which can scarcely be questioned, suggest that there has been something wrong with the way in which the gospel has been presented in India (and the same remark would apply to all the Far East) and especially in the relation which has been established between Christianity and Hinduism.

We shall review at a later stage the relationship which Fr. Bede envisages as correct between his religion and that of the Hindus. The literature of Indigenisation has a lot to say on the subject. What we must find out first is the mistake which, according to Fr. Bede, the mission has made in presenting the gospel. "When we consider the number of conversions to Christianity over the last four hundred years," observes Fr. Bede, "we must admit that the Christian mission has largely failed. As soon as we ask why, I think we find the answer quite clear before us: the Church has always presented herself to the eastern world in the forms of an alien culture. A culture is the way people naturally express themselves; it embraces their language, music, art, even their gestures, their ways of thought and feeling and imagination. It is their whole world. In every case the Church has come to eastern people in an alien form."⁴ It may be noted that Fr. Bede has excluded religion from his definition of culture which he regards as a people's "whole world". This is not an oversight as we shall see. It is deliberate and calculated design.

What is the way out? It is obvious, say the mission strategists. Christianity has to drop its alien attire and get clothed in Hindu cultural

forms. In short, Christianity has to be presented as an indigenous faith. Christian theology has to be conveyed through categories of Hindu philosophy; Christian worship has to be conducted in the manner and with the materials of Hindu *pûjâ*; Christian sacraments have to sound like Hindu *saMskâras*; Christian Churches have to copy the architecture of Hindu temples; Christian hymns have to be set to Hindu music; Christian themes and personalities have to be presented in styles of Hindu painting; Christian missionaries have to dress and live like Hindu *sannyâsins*; Christian mission stations have to look like Hindu ashramas. And so on, the literature of Indigenisation goes into all aspects of Christian thought, organisation and activity and tries to discover how far and in what way they can be disguised in Hindu forms. The fulfilment will be when converts to Christianity proclaim with complete confidence that they are Hindu Christians.

The only alien way which does not seem to call for Indigenisation is the finance of the mission. There is, of course, an occasional speculation whether the mission can do without foreign finance. Off and on, some romantics raise the protest that Christianity can never pass as an indigenous religion so long as it does not learn to live on indigenous resources, but the point is never permitted to be pressed home. The realists know that the mission will collapse like nine-pins if the flow of foreign finance stops for even a short time or is reduced in scale. The theme is brought up once in a while in order to maintain the pretence that the mission is not unmindful of Hindu misgivings on this score. The controversy always ends in a compromise, namely, that "the foreign support should be maintained just for the purpose of getting rid of it".⁵ In other words, Hindus should become Christians if they wish to see the mission freed from foreign support!

In the end one finds it difficult to withhold the comment that the literature of Indigenisation reads less like the deliberations of divines than like the proceedings of conferences on marketing and management convened by multinational corporations. The corporation in this case is old and experienced. It commands colossal resources in terms of money and manpower and prestige. It is also conversant with and employs the latest methods of salesmanship. But the problem is that its stock-in-trade is stale and finds few buyers in Hindu society. At the same time, the corporation is congenitally incapable of producing anything new and more satisfying.

The solution to the problem, as the Board of Management sees it, is to invent spurious labels which can hoodwink Hindus into believing that a brand new product is being brought to them. That is what the Christian theologians, historians, sociologists, artists and musicians are working at today. It makes no difference that they pull long faces, look solemn, and invoke the Holy Spirit whenever they come together in conference, or deliver pep talks, or pen pompous phrases. The business remains as sordid as ever. It is true that there are still left among them some simple souls who believe sincerely that there is no mansion outside the Church save hell; but, by and large, they know what they are doing and that they are doing it because their own jobs and positions and privileges are at stake.

Footnotes:

[1](#) U. Meyer lists as many as 196 articles published in 8 major Christian journals from 1938 to 1965 (*Indian Church History Review*, December, 1967, pp. 114-120). Books and reports of committees and conferences, etc. which constitute a sizable segment of this literature, are not included in this list. The literature has tended to become more and more prolific in years subsequent to 1965.

[2](#) Mercifully, Fr. Bede does not repeat the currently fashionable Christian story that Christianity was brought to India in 52 A.D. by St. Thomas. He opts for sober history which records that the first Christians came to Malabar in the second half of the fifth century.

[3](#) Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India*, Bangalore, 1986, p. 55.

[4](#) Ibid., P. 179

[5](#) U. Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 102

Indigenisation: A Predatory Enterprise

CHAPTER 2

Indigenisation: A Predatory Enterprise

The precedent cited most frequently by the literature of Indigenisation is that which was set by the Greek Fathers when they used Greek cultural forms for conveying Christianity to the pagans in the Roman Empire. Fr. Bede recommends this precedent to the mission in India. "The Church," he says, "has a perfect model of how it should proceed today in the way it proceeded in the early centuries. Christianity came out of Palestine as a Jewish sect. Yet within a few centuries this Jewish sect had taken all the forms of thought and expression of the Greco-Roman world. A Christian theology developed in Greek modes of thought, as did a Christian liturgy in Greek language and in Greek modes of expression; a calendar also developed according to Greek and Roman traditions. Surely all that is a wonderful example meant for our instruction of how the Church can present herself to an alien world, receiving forms into herself while retaining her own Catholic message."[1](#)

Another expert on Indigenisation is more explicit about what the Church had done in the Greco-Roman world. "As we reflect on the process," writes R.H.S. Boyd, "by which Christianity in the earlier centuries became acclimatised in the Greek world, and by which it made use of certain categories of Greek thought, we are struck by the double face of its acceptance of 'secularised' Greek philosophy and philosophical terminology, and its complete rejection of Greek religion and mythology. Greek religion was gradually secularised. Philosophy was separated from what had been a religio-philosophic unity. The religious content - which had already been deeply influenced by secularisation right from the time of Aristophanes and Euripides - developed into a cultural, literary, artistic entity 'incapsulated' and isolated, except in the Orphic and mystery traditions, from that living, existential faith which transforms men's lives."[2](#)

There is no evidence that Greek culture had become secularised before some of its forms were taken over by the Church. The history of that period stands thoroughly documented by renowned scholars. The record leaves no doubt that it was the Church which forcibly secularised Greek culture by closing pagan schools, destroying pagan temples, and prohibiting pagan rites. In fact, the doings of the Church in the Greco-Roman world is one of the darkest chapters in human history. Force and fraud are the only themes in that chapter. But facts, it seems, have no role to play when it comes to missionary make-believe.

In any case, Dr. Boyd has convinced himself that "there is at present a rapid process of secularisation going on within Hinduism".³ He finds that philosophical Hinduism in particular has become "demythologized". "It would seem, therefore," he continues, "as though Hinduism were already started on the path followed by Greek religion. And so we are led to the question of whether or not it is legitimate for Christian theologians to use and adapt categories of what still purports to be *religious* Hinduism, and yet is very largely secularised. What, indeed, is the real meaning of the word 'Hindu'? Does it describe the fully mythological Hindu religion? Does it describe certain philosophico-religious systems? Or is it simply a synonym for 'Indian culture'? We shall find that some Indian Christian theologians, notably Brahmabandhab, have believed that Christianity was not incompatible with cultural, secularised Hinduism."⁴

Legitimate or illegitimate, compatible or incompatible, the literature of Indigenisation provides ample proof that several Hindu philosophies are being actively considered by the mission strategists as conveyors of Christianity. The Advaita of Shankaracharya has been the hottest favourite so far. The Vishistadvaita of Ramanuja, the Bhakti of the Alvar saints and Vaishnava Acharyas, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Vichara of Raman Maharshi are not far behind. For all we know, Kashmir Saivism and Shakta Tantra may also become grist to the missionary mill before long. Missionaries working among Harijans are advocating that the Nirguna Bhakti of Kabir and Ravidas should also be accepted as candidates for service to Christianity. The more enterprising mission strategists recommend that different systems of Hindu philosophy should be used for tackling different sections of Hindu society. In the upshot, we are

witnessing a keen contest among Indigenisation theologians for acquiring doctorates in Hindu religion and philosophy. Christian seminaries in India and abroad conduct crash courses in the same field. Christian publishing houses are manufacturing learned monographs, comparing Hindu philosophers with Christian theologians - ancient, medieval, and modern. And the same operation is being extended to other spheres of Hindu culture.

Fr. Bede is not bothered by considerations of legitimacy or compatibility. What concerns him most is the need of the Church. "We are faced," he says, "with a tradition of philosophy and mysticism, of art and morality, of a richness and depth not excelled, and perhaps not equalled, by the tradition of Greek culture which the Church encountered in the Roman Empire. What then is our attitude towards it to be? It is clear that we cannot simply reject it. The attempt to impose an alien culture on the East has proved a failure. There are no doubt elements in this tradition which we may have to reject, just as the Church had to reject certain elements in the Greek tradition. But what is required of us is something much more difficult. It is an effort of discrimination, such as the Greek Fathers from Clement and Origen to Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Aeropagite undertook, not merely rejecting what is wrong but assimilating all that is true in a vital act of creative thought." [5](#)

This is not the occasion for an evaluation of the philosophical calibre of the Greek Fathers. Those who have taken the punishment of examining their performance without wearing theological glasses, tell us that even at their best they were no more than practitioners of petty casuistries. What comes in for questioning in the present context is the Christian claim that Jesus scored over Zeus simply because some theological text-twisters tried to pass Judaic superstitions as Greek sublimities. The history of Christianity in the Roman Empire is not an obscure subject. The careers of many Christian emperors, popes, patriarchs, bishops, saints, and monks are proof that the contest between paganism and Christianity was decided not by philosophical cajoleries but by brute physical force.

The mission in India had no scruples about using force whenever and wherever it had the opportunity. It changed over to other methods only when it could wield the whip no more. The latest method sounds soft but is

no less sinister. "Indigenisation," say Kaj Baago, "is evangelisation. It is the planting of the gospel inside another culture, another philosophy, another religion."⁶ What happens in the process to that "another culture, another philosophy, another religion" is not the mission's concern.

Fr. Bede give the clarion call. "In India," he says, "we need a christian Vedanta and a christian Yoga, that is a system of theology which makes use not only of the terms and concepts but of the whole structure of thought of the Vedanta, as the Greek Fathers used Plato and Aristotle; and a spirituality which will make use not merely of the practices of Hatha Yoga, by which most people understand Yoga, but of the great systems of Karma, Bhakti and Jnan Yoga, the way of works or action, of love or devotion, and of knowledge or wisdom, through which the spiritual genius of India has been revealed through the centuries."⁷ Mark the words, "make use". The entire approach is instrumental and cynical. Yet Fr. Bede calls it a "vital act of creative thought". The whole business could have been dismissed with the contempt it deserves or laughed out as ludicrous but for the massive finance and the giant apparatus which the Christian mission in India has at its disposal.

As one surveys the operation mounted by the mission under the label of Indigenisation, one is driven to an inescapable conclusion about the character of Christianity: Christianity has been and remains a sterile shibboleth devoid of a living spirituality and incapable of creating its own culture. This spiritual poverty had forced Christianity into a predatory career from the start. It survived and survives to-day by plundering the cultures of living and prosperous spiritual traditions.

Christianity's predatory nature is loathsome to pagans who have inherited and are proud of their own culture. Yet it is quite in keeping with Jehovah's promise in the Bible. "Just as the Lord your God promised to your ancestors, Abraham, Issac and Joseph," proclaims Jehovah, "he will give you a land with large and prosperous cities which you did not build. The houses will be full of good things which you did not put in them, and there will be wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive orchards you did not plant."⁸

The Bible preserves a graphic and gory record of how the descendants of Abraham and Issac and Joseph helped Jehovah in fulfilling this promise. They appropriated the lands and properties of the pagans with a clean conscience. They were convinced that they were only taking possession of what already belonged to them by the terms of a divine pledge.

Christianity claims that Jehovah switched his patronage to the Church militant when the latter-day progeny of his earlier prophets became disobedient and killed his only son. It was now the turn of the Church to redeem the divine pledge. The history of the Church in many lands and over many centuries shows that it did far better than the preceding chosen people. It deprived the pagans not only of their physical possessions but also of their cultural creations. The condottieri who carried out the operation in the field of culture are known as the Greek Fathers.

It should not be a matter of surprise, therefore, that the mission has started singing hymns of praise to Hindu culture. That is the mission casting covetous glances before mounting a marauding expedition. What causes concern is the future of Hindu culture once it falls into the hands of the Church. The fate of Greek culture after it was taken over by the Church is a grim reminder.

Hindu culture grew out of Hindu religion over many millennia. The once cannot be separated from the other without doing irreparable damage to both. The Christian mission is bent upon destroying Hindu religion. Hindu culture will not survive for long if the mission succeeds. The plundered Hindu plumage which Christianity will flaunt for a time is bound to fade before long, just as the Greek and Roman cultures faded.

Let there be no mistake that the Christian mission is not only a destroyer of living religions but also of living cultures. It promises no good to a people, least of all to the Hindus.

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Bede Griffiths*, op. cit., p. 182

² R.H.S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras, 1969, p. 4

³ Ibid., p. 5

⁴ Ibid., p. 6

⁵ Bede Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 72

⁶ Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Madras, 1969, p. 85.

⁷ Bede Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁸ Deuteronomy, 6. 10-11 (*Good News Bible*, Bangalore reprint, p. 177).

The Patron Saint of Indigenisation

CHAPTER 3

The Patron Saint of Indigenisation

"De Nobili, in fact," observes Fr. Bede, "gives us the key to what was wrong in the Christian approach to the Hindu and shows how the gospel might have been presented to India in such a way as to attract its deepest minds and its most religious men."¹ He contrasts the way of De Nobili with that of St. Francis Xavier for whom "all Hindus, but especially Brahmins, were 'devil-worshippers'."² And he is not alone in hailing De Nobili as the patron saint of Indigenisation.

In fact, the one name which the literature of Indigenisation mentions most fondly is that of Robert De Nobili. Latter-day pioneers of the Ashram Movement among the Catholics, such as Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, refer to him with reverence as the first Christian sannyasin and the founder of the first Catholic ashram. A study of who this man was and what he did is, therefore, most likely to reveal what the mission strategists are trying to conceal.

Robert De Nobili was born at Rome in 1577 in a family which claimed noble descent. He ran away from home at the age of nineteen and joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) at Naples. Having completed his religious studies, he was ordained a priest in 1603. The next year he was sent as a missionary to India. He was made chief of the Madurai Mission in 1606, and worked there till his death at Mylapore in Madras in 1656.

The Madurai Mission had been carved out towards the end of the sixteenth century from the Jesuit missionary province on the Pearl Fishery Coast. The province had been visited in the middle of the same century by the Jesuit star-performer, St. Francis Xavier. He had converted thousands of local fishermen, known as Paravas, with the help of the Portuguese navy which threatened to burn their fishing boats unless they embraced Christianity. The "saint" had also declared war on Brahmins who did not

approve of his mission and methods. He had concluded, after surveying the scene, that Christianity had little chance even among the poorest Hindus so long as Brahmins enjoyed the prestige they did in Hindu society. Ever since, the Portuguese had been molesting, even killing Brahmins wherever Portuguese power prevailed. But far from doing any damage to the prestige of Brahmins, Portuguese barbarism brought Christianity into contempt among the Hindu masses. The pejorative term "*paranghi*" which the local people had used for a Portuguese came to mean a Christian as well. Fr. Fernandes who was stationed at Madurai since 1595, had not been able to make a single convert.

"There I remarked," De Nobili would write in a letter to Pope Paul V, "that all the efforts made to bring the heathens to Christ had all been in vain. I left no stone unturned to find a way to bring them from their superstition and the worship of idols to the faith of Christ. But my efforts were fruitless, because with a sort of barbarous stolidity they turned away from the manners and customs of the Portuguese and refused to put aside the badges of their ancient nobility." He was in a fix when he "noticed that certain Brahmins were highly praised because they led lives of great hardship and austerity and were looked upon as if they had dropped from the sky". So De Nobili decided to disguise himself as a Brahmin "for it seemed to me that with divine help I could do for God's sake, what they did with wicked cunning to win vain applause and worldly honours".[3](#)

He had already learnt Tamil and Sanskrit. But he could not pass as a Brahmin unless he wore a sacred thread and grew a *kuDumî* (tuft of hair) on the back of his head. These essential emblems of a Brahmin had been expressly forbidden to Christians by a Church Synod. So he sought an exemption from his immediate superior, the Archbishop of Cranganore. The Archbishop referred the matter to the Primate and the Inquisitor at Goa. Both of them sanctioned the masquerade, and De Nobili "declared war on the powers of hell and set about with the torch of the Gospel to scatter the darkness of error and bring to Christ as many souls as I could".[4](#)

He was meticulous in his methods. He left the mission house dressed as a Hindu sannyasin and set up an "ashram" on the outskirts of Madurai, an ancient seat of Hindu learning in South India. He wore a sacred thread and

grew a *kuDumî*; he painted appropriate parts of his body with sandal paste; he took to sitting and sleeping on the floor and eating vegetarian meals prepared by a Brahmin cook; he began washing with water in the lavatory, brushing his teeth with a twig and bathing as many times a day as was prescribed in the Brahmin books; he stopped riding a horse on his travels in the interior.

Meanwhile, the ashram was coming up fast. De Nobili built a shrine which looked like a Hindu temple. He called it "*kovil*", the Tamil term for a Hindu place of worship. He celebrated Mass but described it as "*pûjei*". The fruits and sweets he passed around after the "*pûjei*" were termed "*prasâdam*". He composed Christian hymns and songs in Tamil and set them to the tunes of Hindu devotional music. The names of angels, saints and apostles which these compositions contained were translated into a kind of Tamil. Similar names were given to whatever converts he made. The hymns and songs were used for sacraments, which he called "*saMskâras*", at the time of births, marriages and deaths. Festivals like Pongal were also Christianised in the same surreptitious manner.

De Nobili composed several books and tracts. They were written in Sanskrit or Tamil but packed with Christian lore. His most brilliant performance pertained to the most sacred Hindu scripture-the Veda. Having heard a folk tradition that the true Veda had been lost, he produced a book in Sanskrit and proclaimed that it was the *Yajurveda* which he had discovered in a distant land and which he had come to teach in India. Later on, when he was found out, he would say with a straight face that what he meant was the *Yesurveda*, the Veda of Jesus.

The Hindus he baptised did not have the faintest notion that they were embracing another faith, least of all Christianity which they despised. The ritual they were required to perform was washing with water from a nearby well, a change of clothes, muttering of *mantras* coined by De Nobili, and eating of "*prasâdam*". They did not suspect that the new names they were given were the names of Christian saints translated into Tamil. All they were told and knew was that they were being initiated by a Brahmin *guru* into his own *sampradâya*. Such initiations were at that time, as they still are, a routine matter for most Hindus.

Some Hindus suspected that there was something fishy about this stranger with a white skin. They asked him if he was a *paranghi*, that is, a Christian. De Nobili took advantage of the double meaning which the term had acquired. He replied that he was not a *paranghi*, that is, a Portuguese but a Brahmin from Rome. In his own words, "I professed to be an Italian Brahmin who had renounced the world, had studied wisdom at Rome (for a Brahmin means a wise man) and rejected all the pleasures and comforts of this world."⁵ He had the subjective satisfaction of being verbally correct, though in missionary ethics even this much was not necessary. Truth has always occupied a secondary place in missionary methods. What has stood uppermost is the saving of souls, even if it involves practising fraud. "The end justifies the means", is after all a Jesuit maxim.

De Nobili succeeded for some time and converted a number of upper caste Hindus in the next few years. Most of his unwary victims were from the Nayak community. The total number of converts till 1611 was a hundred and twenty. Of the twelve Brahmins included in the count, two were women and two children. The current Christian story credits him with the conversion of a much larger number. The count goes up to a hundred thousand, depending upon who is telling the story. Fr. Bede supports the story, though he does not mention concrete numbers. What amazes is that he regards these non-descript converts as India's "deepest minds and its most religious men". In any case, De Nobili had started looking forward to a larger harvest in years to come. The fraud was flourishing and he was well on his way to becoming a famous Brahmin sannyasin.

But he had counted without other missions and missionaries in the field. Some of his competitors for Hindu souls were becoming jealous of his success. Most of them felt that he had gone too far in "pandering to paganism". His own colleague at Madurai, Fr. Fernandez, sent one memorandum after another to the mission superiors, protesting against De Nobili's doings. The Franciscan missionaries working in a neighbouring province spread the rumour that De Nobili had abandoned Christianity and become a Hindu. The authorities at Goa were forced to take notice of the storm which their protege had raised.

At last, in 1613, De Nobili received a letter from the Provincial of his mission. It contained 34 orders and observations. The dress of a sannyasin was declared immodest, if not indecent. Abstinence from meat and fish was held contrary to nature and hazardous to health. The angels, apostles and saints were to be called by their proper names used in the Church and not by their Tamil translations. Mass was to be called Mass and not "*pûjei*", not even Christian "*pûjei*". Sacraments like baptism and confirmation were to be straight Christian ceremonies and not disguised as "*saMskâras*". In short, De Nobili was ordered to stop the major moves in his game of deception.

De Nobili put up a spirited and learned defence, quoting scriptures and citing precedents set by the Greek Fathers. The most telling point he made was when he quoted Chrysostom who, on seeing St. Paul circumcising Timothy, had exclaimed, "Behold! this incident: he circumcises to destroy circumcision." [6](#) He asserted that Hindu forms like sacred thread, *kuDumî*, sandal paste and ochre robe had nothing idolatrous about them and could be detached from Hindu religion in order to destroy that religion.

Fortunately for him, the Provincial who had questioned his methods died and the next man to take over was more sympathetic. His opponents, however, appealed to Pope Paul V. They also marshalled telling quotations and precedents. Christian scriptures and Church traditions abound in sayings and doings which can be cited equally effectively for using force or practising fraud. The Pope ordered the Inquisition at Goa to call a Council and investigate De Nobili. The Council met in February 1619 and was presided over by the Primate. De Nobili appeared before it and put up a still more spirited defence. But the Council decided against him. Now it was De Nobili's turn to appeal to the Pope.

At the end of a long letter to the Pope, De Nobili said quite truthfully that, till his time, converts to Christianity had been made only by force. "On all sides", he wrote, "spread before our eyes fields with ripening harvest, and there is not one to reap them, no one to bring help to these populations, sunk in profound ignorance. For so far it is along the Coasts of India that the courage of the Portuguese has brought the torch of faith; the rest of the country, the inland provinces, have not been touched, so that it may rightly

be said that the Christian faith can be found only where Portuguese arms are respected."

Next, he told the big lie that Hindus were thirsting for Christ and would flock to the Church if they were allowed to retain their ancestral culture and social customs. "Nearly everybody," he said, "is full of admiration for the Christian religion, very few if any condemn it, many embrace it; but there is one thing which delays conversions; it is the fear of being outcast by their own people, exiled from their country, deprived of their friends, relatives and temporal goods, as will happen if they give up the badges of their caste and the manners and customs of their ancestors."

Finally, he came out with the fervent plea that he be permitted to continue practising his fraud on the Hindus. He made himself "prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness" and invoked "the tolerant practices of the Sovereign Pontiffs". He prayed that "a Christian meaning may be given to these emblems, since it cannot be shown, still less proved, that they are superstitious, as is evident from certain texts and long experience".[7](#)

After sending his appeal to the Pope at Rome, De Nobili pulled strings in Portugal so that the King and the Inquisitor General of that country sided with him. Pope Paul V also obliged him by dying soon after his appeal arrived in Rome. The matter dragged on for a few years. It was only in 1623 that Pope Gregory XV decided in De Nobili's favour. The Madurai Mission continued to spawn "sannyasins" till long after De Nobili was dead. The records of the Mission provide a list of 122 Jesuit missionaries "who wore the dress of Sanniyasis and followed the method of de Nobili"[8](#) before the Jesuit order was suppressed in 1773.

Meanwhile, the Hindus at Madurai had come to know the truth about the "Brahmin of noble birth from Rome". The converts De Nobili had made melted away in no time. Father Antony Proenca, a companion of De Nobili, was soon crying for a suitable lotion which could hide the colour of missionary skin. "Among my readers," he appealed in his Annual Letter of 1651, "there will surely be some who could procure for us some lotion of ointment which could change the colour of our skin so that just as we have changed our dress, language, food and customs, we may also change our complexion and become like those around us with whom we live, thus

making ourselves 'all to all', Omnia Omnibus factus. It is not necessary that the colour should be very dark; the most suitable would be something between black and red or tawny. It would not matter if it could not be removed when once applied: we would willingly remain all our lives the 'negroes' of Jesus Christ, A.M.D.G. [to the greater glory of God]." We are told by the theologians that Fr. Proenca was inspired by the "spirit of understanding and stooping down which St. Clement of Alexandria calls *synkatabasis* and St. Augustine *condescension*".⁹ Christian scriptures and Church traditions, as we have pointed out, provide for every exigency.

Thus an abominable scoundrel is the patron saint of Indigenisation. He was followed, and is being followed, by many more similar scoundrels, no matter what high-sounding honorifics they themselves or the Church bestows on them.

II

Transactions of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, published in its Volume XIV (1822) an article, 'Account of a Discovery of a modern imitation of the Vedas', by Francis Ellis. He found in what he had seen "an instance of religious imposition without parallel". A summary of this article is given below.

A book entitled *L' Ezour Vedam* was published in Paris in 1778. A manuscript of this book had reached Voltaire, the famous French thinker, in 1761. He had thought it a genuine work on Hindus religion and philosophy and presented it to the library of the king of France. M. Anquetil Du Perron who had spent many years in India and who "professed a profound knowledge of its religion, antiquities and literature" helped in getting it published. But M. Sonnerat, who saw the publication, inferred that it was the handiwork of Christian missionaries and must have been written in an Indian language. The purpose of the work, pronounced Sonnerat, was "to refute the doctrines of the Puranas and to lead, indirectly, to Christianity".

Mr. Ellis was able to "ascertain that the original of this work still exists among the manuscripts in the possession of the *Catholic* missionaries at *Pondicherry*, which are understood to have originally belonged to the Society of Jesus". He also found "among the manuscripts, imitations of the

other three Vedas"- Rigveda, Samaveda. and Atharvaveda. There was also an Upaveda of the Rigveda composed in "16,128 lines or 8600 stanzas"-a work unknown to any Hindu tradition. Several other forgeries came to his notice. On enquiries made at Pondicherry, "the more respectable native Christians" informed him that "these books were written by Robert De Nobilibus" who had become "well known to both Hindus and Christians under the Sanscrit title of Tattwa-Bodh Swami".

Mr. Ellis concludes that "the mission of Madura was founded on the principle of concealing from the natives, the country of the missionaries, and imposing them on people as belonging to the sacred tribe of the Brahmanas (*Romaca Brahmana* was the title assumed), and this deception, probably, led to many more; at least Robert De Nobilibus is accused by Mosheim in his Ecclesiastical History both of fraud and perjury in his endeavour to support this assumed character."

Mr. Ellis quotes, in a supplementary note, a long para from Mosheim which is reproduced below:

"These missionaries of the court of *Rome*, spread the fame of the Christian religion through the greatest part of Asia during this century. To begin with India, it is observable, that the ministerial labours of the Jesuits, Theatins, and Augustinians contributed to introduce some trace to divine truth, mixed, indeed, with much darkness and superstition, into those parts of that vast region, that had been possessed by the Portuguese before their expulsion from thence by the Dutch. But of all the missions that were established in these distant parts of the globe, none has been more constantly and universally applauded than that of Madura, and none is said to have produced more abundant and permanent fruit. It was undertaken and executed by Robert De Noble, an Italian Jesuit, who took a very singular method of rendering his ministry successful. Considering, on the one hand, that the Indians beheld with an eye of prejudice and aversion all the Europeans, and on the other, that they held in the highest veneration the order of Brachmans as descended from the gods; and that, impatient of other rulers, they paid an implicit and unlimited obedience to them alone, he assumed the appearance and title of a Brachman, that had come from a far country, and by besmearing his countenance and imitating that most

austere and painful method of living that the Sanyasis or penitents observe, he at length persuaded the credulous people that he was in reality a member of that venerable order. By this stratagem, he gained over to Christianity twelve eminent Brachmans, whose example and influence engaged a prodigious number of people to hear the instructions, and to receive the doctrine of the famous Missionary. On the death of Robert this singular mission was for some time at a stand, and seemed even to be neglected. But it was afterwards renewed, by the zeal and industry of the Portuguese Jesuits, and is still carried on by several Missionaries of that order from France and Portugal, who have inured themselves to the terrible austerities that were practised by Robert, and that are thus become, as it were the appendages of that mission. These fictitious Brachmans, who boldly deny their being Europeans or Franks, and only give themselves out for inhabitants of the northern regions, are said to have converted a prodigious number of Indians to Christianity; and if common report may be trusted to, the congregations they have already founded in those countries grow large and more numerous from year to year, Nor indeed, do these accounts appear, in the main, unworthy of credit, though we must not be too ready to receive, as authentic and well attested, the relations that have been given of the intolerable hardships and sufferings that have been sustained by these Jesuit-Brachmans in the cause of Christ. Many imagine, and not without good foundation, that their austerities are, generally speaking, more dreadful in appearance than in reality; and that, while they outwardly affect an extraordinary degree of self-denial, they indulge themselves privately, in a free and even luxurious use of the creatures, have their tables delicately served, and their cellars exquisitely furnished, in order to refresh themselves after their labors."

There is the following footnote to the above passage:

"Nobili, who was looked upon by the Jesuits as the chief apostle of the Indians after Francois Xavier took incredible pains to acquire a knowledge of the religion, customs, and language of Madura, sufficient for the purposes of his ministry. But this was not all: for to stop the mouths of his opposers and particularly of those who treated his character of Brachman as an imposture, he produced an old, dirty parchment in which he had forged, in the ancient Indian characters, a deed, showing that the Brachmans of

Rome were of much older date than those of India and that the Jesuits of Rome descended, in a direct line from the god Brama. Nay, Father Jouvence, a learned Jesuit, tells us, in the history of his order, something yet more remarkable; even that Robert De Nobili, when the authenticity of his smoky parchment was called in question by some Indian unbelievers, declared, upon oath, before the assembly of the Brachmans of Madura, that he (Nobili) derived really and truly his origin from the god Brama. Is it not astonishing that this Reverend Father should acknowledge, is it not monstrous that he should applaud as a piece of pious ingenuity this detestable instance of perjury and fraud?"

III

We also reproduce what William Hickey, "a pleader practising for several years in the Southern Districts of India", wrote in his book, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality in Southern India*, published in 1873.

"The name of Robert de Nobilibus will be lastingly associated with the first spread of Christianity in Southern India. It must be admitted, however, that he, his associates, and successors aimed at high game... With preaching and persuasion, these teachers adopted a questionable policy. They sought for converts among the heaven-born of India; they addressed themselves to the Priesthood-the Brahmins. To quote a graphic writer - 'They had studied, and they understood the native languages; they made themselves familiar with, and were ready to adopt the habits and customs of, the natives. They called themselves Western Brahmins, and in the disguise of Brahmins, they mixed themselves with the people; talking their language, following their customs, and countenancing their superstitions. Clothed in the Sacerdotal yellow cloth, with the mark of sandal wood on their foreheads, their long hair streaming down their backs, their copper vessels in their hands, their wooden-sandals on their feet, these new Brahmins found acceptance among the people, and were welcomed by the Princes of Southern India. They performed their ablutions with scrupulous regularity, they ate no animal food, they drank no intoxicating liquors, but found in the simple fare of vegetables and milk, at once a disguise and a protection against their doubtful course of action. The Christians had appeared among the highest castes of India eating and drinking, gluttonous and wine bibbers, and they

had paid the penalty of an addiction to these feverish stimulants under the burning copper skies of the east.'

"Their success among the Brahmins was very small, and these Missionaries soon began to see the necessity of seeking converts, from among the lower orders. They went among the villagers, condescended to Pariahs, and achieved great triumphs over the humblest classes of the people. But in time these new Brahmins were discovered to be only Feringhees in disguise, and the natives consequently rejected with contempt their ministrations."

Footnotes:

[1](#) Bede Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 59

[2](#) Ibid., p. 58

[3](#) S. Rajamanickam, 'Goa Conference of 1619', *Indian Church History Review*, December, 1968, p. 85

[4](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 86

[5](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 85

[6](#) Acts, 16.3

[7](#) Ibid., pp. 95-96

[8](#) *Indian Church History Review*, December, 1987, p. 130

[9](#) *Indian Church History Review*, December, 1967, p. 88

Mission's Volte-Face vis-a-vis Hindu Culture

CHAPTER 4

Mission's Volte-Face vis-a-vis Hindu Culture

The mission's new-found love for Hindu culture is a sham. It is neither spontaneous nor sincere at any point. On the contrary, it remains forced, calculated and contrived throughout. Examined closely, it is no more than a thin veneer that cracks at the very first probe.

The language of Indigenisation indicates no change of heart on the mission's part vis-a-vis Hindu culture. All that we learn, as we read between the lines, is that the mission is shifting its strategy in a changed situation. The rising tide of resistance to Christianity in the wake of the freedom movement had frightened the mission out of its wits. The dawn of independence drove it into a panic. The need for Indigenisation was felt by the mission for the first time when it was gripped with fear for its future. It soon realized that the new ruling class in India was its admirer rather than its adversary. Yet it felt that it could still do with some cold-blooded camouflage for furthering its designs and disarming opposition to it at the popular level.

The formulas which the mission has been coming forward with, in the years since independence, are not at all new. The fraud which had been practised secretly by Robert De Nobili in the first half of the seventeenth century, was proposed publicly by a number of noted Hindu converts in the second half of the nineteenth. In fact, these converts had gone much farther. They had advocated that the disguising of the gospel should not remain confined to the dress and demeanour of missionaries, the style of mission stations, and the language of liturgy, sacraments and sacred hymns. The operation, they had pleaded, should be extended to the field of theology as well. The Theology of Fulfillment which the mission flaunts at present and which Fr. Bede Griffiths and his two predecessors at the Saccidanand

Ashram have expounded with extraordinary zeal, was formulated in the first instance by these Hindu converts.

The Hindus converts had not made their contributions out of love for their country or culture. They were alienated from both. It was their fascination for European ways, including European religion, which had led them into the Christian fold. They had become champions of Hindu culture only when the mission turned down with contempt their claim to be treated as more equal than the other natives. Their recommendation that Christianity should be clothed in Hindu culture had been their way of scoring over the foreign missionaries whom they accused of compromising the Christian cause in India by presenting the gospel in a foreign garb. The psychology of these converts is a fascinating subject. They were trying to out-mission the mission itself. But that is a different story. For the present we are dealing with the genesis of Indigenisation.

Today, the mission is holding up these half dozen Hindu converts as its prized heroes. They are being hailed as pioneers of indigenous Christianity, paragons of patriotism, and dogged defenders of Hindu culture. The mission has even developed a complaint that these "great men" and their "sterling contributions" to "Indian causes" are not getting the place they deserve in Indian history. But in their own life-time the same mission had scolded and snubbed these Hindu converts, even disowned and denounced them as villains. They had been commanded by the mission to get cured of their "nationalist malady", and told in no uncertain terms that nationalism had no place in a universal religion like Christianity. The volte-face which the mission has staged with regard to these men speaks volumes about the mission's mentality and methods.

The mission had remained convinced for a long time that Christianity as propounded, preached and practised in Europe was the *sine qua non* for all Hindu converts. It had tried its best to impose that model on India, first with the help of Portugal's armed power and later on with the aid of the awe inspired by Britain's imperial prestige. It had frowned upon every departure from that model as tantamount to heresy or worse. The foreign missionaries who had flocked towards India like locusts towards a green field were hostile to Hindu culture which they rightly regarded as an expression of

Hindu religion. They had harangued Hindu converts to shed all vestiges of their ancestral culture. Every convert was expected to ape the European Christian in all spheres of life. Mahatma Gandhi has mentioned in his autobiography the case "of a well-known Hindu" converted to Christianity. "It was the talk of the town," he writes, "that when he was baptised, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes and thenceforward he began to go about in European costume including a hat."¹

Furthermore, the mission had made no secret of the low esteem in which it held the natives of every description. A conference of foreign missionaries held at Calcutta in, 1855 had proclaimed that the natives were known for "their deficiency in all those qualities which constitute manliness".² It is true that English-educated and high-caste Hindu converts were prized by the mission. But only for purposes of publicity. They proved, if a proof was needed, the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism. But if any Hindu convert acquired inflated notions about his intrinsic worth or his standing with the mission, he had to be put in his proper place. In 1856, Alexander Duff had denounced his own protege, Lal Behari Dey, as the "ring leader of cabal" when the latter, along with two other Hindu converts, requested for admission to the Committee of the Scottish Church Mission in Calcutta.

The message which the mission had sent out to Hindu converts had gone home. Most of them had accepted their servile role in studied silence. Some of them had felt frustrated and expressed bitterness. But only in private. Nehemiah Goreh, a Brahmin convert from Maharashtra, would confess at the end of his career that he often "felt like a man who had taken poison".³ Only a few like Kali Charan Banerjea continued with open criticism of foreign missionaries who, they said, were endangering the mission. But the mission was not impressed by this native fervour for the faith. Another conference of foreign missionaries held at Allahabad in 1872 noted with concern that "many or most of the 'educated native Christians' are showing feelings of 'bitterness, suspicion or dislike' towards the European missionaries" and "warned these radicals that as long as the native church was economically dependent on European funds, it would be more proper for them to display patience with regard to independence".⁴

The classic case of what the mission could do to a defiant Hindu convert was that of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. He was the one who went farthest in advocating that Christianity should be clothed in Hindu culture. He was also the most comprehensive and persistent in his prescriptions till he was hounded out of the Church. At present he is given the lion's share of space in the literature of Indigenisation. The Catholic Church is today crowning him with posthumous laurels. The trinity from Tannirpalli-Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux and Bede Griffiths-have only repeated what Brahmabandhab had said and done long ago. His story, therefore, deserves a detailed treatment.

Brahmabandhab's Hindu name was Bhawani Charan Banerjea. He was a nephew of Kali Charan Banerjea, an early Christian convert, who exercised a deep influence on him at his village home. In 1880, Brahmabandhab came in contact with Narendra Nath Datta. Both of them had joined the Brahmo Samaj (Nababidhan) of Keshab Chandra Sen and imbibed the latter's ardent admiration for Jesus Christ. But their ways parted when Narendra Nath came under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna and emerged as Swami Vivekananda. The Swami became a devout Hindu and informed critic of Christianity. Brahmabandhab, on the other hand, came more and more under the spell of Jesus and joined the Catholic Church in 1891. Even so, Vivekananda continued to fascinate his old friend who tried to do for Christianity what Vivekananda had done for Hinduism.

Bhawani Charan took the name Theophilus when he was baptised at Hyderabad in Sindh where he had gone as a school teacher and Brahmo Samaj preacher. He translated the Greek name into Sanskrit and became Brahmabandhab, the Friend of God. For the next few years he travelled in Sindh and the Punjab and elsewhere, defending Christianity and attacking Hinduism, particularly the philosophy of Advaita which he denounced as the "deadly swamp of Vedanta" and "the Vedantic delusive poison". He entered into public debates with Arya Samaj preachers and tried to counter the influence which Annie Besant had come to exercise against Christianity. He also wrote a tract in refutation of rationalism which was becoming popular among India's intellectual elite and damaging the Christian cause rather seriously.

He started a monthly magazine, *Sophia*, in January 1894. "When the idea was proposed to Fr. Bruder, the parish priest of Karachi," writes his devoted disciple and biographer, "he [the priest] smiled at it. How could a layman and a recent convert at that undertake to edit a Catholic Monthly?"⁵ Fr. Bruder was being polite. He did not want to say that a native convert was not qualified to write on philosophical or theological themes. Brahmabandhab could start the magazine only when the Jesuit Mission at Bombay recommended his case.

By now Brahmabandhab had heard of the impact which Vivekananda had made at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Hindus all over India were feeling elated while Christian missionaries were shocked that a native from an enslaved country should have the audacity to address a Christian audience and that, too, in a Christian country. Brahmabandhab decided immediately to become a Vivekananda for the propagation of the Christian gospel. He put on the ochre robe of a Hindu sannyasin and styled himself Upadhyay, the Teacher. "Indian bishops," he wrote in the *Sophia* of October 1894, "should combine together and establish a central mission... The itinerant missionaries should be thoroughly Hindu in their mode of life. They should, if necessary, be strict vegetarians and teetotallers, and put on the yellow *sannyasi* garb. In India, a Sannyasi preacher commands the greatest respect. The central mission should, in short, adopt the policy of the glorious old Fathers of the South."⁶ The reference was to Robert De Nobili and his successors at Madurai.

But, like De Nobili before him, Brahmabandhab had counted without his superiors in the mission. "In forming the idea of becoming a Sannyasi," writes his biographer, "Bhavani did not consult with the authorities. The first day he appeared in the Church of Hyderabad in the garic gown, Fr. Salinger took exception and had him leave the Church. Quietly he repaired to the Presbytery and changed his dress." Brahmabandhab appealed to the Archbishop of Bombay but the latter was not in a mood to listen till Brahmabandhab quoted the precedent from Madurai. He was then granted a special permission. "The ordinary people," continues his biographer, "did not like this. They could not take the idea of a Christian in the garb of a Sannyasi. Some saw in it nothing but a clever trick to catch the unwary among the Hindus. Upadhyay wore therefore a petty cross of ebony to

distinguish himself from the other Sannyasis. Even this did not silence their malicious tongues."[7](#)

Vivekananda had stopped at Madras on his return from abroad early in 1897, and his speeches had left large audiences spellbound. Brahmabandhab appealed to the Archbishop of Bombay that he be allowed to undertake a tour of the South so that Vivekananda's spell in that area could be broken. The Bishop of Trichinopoly played the host. At Madras, Brahmabandhab made it a point to stay with the same gentleman who had housed Vivekananda. He visited several places in the Madras Presidency and made many speeches. His biographer does not tell us what impact he made and where.

Meanwhile, he noticed that the stock of Hindu philosophy had risen in the eyes of the people who had attended Vivekananda's lectures or read his writings. He also realised from the Hindu response to his own lectures that it was difficult to refute Hindu philosophy. The man had a practical mind. He started proposing that Hindu philosophy should be made to serve Christian theology. "Christianity", he wrote in the *Sophia* of July 1897, "has again after a long period come in contact with a philosophy which, though it may contain errors-because the Hindu mind is synthetic and speculative-still unquestionably soars higher than her western sister. Shall we, Catholics of India, now have it made their weapon against Christianity or shall we look upon it in the same way as St. Thomas looked upon the Aristotelian system? We are of the opinion that attempts should be made to win over Hindu philosophy to the service of Christianity as Greek philosophy was won over in the Middle Ages." He did not yet know how to do this and also felt that the operation involved dangers for the Christian dogma. "But we have a conviction," he continued, "and it is growing day by day that the Catholic Church will find it hard to conquer India unless she makes Hindu philosophy hew wood and draw water for her."[8](#) No one could accuse Brahmabandhab of not being frank and forthright.

Brahmabandhab reached Calcutta towards the end of 1897 in order to feel for himself the atmosphere which Vivekananda's return from abroad had created in Bengal. He was staggered. He learnt at the same time that Vivekananda was planning to create a sannyasin order of Hindu

missionaries and establish a monastery in some secluded spot for contemplation on and development of Hindu thought. He came out immediately with the plan of a Catholic monastery. "Several bishops and missionary priests," he proclaimed in the *Sophia* of May 1898, "do not only share with us this conviction but have promised encouragement. It should be conducted on strictly Hindu lines with two classes of monks, contemplative and itinerant. There should not be the least trace of Europeanism in the mode of life and living of the Hindu Catholic monks. The *Parivrajakas* (itinerants) should be well versed in the Vedanta philosophy as well as in the philosophy of St. Thomas... We intend making an intensive tour through India and, if necessary, through Europe and America, to appeal to the Pastors, apostolic missionaries and all the faithful to cooperate with our humble selves in the arduous task of inaugurating the monastic life in India. The ancient land of the Aryans is to be won over to the Catholic Faith, and who can achieve the conquest, but the Hindu Catholic sannyasis inspired with the spirit of the ancient monks?"[9](#)

A new note now entered in the voice of Brahmabandhab. He started calling on the Hindu converts to retain their Hindu culture in order to prove that Hindus culture could find its fulfilment only in Christianity. "By birth," he wrote in the *Sophia* of July 1898, "we are Hindus and shall remain *Hindus* till death. But as *dvija* (twice-born) by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are members of an indefectible communion embracing all ages and climes... *The more strictly we practise our universal faith, the better do we grow as Hindus*. All that is noblest and best in the Hindu character, is developed in us by the genial inspiration of Narahari (God-man)[10](#) our pattern and guide. *The more we love him, the more we love our country*, the prouder we become of our past glory." Thus a new type of Hindu was on the anvil. "In short," concluded Brahmabandhab, "so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned we are Hindus, but in regard to our immortal soul we are Catholics. We are Hindu Catholics."[11](#)

A new type of Catholicism was also in the crucible. "The European clothes of the Catholic religion," he wrote in the *Sophia* of August 1898, "should be removed as early as possible. It must put on the Hindu garment to be acceptable to the Hindus. This transformation can be effected only by the hands of Indian missionaries preaching the holy faith in the Vedantic

language, holding devotional meetings in the Hindu way and practising the virtue of poverty conformably to Hindu asceticism. When the Catholic church in India will be dressed up in Hindu garments then will our countrymen perceive that she elevated man to the universal kingdom of truth by stooping down to adapt herself to racial peculiarities." [12](#) The proposal fired other missionary minds and was discussed in the Catholic press in India and Ceylon.

He revised his theology also when he learned that Advaita had become the foundation of Vivekananda's call for revitalizing Hinduism. He quickly dropped his earlier diatribes against Vedanta and fell back on the "deep insights" of his Brahmo guru, Keshab Chandra Sen. The prophet of the new Dispensation (Nababidhan) had read the Upanishdic message, *aham brahmo'smi* in Christ's saying, "I and my Father are one". He had stated in a lecture delivered in 1882 that "The Trinity of Christian Theology corresponds strikingly with the Saccidananda of Hinduism" - Sat being the Father, Cit being the Son, and *Ananda* being the Holy Spirit. Brahmabandhab published in the *Sophia* of October of 1898 his hymn to Saccidananda composed in Sanskrit and translated into English. The transition from an opponent of Vedanta to that of its supporter was smooth, and caused no intellectual qualms in the Catholic thinker.

It was not long before, Brahmabandhab launched his project in a practical manner. He announced in the *Sophia* of January 1899 that the Catholic Monastery or the *Kastalik Matha* "will be located on the Narmada" and "placed under the protection and guidance of the Bishop of Nagpur". [13](#) He had now very little time for his monthly and the *Sophia* ceased publication after the February-March issue of 1899. Along with two other Catholic sannyasins, Brahmabandhab set up a small ashram on the Narmada near the Marble Rocks of Jubblepore. He had already issued an appeal in the *Sophia* inviting Catholic young men to come and become inmates of the ashram. This nucleus was to grow into a fullfledged monastery in due course. Brahmabandhab spent the Lenten season of 1899 on a hill, fasting and praying for the success of his enterprise. But, once again, he had counted without his superiors. The young candidates who consulted the mission before joining the ashram were told that the scheme had not been

granted ecclesiastical approval. The Bishop of Nagpur suddenly withdrew his support, and the ashram collapsed before the year 1899 was out.

The facts as they came to light in due course were revealing. The Bishop of Nagpur had referred the scheme to the Archbishop of Bombay who in turn had brought it to the notice of the Delegate Apostolic, the Pope's representative and supreme authority of the Catholic Church in India. The Delegate Apostolic strongly opposed the scheme and sent it with his critical comments to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda at Rome. The Congregation agreed with him and turned it down. That was in September 1898, several months before Brahmabandhab set up his ashram on the Narmada. But he was not informed of what was going on behind the scenes, nor given an opportunity to defend his stand. When the facts became known, he felt he had been stabbed in the back. He had to wind up the ashram if he wanted to go on appeal to the Pope. This he did and travelled to Bombay on his way to Rome. But he fell seriously ill and the voyage was abandoned. All his dreams of clothing Catholicism in Hindu garments had come to nought.

Brahmabandhab now moved to Calcutta and set up a small and less publicised ashram in a small house where a few disciples from Sindh joined him. Day after day, he sat on a tiger skin spread on the floor and "chafed at the Westernisation of Christianity and the adopting of Western ways by Indian Christians".¹⁴ On June 16, 1900 he launched a new journalistic venture, the *Weekly Sophia*. His earlier experience had made him cautious. "Our policy precludes us," he wrote on September 8, "from making our paper the organ of any existing religious body... It will supply a new garb to the religion of Christ without affecting in the least the Christian tenets."¹⁵ The journal broadened its scope and devoted some space to politics, literature and sociology.

The Delegate Apostolic, however, was vigilant about this wayward sheep in his flock. He wrote to the Archbishop of Calcutta, disapproving of what Brahmabandhab was writing. The Archbishop made Brahmabandhab resign from editorship of the magazine. But the Delegate Apostolic was not satisfied and the next step he took was drastic. He addressed a letter to the Archbishop of Madras objecting specifically to Brahmabandhab's

declaration that the *Weekly Sophia* "will supply a new garb to the religion of Christ". Finally, he issued a public statement warning all Catholics "against associating with and reading the said periodical Sophia".¹⁶ Brahmabandhab became defiant and resumed as editor of the paper. The delegate Apostolic placed the *Weekly Sophia* on the Index, which meant that Catholics were forbidden to subscribe to it, or read it, or have anything to do with it without permission from appropriate authorities in the Church. Brahmabandhab reversed his stand and offered to submit his writings to the Censor of the Catholic Church before publication. But the Delegate Apostolic refused to relent and the *Weekly Sophia* expired in December 1900.

Brahmabandhab now tried a new strategy. He persuaded a Hindu friend to become the publisher of a monthly, *The Twentieth Century*, which came out in January 1901, and employed another Hindu as joint editor. As an extra precaution, he wrote his pieces under the nom de plume, Nara Hari Das (the slave of the God-man, that is, Jesus Christ). But once again "the axe that had felled the Jubblepore Math and the *Weekly Sophia*,"¹⁷ drove through his defences. The Delegate Apostolic was holidaying in Rome when he was informed by a bishop in India that the *Sophia* had reappeared under a new name. One June 20, 1901, he addressed an open letter to his flock in India stating that the "prohibition regarding the periodical *Sophia* is extended to the *The Twentieth Century*, and therefore all Catholics residing within the limits of our Delegation are forbidden to read, to subscribe to, and have any connection with the above said monthly review, *The Twentieth Century*".¹⁸

Brahmabandhab made a pathetic appeal for reconsideration of the case. It was published in the *Catholic Examiner* of Bombay on August 17, 1901. "My writings in the *Sophia*," he said, "have never been found to contain any error by the ecclesiastical authorities, but only my attempt to interpret Catholic dogmas through the Vedanta has been considered dangerous and misleading. If ever the ecclesiastical authorities point out errors in my writings I shall at once make submission to them, though I may reserve to myself the right to appeal to Rome, the final refuge of the faithful on earth, for I do believe in the formula - *Roma locuta est causa finita est* [Rome has spoken, the cause has ended]".¹⁹ The man who had boasted for years that he had broken the bonds of the Hindu social system was kowtowing to a

totalitarian tyranny imposed from abroad. But his abject servility served no purpose, and the appeal fell on deaf ears. The new monthly met its demise without celebrating its first anniversary.

Yet Brahmabandhab remained undeterred in his devotion to the Catholic Church which he now chose to serve in another capacity. Vivekananda, the man whom Brahmabandhab had continued to ape in the service of a rival cause, died suddenly in July 1902. Brahmabandhab persuaded himself that the only thing which made Vivekananda rise to fame in foreign lands was the ochre robe of a sannyasin and that he himself could use the same robe for serving the Catholic creed. "Hearing of the death of Vivekananda in Howrah station," he confided to a friend, "I determined there and then to go to England and to continue his mission."²⁰ This was a misleading statement, but quite characteristic of the man who was trying his utmost to mislead his countrymen regarding their religion.

He sailed for England in October 1902 with the help of money raised mostly by his Hindu friends. He went into ecstasy when he reached Rome. "As soon as I got down from the train," he wrote to another Catholic enthusiast in India, "I kissed the soil of Rome... I prayed at the tomb of St. Peter, The Rock, The Holder of the Keys - for India, for you all. While kissing the toe of St. Peter, my mind turned back to you because you had once told Mr. Redman how you could kiss that worn out toe a thousand times over and over again." He cherished a desire to meet the Pope but could not muster the courage to apply for an audience. "While kneeling down at the tomb of St. Peter," he consoled himself, "I thought of the Holy Father, the living St. Peter. Oh! how I longed to kneel at his feet and plead for India. I was shown from a distance the window of his apartments."²¹ The man who regarded Hinduism as idolatrous had succumbed to the most abominable idolatry known to human history. There was no limit to the depths to which this man was prepared to sink, willingly and without remorse.

From Rome he went to London. One day, as he was being driven on a street of the imperial city, he heard that King Edward VII was soon to pass that way. "I am so fortunate," he confided to an Englishman, "I am to see the King today. To see the King spells virtue with us."²² He saw the Hindu

Goddess of Might incarnated in the British monarch. "While thus engaged," he wrote to a friend in India, "behold! King Edward appeared before my eyes. The carriage vanished out of sight in the twinkling of an eye but the scene filled my heart with joy. *Maha Maya* with her lightening-like smile had faded away. The great *Shakti* leaving her Himalayan lion had mounted the British lion instead. Who can understand the sport of the *Maya of Maheshwari*?"²³ That was all the use he had for the great Goddess his ancestors had worshipped for ages untold. The man had become a moron.

He visited Oxford and Cambridge, and tried to impress learned audiences with his inimitable insight into how Hinduism had prepared the way for Christianity. The attendance was never impressive or enthusiastic. The ladies he addressed in London found him disappointing. The press took no notice of him. Finally, on January 3, 1903, he wrote an article in *The Tablet* of London. "Since my conversion to the Catholic Faith," he said, "my mind has been occupied with the one sole thought of winning over India to the Holy Catholic Church. I have worked as a layman towards that end, and we are now a small band of converts ready to work in the vineyard of the Lord."²⁴ The man who had sought salvation in Christianity had ended as a courtier to the biggest crime cartel in the world.

He presented a picture of Christianity in India which was strikingly similar to the one which Fr. Bede Griffiths would present eighty years later. "What strikes every observer of the missionary field of work in India," he said, "is its frightful barrenness. It is unquestionable, and perhaps unquestioned too, that Christianity is not at all thriving in India. There it stand in the corner, like an exotic stunted plant with poor foliage, showing little or no promise of blossom. Conversions are almost *nil* so far as the Hindu community is concerned. There are indeed conversions of famine-stricken children, and also non-Aryans not within the pale of Hinduism, but these acquisitions too are not on a significant scale."²⁵ He missed the point that Christianity was born as barren and has remained barren except occasionally when it succeeded in becoming parasitic on the creativity of other cultures.

The quality of converts was poorer still. "The social and spiritual state of converts," he continued, "made during the Portuguese ascendancy does not

present any more hopeful prospect. Three hundred years have passed away and not a single saint has India given to the altars of God. There has not been a single theologian, not even a philosopher, who has made any impression on the Christian science of Divinity. In the secular line we do not find among them leaders of thought to guide national deliberations. There has flourished no statesman, no historian, no thinker worth the name, to raise the status of the Indian Christian community. Strange to say even those who have shed lustre on India in modern times, have almost all of them, sprung from outside the Christian pale. The undesirable state of things cannot be attributed to political environment."[26](#) He could have laboured a little more and given a count of the questionable characters which Christianity had produced in this country.

In another article written in the same paper on January 31, 1903, he repeated his pet prescription for ensuring the rapid progress of Christianity in India. "To my mind," he wrote, "the best and the most congenial way of teaching Theism to the educated as well as to the non-educated in English will be through Hindu thought. Hindu thought may be made to serve the cause of Christianity in the same way in India as Greek thought was made to do in Europe. I can testify, if my personal experience is of any value, to the fact of some of the most educated men of our country giving up naturalistic Theism for the right one through my exposition of Vedantic philosophy."[27](#) By theism he meant Christianity. Naturalistic theism, on the other hand, stood for Hinduism.

One wonders if Brahmabandhab was aware that the house of Christianity in Europe had been in shambles since the French Revolution. The higher intelligentsia in the West had had its fill of the Bible and was looking for something which made moral and spiritual sense. That was why Vivekananda was a success and he an utter failure. His only biography provides no guidance in this respect. In any case, he returned to Calcutta in July 1903, deeply frustrated and bitter. His visit to England had turned out to be a damp squib.

His biography also fails to chart out what went on in the inner recesses of Brahmabandhab's mind. His behaviour after his return from abroad became stranger and stranger with the passing of time. He had set up a school,

Sarasvat Ayatan, in Calcutta in 1904. When the day for Sarasvatî Pûjâ dawned that year, he made his students worship an icon of the Goddess which he had installed. The Catholics were scandalised. His colleague, Animananda, who was to write his biography and eulogise him in later years, left the school in disgust. But the next thing which Brahmabandhab did was still more shocking. He defended Sri Krishna as an *avatâra* in a public debate with Fr. J.N. Farquhar.

Brahmabandhab had started a quarter anna daily paper named *Sandhya*. Day after day, he poured himself out in vehement attacks on everything Western. He saw in the British regime the rise of the *Mleccha*. "The gloom," he declared in the very first issue, "darkens. But wherein lies our emancipation? A peep into the past would give us a key to the problem. We are as though tethered to a past by a long rope. Wheresoever we go, through whatever vicissitudes we pass, the past remains and bound to it we stand. The self-same Veda, the Vedanta, the Brahmanas, the Varna Dharma stand as a rock of hope to a Hindu. There is no other way."²⁸ He made no mention of Catholicism or Christianity.

When the Partition of Bengal was announced in October 1905, Brahmabandhab jumped into the fray. His *Sandhya* made a strong and all-out attack not only on the British rule but also on Western imperialism as a whole-political, economic, and cultural. He invited the attention of the police before long. When searches made and minor cases filed failed to silence him, the government arrested him in the Sandhya Sedition Case on January 31, 1907. He was put in jail. *Sandhya* was suppressed in September that year. He was bailed out by his Hindu friends and the case came up in the court. But he fell ill and died on October 27, 1907.

Two months before his death, in August 1907, he had administered a rude shock to the Christians in India. He had performed a *prâyaSchitta* (repentance ceremony) for the sin of visiting the land of the *Mlecchas* and taking food with them. He went through the prescribed rites, even to the extent of eating a bit of cow-dung. Hindus concluded that he had ceased to be a Christian. So when he died, they cremated him with Hindu *saMskâras* at a Hindu burning *ghât* in Calcutta. The Catholic priest who came to claim his body for a Christian burial arrived too late. The Church which had

hounded Brahmabandhab alive was out to save the soul of Brahmabandhab dead.

Brahmabandhab had become a persona non grata for the Catholic Church while he was alive, but after his death in 1907, he was forgotten completely. It is only recently that he has been taken out of the limbo and passed as the pioneer of indigenous Christianity. The Catholic Church now takes considerable pains to prove that he was a believing Christian till the end. His Sarasvatî Pûjâ, his defence of Sri Krishna and his *prâyaSchitta* are being explained away as external acts which he performed in order to demonstrate his conformity to Hindu culture but which did not affect his deep devotion to Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour. His persecution by the Church is being "repented" as a "mistake" made by the Church in an atmosphere when Christianity had not yet freed itself from its "colonial associations".

The Protestant side of the Christian mission in India has started a similar search in its burial grounds. Hindu converts who had been ignored or insulted in an earlier period are being raised from the dead, and hailed as harbingers of Indigenisation. Now we hear a lot about Krishna Mohun Banerjea, Parni Andy, Kali Charan Banerjea, J.G. Shome, A.S. Appaswami Pillai and Sadhu Sunder Singh. All these converts are supposed to have tried, each in his own way, "to relate Hindu culture meaningfully to the message of Christianity".

The mission has staged resurrection of those whom it had crucified earlier simply because they wanted the mission to make Hindu culture a vehicle of Christianity. The step is calculated to create the impression that the mission has acquired a sincere respect for Hindu culture. But the timing of the performance tells a different story. The mission started talking suddenly and loudly about the merits of Hindu culture only when it became clear to it that India was fast heading towards independence. The new political situation called for a new mission strategy. Moreover, the mission had reached a dead end because of resistance offered by resurgent Hinduism. The mission literature of the period when the mission was manoeuvring itself into the new position leaves little doubt that the

mission was forced to revise its attitude towards Hindu culture not as a result of reflection but by compulsion of outer circumstances.

The International Missionary Council (IMC), the Protestant section of the world-wide Christian mission, was the first to notice the change that was taking place in the political situation in India. The coming to power of Congress ministries in seven out of eleven provinces in the India of 1937, had rung a bell in the minds that controlled the IMC. A meeting of the IMC was held at Tambaram in Tamil Nadu from December 12 to 29, 1938. It was presided over by the veteran American evangelist, J.R. Mott, a much-travelled and fabulous fund-raiser for the mission.

Mott had looked forward to evangelisation of the whole world in one generation when he presided over the first IMC meeting at Edinburgh in 1910. But by the time he came to Tambaram, he was a much chastened man. Mahatma Gandhi had meanwhile emerged on the scene as an uncompromising opponent of the Christian mission. Mott had met the Mahatma twice in 1936 in order to fathom the latter's mind. He had found the Mahatma unshakable. Later on, he had sounded the Mahatma through C.F. Andrews to find out if a concession in favour of conversion could be made in cases of sincere conviction about the superiority of Jesus Christ. The Mahatma had ruled out conversion under any circumstances. He knew the mission's capacity for enlarging even the smallest concession until it covered any and every kind of mischievous liberty.

"We have long held," proclaimed the IMC meeting under Mott's presidentship, "that the one serious rival for the spiritual supremacy of India that Christianity has to face is a resurgent Hinduism, and recent happenings deepen the conviction. The spirit of new Hinduism is personified in Mahatma Gandhi, whose amazing influence over his fellows is undoubtedly fed by the fires of religion and patriotism. Because he is a staunch Hindu and finds within the faith of his fathers the spiritual succour he needs, he strongly opposes the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the one and only saviour. This reminds us again that unless the great Christian affirmations are verified in Christian living, they beat ineffectively on Indian minds."[29](#)

The IMC stalwarts did not spell out the details of Christian living that the mission was to demonstrate in days to come. But a beginning was made in

the thesis, *Rethinking Christianity in India*, presented to the meeting at Tambaram by a group of native Christians led by P. Chenchiah. The Preface to the thesis pleaded that "Christ should be related to the great Indian religious heritage" and that "Christianity should assume an Indian expression in Life, thought and activity".³⁰ The thesis devoted some chapters to such themes as Ashrams, The Christian Message in Relation to the National Situation, and Indian Christians under Swaraj. The same group came out with another major work in 1941, *The Ashrams: Past and Present*, on the subject of Indigenisation. The Ashram Movement followed in due course. The Protestant section of the mission was thus in position to launch Indigenisation on several fronts by the time India attained independence in 1947.

The Catholic section of the mission had to wait until Rome gave permission after the Vatican Council II held in 1965. But, in the meanwhile, Fr. Jules Monchanin, the French missionary in Tamil Nadu had resurrected Brahmabandhab as a model for experimentation in the field of theology and missionary methods. He established the Saccidananda Ashram at Tannirpalli on the Kavery in 1950 and started living like a Hindu sannyasin. A French monk, Fr. Henri Le Saux, who was Monchanin's close collaborator in the experiment made an indepth study of Brahmabandhab before evolving his own strategy of undoing Hindu religion with the help of Hindu culture. The British monk, Fr. Bede Griffiths, has gone the farthest in aping Brahmabandhab, both in words and deeds. But without acknowledgement. Perhaps he finds it below his British prestige to acknowledge a debt to a mere native.

Taken together, the mission's literature on the need for adopting a new posture vis-a-vis Hindu culture reads like communist literature evolving a new party line. One finds in the mission's literature the same cold-blooded appraisal of new power equations, the same deliberations on how a new strategy should be evolved to meet a new situation, and the same trimming of tactics on various fronts. One also comes across the same confession of errors that had crept into the earlier theory and practice, without revealing how the earlier strategy and tactics had been evolved in relation to another political situation obtaining in another period. The slogans to be raised by the mission in days to come are periodically revised with a view to

deceiving and disarming a new class of Hindus, as in the case of the communist party when looking for new fellow-travellers.

The mission's re-writing of the history of Christianity in India also bears close resemblance to the same oft-repeated communist exercise. Christian historians have been busy trying to salvage Christian doctrine from the cesspool of Christian history. The wrongs heaped on Hindu society, religion and culture by the Christian mission in alliance with Western imperialism, are being explained away as "aberrations" arising out of "accidental association with colonialism". It was only a coincidence, we are told, that the Western nations which practised colonialism happened to be Christian nations. The crimes committed by colonialism, we are warned, should not be held against Christianity. It was not the fault of Christianity if, at times, it was used by colonialism as a cover for its own and quite different designs. Moreover, Christianity did not come to India for the first time in the company of colonialism. It is as old in this country as most of the Hindu sects in their present shape. Pandit Nehru is frequently quoted by Christian historians in order to point out that the Christianity which was brought to India by St. Thomas and which the Syrian Christians practise till to day, is known for its love of Hindu culture.^{[31](#)}

In the end one is reminded of Bertrand Russell's observation that Communism is a Christian heresy. The close correspondence between the two cannot be dismissed as accidental. Both of them have their source in the Bible.

Footnotes:

^{[1](#)} *Collected Works*, Volume Thirty-nine, p. 33

^{[2](#)} Quoted by S. Immanuel David in his article on Indigenisation, *Indian Church History Review*, August 1977, pp. 104-105

^{[3](#)} Quoted by Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism*, Vienna, 1981, p. 171

^{[4](#)} Kaj Baago, *op. cit.*, p. 3

[5](#) B. Animanand, *The Blade: Life and Work of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Calcutta 1945, p. 54

[6](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 59

[7](#) Ibid., pp. 59-60

[8](#) Quoted in Ibid., pp. 67-68. Compare this passage with Fr. Bede's prescription, quoted above regarding the use of Hindu philosophy in the service of Christianity.

[9](#) Quoted in Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[10](#) God become man or Jesus Christ.

[11](#) Quoted in Ibid., pp. 71-72. Italics in the original.

[12](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 75

[13](#) Quoted in ibid., p. 78

[14](#) Ibid., p. 87

[15](#) Quoted in Ibid., 88

[16](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 91

[17](#) Ibid., pp. 102-103

[18](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 103

[19](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 106

[20](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 108

[21](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 109

[22](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 115

[23](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 116

[24](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 113

[25](#) He was repeating the patent missionary propaganda that people living in the tribal areas are not Hindus but 'pre-Aryan animists'.

[26](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 113

[27](#) Quoted in Ibid., Appendix I, p.iv

[28](#) Quoted in Ibid., p. 131

[29](#) *Tambram Series*, Volume 3: *Evangelism*, London 1939, p. 126

[30](#) *Rethinking Christianity in India*, Second Edition, Madras, 1939, first para in the Preface to the First Edition published in 1938.

[31](#) Interestingly, while Dr. K. Latourette regards the nineteenth century, the peak period of Western colonialism, as the *Great Century* in his monumental work, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 volumes, London, 1937 - 1945), Dr. M.D. David, President of the Church History Association of India, sees in the same century "A Great Handicap to the Growth of Christianity in Asia" (*Western Colonialism in Asia and Christianity*, Bombay, 1988).

The Ashram Movement in the Mission

CHAPTER 5

The Ashram Movement in the Mission

As in the case of the "pioneers of indigenous Christianity," historians of the mission have been rummaging through the record in search of some Christian institutions of the past which can be presented now as "pioneers of the Ashram Movement". The pride of place in this context goes, of course, to the "ashram" of Robert De Nobili and his successors at Madurai. We have already dealt with it in detail. Then there is a long gap till we come to the short-lived ashram which Brahmabandhab set up on the Narmada in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Finally, from 1921 onwards we are presented with some mission stations which styled themselves as ashrams, or are named so now, simply because the inmates wore *khâdî* and ate vegetarian food. The credit for placing the Ashram Movement squarely on the map of the mission goes to P. Chenchiah and company who included a chapter on it in their main thesis, *Rethinking Christianity in India*, presented to the IMC conference in 1938. It was followed with a full-fledged 326-page treatise, *Ashrams: Past and Present*, published in 1941.

All Christian historians concur that the need for Christian ashrams was felt when the spread of the gospel became more and more difficult due to the rising tide of resurgent Hinduism. They also agree that the first cues came from ashrams founded by some leaders of the Indian Renaissance-the Bharat Ashram founded by Keshab Chandra Sen in 1872 at Belgharia near Calcutta, the Ramakrishna ashrams which functioned as bases of the Ramakrishna Mission since 1897, the Shantiniketan Ashram founded by Rabindranath Tagore at Bolepur in 1901, and the Satyagraha Ashram which Mahatma Gandhi started at Sabarmati after his return from South Africa in 1915. The names of Ramana Ashram at Tiruvannamalai and Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry are added to the list by some historians. The fashion since Chenchiah's thesis of 1941 has been to hark back to the Brahmanical

ashrams and Buddhist and Jain monasteries, in ancient and medieval times, as providing inspiration for Christian ashrams.

After Brahmabandhab, K.T. Paul, General Secretary of the National Missionary Society (NMS) founded in 1905, was the first to propose formation of Christian ashrams in a meetings of the NMS at New Delhi in 1912. The ashrams were expected "to attract the most spiritual Christian youths" and provide them with "evangelical equipment to meet the best exponents of the non-Christian religions on their own grounds".¹ But the idea did not take shape till 1921. The NMS was an organisation outside the mission proper controlled by foreign missionaries.

The Christian poet from Maharashtra, N.V. Tilak, founded an institution at Satara in 1917 and named it God's Darbar. He had "a vision of Christ founding *Swaraj* in man's heart". Jesus was hailed as the *guru*. The inmates of the Darbar were baptised and unbaptised disciples of Tilak. He sometimes preferred to describe his creation as an ashram. "But it is recorded that some missionaries misunderstood and opposed Tilak's attitude and style." In any case, the "ashram" collapsed and disappeared when Tilak died two years later. In 1920, G.S. Doraiswamy wrote in the *Harvest Field*, a mission journal, that a series of ashrams should be set up by the mission. They were to be "theological institutions-for thinking, training, study, research and writing". The proposal was not welcomed. "In the next two monthly numbers of the journal, foreign missionaries criticised Mr. Doraiswamy's hopes and suggestions from the point of view of economics and theology."² The mission was not sure that native Christians were capable of managing missionary institutions or competent for expounding theological themes.

A foreign missionary had to come forward before the idea of Christian ashrams could find favour with the Mission. That was Dr. E. Forrester Paton of the Scottish Mission. He joined the NMS and roped in a native Christian, Dr. S. Jesudasen of the same organisation, to start in 1921 the Christakula (Family of Christ) Ashram at Tirupattur in the Madras Presidency. It was patterned on Gandhian lines. The inmates were clad in *khâdî*, ate vegetarian food and remained celibate. "Because both the founders were medical doctors, the major social service activity of the ashram was medical care.

But village evangelism was a high priority with the ashram and education and agriculture development were systematically offered." The ashram did make some experiments in Tamil-style church architecture and Tamil Christian hymns. But for the rest, it was a normal mission station and so it has remained till today. In later years, it was given "grants by European funding agencies for health, agriculture and tribal development".[3](#)

Similar Christian ashrams sprang up in different parts of the country in the years following 1921. We shall take up only one more, the Christa Seva Sangha, to show what they have been doing. The Sangha was also founded by a foreign missionary, J.C. Winslow of the British Society for Propagation of the Gospel. He had consulted Dr. Paton before the Sangha was launched at Miri in Ahmadnagar District of Maharashtra on June 11, 1922, the feast day of St. Barnabas. Bishop Palmer in whose diocese Miri was located came and gave his blessings at the time of inauguration. Soon after, the inmates became known for wearing *khâdî*, performing *sandhyâs* in Marathi and Sanskrit, and singing bhajans to the accompaniment of Indian musical instruments. "Most of our time," reported Fr. Winslow in 1947, "was spent in evangelistic work in the Ahmadnagar villages. Outstanding among our experiences which will always live in our memory was the work at Karanji, a village some twenty miles east of Ahmadnagar... We had a wonderful reception from the people of Karanji itself and soon after, from those of four of the surroundings villages as well. Almost the whole of the Mahar population of these villages were received, at their earnest request, first as catechumens and then as Christians; and Karanji has now become a base of work for extending right out into the Nizam's Dominions."[4](#)

Fr. Winslow visited England in 1926 and reported the results achieved to influential people in mission circles "with the result that in 1927 and 1928 the Sangha was reinforced by four priests and three laymen (two of whom were afterwards ordained) from England". Dame Monica Wills, a pious and rich lady, gave him "the munificent gift of £1000 with which we were able to purchase a piece of land near Bhamburda station just outside Poona and in the early months of 1928 to build at last our Ashram and permanent headquarters".[5](#)

More money came. In 1931, the Sangha purchased "a large field adjoining the river at Aundh, four miles to the north of Poona, as a site for establishing a village Ashram from which work might be carried on among villages similar to that of the early days of the C.S.S. and supplementing the work in Poona".⁶ By 1934, the Sangha had so much money and manpower that it was bifurcated into two. The new establishment at Aundh retained the old name. The set-up at Poona was rechristened as the Christa Prema Seva Sangha and handed over to another British missionary, W.Q. Lash. He was to become the Bishop of Bombay in 1947.

In subsequent years, the Christa Prema Seva Sangha became more prominent than its parent body. It built a hostel for college students-Hindu, Muslim and Christian-who could spend their holidays there in inter-religious dialogues.⁷ It became affiliated to the Society of St. Francis in England and provided hospitality to all sorts of missionary organisations, national and international, for holding conferences. It took over the *C.S.S. Review*, which was first started in 1931, and turned it into *The Ashram Review*. Before long, Poona became the clearing house for the Ashram Movement of the mission. "The Poona Ashram has been revived in recent years," writes Dr. Philipos Thomas, "as an ecumenical Ashram in which Roman Catholics and Protestants work together... Inter-Ashram Conferences are held every year and their reports, messages and prayer circulars are sent to every Ashram. This is one way of strengthening the fellowship between Ashrams."⁸

A Christian painter at Poona plied his brush and made Jesus a native son of India. His paintings provided frontpieces for *The Ashram Review*. Hindus could now see Mary, the mother of Jesus, dressed in *sârî* and wearing an elaborate Hindu coiffeur, in scenes such as her own childhood, Nativity of Jesus, Mother of India, Our Lady of India, Annunciation, etc. Hindus could now see Jesus in a Hindu setting, blessing the fishes held up in a plate by a Brahmin boy, meeting and talking to a Hindu woman at Samaria, sitting in *padmâsana* while his feet are anointed by Mary Magdalene dressed as a Hindu damsel, being attended by two Hindu women at Bethany, getting tied to a Hindu-style pillar and scourged by two whip-wielding Hindus, being crucified while two Hindu women stand by the cross with mournful faces, being taken down from the cross by four Hindu women, and so on. The

evening at Golgotha became crowded with Hindu men and women. St. Thomas stood attired as a Hindu sannyasin with two similarly dressed Hindu disciples kneeling at his feet. The design for Indian Christian statuary showed Jesus hanging on a cross while a *rishi*-like figure, riding a GaruDa-like bird, sat on its top and two Hindu women stood on both sides, one praying with folded hands and the other offering incense. Hindus now had no reason to reject Jesus as a Jewish rabbi who lived and died in a distant land; he was very much of a Hindu *avatâra*. Hindus could only wonder at how a historical person who appeared at a particular place and time could be transplanted elsewhere and in another period with such perfect ease. The mission is never tired of saying that Jesus is not a mythological figure like Rama, Krishna and the Buddha of the Mahayana school. Christian theology provides an explanation. Had not Tertullian, the famous Church Father, said long ago that it is true because it is absurd, and that it happened because it was impossible?

The Ashram Movement had gained some momentum by the time the International Missionary Council met at Tambaram in 1938. It was given a firm footing in the mission strategy by S. Jesudasan of the Christukula Ashram in a chapter on Ashrams which he contributed to the joint thesis presented by his group. He prefaced his essay by announcing that "Rishis gave us ashrams and the ashrams gave us rishis in return".⁹ What he meant by a *rishi* was spelled out in a subsequent section. "The first missionaries (especially Roman Catholic missionaries)," he wrote, "were men who saw nothing but evil in Hinduism and looked upon Hindus as people who were debased and corrupt. Thus wrote Francis Xavier, one of the saintliest of R.C. missionaries, to his chief Loyola in one of his letter: 'The whole race of Hindus is barbarous and will listen to nothing that does not suit its barbarous customs. Regarding the knowledge of what is Godlike and virtuous it cares but little.' Since his time there have been others, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, who have in a measure shared with Francis Xavier the same attitude towards the religion and people of this land. A change in attitude towards the religion and people of this land came about 1606 when Robert de Nobili and other Jesuits of a high intellectual order, ability, culture and sacrifice Indianised themselves and their methods of Christian work until later they incurred papal condemnation... That this attempt at identification with people was a success is proved at least to me

by the history of my own family. My ancestor's conversion to Christianity from Hinduism was brought about by one of these early Jesuits in AD 1690."[10](#)

We have seen what Robert De Nobili and his successors were doing at Madurai. It is difficult to believe that Dr. Jesudasen did not know the full story. Just because his ancestor was a victim of Jesuit wiles, it does not follow that the Madurai missionaries were not downright crooks, and that what they practised was not a despicable fraud. Holding them up as men of "high intellectual order, ability, culture and sacrifice" reveals the depths to which missionary moral standards can descend.[11](#) Invoking Robert De Nobili as the first inspiration for Christian ashrams tells us the truth about the Ashram Movement, namely, that it is being promoted in order to practise the same fraud.

Coming back to *rishis*, it is true that they founded and lived in ashrams. But to say that ashrams produced rishis is ridiculous. There is no evidence that Hindus ever accepted a man known as a *rishi* simply because he lived in an ashram. The *rishis* known to Hindu religious tradition were first and foremost the living embodiments of a vast spiritual vision evolved and perfected by Sanatana Dharma. The total absence of that vision in Christianity is a guarantee that Christian ashrams will always remain sterile so far as rishis are concerned. At their best the Christian ashrams can produce only hypocrites, at their worst only scheming scoundrels. In fact, the preposterous attempt to produce *rishis* by the mechanical process of aping Hindu sannyasins proves beyond doubt that Christianity is a vulgar ideology of gross materialism disguised in religious verbiage.

This truth about the nature of Christianity, which has no metaphysics, was confessed by P. Chenchiah's group in their next book. "The Hindu," they said, "sees only the commonplace Christianity in us. He does not find anything in Christianity corresponding to the deeper levels of Hindu spiritual experience... Hindu religious experience, mapped out in Yoga, takes men from height to height. Similar heights in Christianity, the Christian himself has not explored. There are certain valued experiences of the Hindu in the pilgrimage of the soul to God. Of parallel experiences in Christianity he is not aware."[12](#)

A review of this book in *The Ashram Review* confirmed that Christianity not only does not have this wealth of spiritual experience but also does not care for it. The reviewer who remained unnamed drew a line between "the ideal of a stoic or rishi who seeks union with the attributeless Brahman" and the ideal of the Christian "who seeks union with God revealed in Christ Jesus." He cited an established Christian tradition and warned Christians against the experiences cherished by P. Chenchiah and company. "It is indeed just this note of the cross," he wrote, "that one misses in the book. The ideal Christian Ashrams will attract 'Christians anxious to scale higher levels of Christian experience'-and here the 'higher levels' seems to be 'powers and illumination', 'to see visions'- although from St. Paul onwards, mindful of the lesson of Transfiguration, the great Christian saints and mystics have unanimously taught that such experiences may be given but not sought, rather feared than clung to, and that the true union with God is at the far deeper level, in the steadfast union of the will with His will." [13](#) The reviewer was being polite. Christian missionaries, ever since their advent in India, had been dismissing Hindu spiritual experience as delusion inspired by the Devil. In fact, the very word "experience" has been foreign to Christian parlance. Christianity has always aimed at inculcating or imposing blind beliefs, the blinder the belief the better.

The reviewer, however, was looking backwards. In days to come, the mission was going to use the word "experience" with great abandon. The theologians and experts on Indigenisation were getting ready to hold one "spiritual workshop" after another on the subject of "inferiority". Fr. Henri Le Saux who became Swami Abhishiktananda one fine morning in 1950 simply by putting on the ochre robe of a Hindu sannyasin, will very soon start talking and writing ecstatically about "Christian experience". It is a different matter that till to-day the mission has not been able to spell out what this "Christian experience" means. The *rishis* were never so dumb. Hindus have inherited a large literature in which spiritual experience has been described in detail, in prose and poetry, by means of similes and metaphors. Their *rishis* have continued adding to it till recent times.

This is not the occasion for probing into what the "steadfast union of the will with His will" has meant in human history, particularly to the heathens, in terms of death and destruction. Here we are dealing with the Ashram

Movement in the mission. By 1945 there were a score of Christian ashrams spread over the country. The mission had promoted them "as places of experimentation in the working out of the Gospel in the background of Indian thought, bringing about all that is valuable in that heritage under the power of Christ".¹⁴ But the mission was far from satisfied with their performance in the one field which it regarded as the most important. "Many of our Christian ashrams," observed S.V. Parekh, "are noted for their life of piety and devotion. Some are noted for their medical and social work, while others, are keenly interested in educational work, but it is a sad comment to make that there are hardly any with the exception of a few that are out for evangelism. If I am not mistaken this is one of the reasons why the Church has fought shy of the ashrams. Let the Christian ashrams accept this challenge and throw out a challenge to the youth to rally round the banner of evangelism."¹⁵ The cat was out of the bag - the Christian ashrams were expected to produce converts like the rest of the mission stations. The talk about producing *rishis* was so much hogwash.

The Ashram Movement, however, kept forging ahead under the impetus for Indigenisation about which the mission became somewhat frantic soon after India attained independence. The Catholic Church had been hostile to ashrams which it regarded as an attempt to infuse Hinduism into Christianity. We have seen how it dealt with Brahmabandhab when he tried to create an ashram in 1899. His Sindhi disciple, Rewachand who styled himself as Swami Animananda, made another attempt by starting a Catholic Ashram in 1940 near the Catholic Seminary at Ranchi. "Most of the Belgian Jesuits in Ranchi," writes Dr. Taylor, "Whom I talked with in March 1977 and who lived across the street from the Seminary did not know that Animananda had ever lived in Ranchi." But the Catholic Church became reconciled to the institutional innovation when it caught the fever for Indigenisation. Speaking of the same Belgian Jesuits in 1977, Dr. Taylor adds in a footnote: "But they were very proud of their colleague. Fr. E. De Meulder who had put up gross and petty signs calling the Hazaribagh Church compound an ashram and who now claims that a discussion club he once founded in Ranchi was actually called ashram. Part of the problem with the name 'ashram' these days is that too many irresponsible churchmen are willing and eager to apply it to anything and every-thing."¹⁶

The Jesuit father, Henry Heras, the foremost Catholic expert on Indigenisation "contemplated an all-embracing Christian sannyasa in his project of *Saccidananda Prema Sangha*".¹⁷ Fr. Jules Monchanin, the French missionary, gave the project a practical shape in 1950 when he, along with another French missionary, Fr. Henri Le Saux, founded the Saccidananda Ashram at Tannirpalli in the Tiruchirapalli district of Madras Presidency. "They had clad themselves in Kavi robes, the traditional sign of the great renunciation in the land of India. Round their necks they wore the Benedictine cross and engraved in its centre the *pranava*, symbol of God the Ineffable and of the Eternal word springing from His Silence, a solemn affirmation that the Christ revealed in history is the very *Brahman* itself, the object of all the contemplations of the Rishis. They had taken new names. His own, *Parama-Arubi-Anandam*, bore witness to his special devotion to the Praclete, the Supreme (*Parama*), Formless (*a-rubi*). They called their solitude the *Shanti Vanam*, the wood of peace. Its formal name was *Saccidananda Ashram*."¹⁸ Fr. Henri Le Saux took the name Swami Abhishikteshwarananda, Bliss of the Lord of the Anointed Ones, that is, Jesus Christ. His friends and followers found the full name too difficult to pronounce. So he cut it short to Abhishiktananda. People who were fond of him shortened the name still further and simply called him Abhishikta.

In a small book authored jointly by the two Catholic "swamis" and published in 1951, they stated their aims and methods. The Bishop of Trichinapoly (now Tiruchirapalli) wrote a Foreword. "The present venture," said the Bishop, "is but an attempt to reconstruct the ideals of the first missionaries like De Nobili or of their recent prototypes like Father Vincent Lebbe of China."¹⁹ The first missionaries were following the example of St. Paul by "becoming all things to all men that they might save all".²⁰ The new swamis had the full support of the Catholic Church in their "approach which will in the long run help in assimilation of the ancient Indian culture and in its Christianisation".²¹ The Bishop hoped that the new venture will be welcomed "by those who have at heart the speedy 'illumination' of this large subcontinent of India, which for all its glorious religious past and its natural, and even violent, sympathy for spiritual values, is still far away from Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life".²²

"But somehow," writes Dr. Taylor, "the ashram did not really work like an ashram. Some came to visit them but nobody joined them... Monchanin died, much respected in the West and, finally Abhishiktananda wandered off to the Himalayas and became the most exciting Indian spiritual theologian of his generation. Then Dom Bede Griffiths came to Shantivanam to make a new foundation. Dom Bede had been in India for many years at the so-called ashram in Kurisumala where he must have observed how to do and how not to do things. Anyway, it seems to me that Shantivanam is now thriving."[23](#)

So are many other Christian ashrams in India.[24](#) They are attracting the attention of what Dr. Taylor describes as "a new breed of missionary statesmen-cum-funders and a group I shall call the 'Continental Christian Funding Organisation'".[25](#) They are no more than normal mission stations hiding behind a false facade. The only additional function they perform is to prevent bewildered people from the West from wandering into Hindu ashrams and coming under the influence of Hindu *gurus*. "We know very well, of course," said Henri Le Saux in 1964, "that the word ashram has been terribly devalorised by Christians. In some so-called Christian ashrams, such essential conditions of Hindu sadhana as abstinence from meat and liquor are completely neglected if not deliberately trodden upon. Elsewhere ashrams are simply guest-house and in the States it is even spoken of 'weekend ashrams'".[26](#) What else did he expect from fake swamis?

It is useless to tell the missionaries that Hindu *sâdhanâ* has nothing to do with buying a piece of land, building some stylised houses on it, exhibiting pretentious signboards, putting on a particular type of dress, and performing certain rituals in a particular way. Hindu *sâdhanâ* has been and remains a far deeper and difficult undertaking. It means being busy with one's own self rather than with saving others. It means clearing the dirt and dross within one's own self rather than calling on others to swear by a totem trotted out as the only saviour. It has no place for abominable superstitions like the atoning death of a so-called chirst. Above all, it is not consistent with double-talk-harboursing one motive in the heart and mouthing another. A counterfeit must remain a counterfeit, howsoever loudly and lavishly

advertised. It is a sacrilege that those who are out to cheat and deceive should use the word "*sâdhanâ*" for their evil exercise.

Footnotes:

[1](#) Richard W. Taylor, 'Christian Ashrams as a Style of Mission in India', *International Review of Missions*, July 1979, p. 283.

[2](#) Ibid., p. 284

[3](#) Ibid., p. 285

[4](#) *The Ashramn Review*, July 1947, p.5. Mahars are a community of depressed class Hindus in Maharastra.

[5](#) Ibid., p. 6

[6](#) Ibid., p. 7

[7](#) What the dialogues were intended for is reported in *The Ashram Review* of October 1948: "Just now there are two other Hindu friends staying in the Ashram, who have expressed their intention of becoming Christians; one of them has been a Hindu pilgrim for many years" (p. 31).

[8](#) *Indian Church History Review*, December 1977, p. 220

[9](#) *Rethinking Christianity in India*, p. 197

[10](#) Ibid.

[11](#) Full facts about De Nobili's frauds and forgeries have been known since long.

[12](#) P. Chenchiah et al, *Ashrama: Past and Present*, Madras, 194 1, p. 267

[13](#) *The Ashram Review*, January, 1942, p. 29

[14](#) Ibid., April 1945, p. 21

[15](#) Ibid., July 1955, p. 17

[16](#) Richard W. Taylor. *op. cit.*, p. 286

[17](#) *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam: A Memorial*, Saccidananda Ashram, 1959, p. 79

[18](#) Ibid., pp. 16-17

[19](#) *A Benedictine Ashram*. Douglas (England), 1961. p. 1

[20](#) Ibid., P. 5

[21](#) Ibid., p. 6

[22](#) Ibid., p. 7

[23](#) Richard, W. Taylor, *op. cit.* pp. 286-287

[24](#) A List of Christian ashrams at present is given in Appendix 1.

[25](#) Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 292

[26](#) *A Bendictine Ashram*, p. 2

The Trinity from Tannirpalli

CHAPTER 6

The Trinity from Tannirpalli

The three names which have achieved celebrity in the Christian world, in India as well as abroad, are those of Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux and Bede Griffiths. All of them are associated with the Saccidananda Ashram at Tannirpalli in the Tiruchirapalli district of Tamil Nadu. The first two came from France and the third belongs to England. All three have become known as Indian sages. Bede Griffiths is being hailed as a *brahmavid*, a claim advanced rarely even by ancient Hindu rishis. A brief survey of the sayings and doings of this trinity will help in determining the truth about their drumbeating.

Jules Monchanin

He was born in France in 1895 and ordained a priest in the Catholic Church in 1922. "He knew and deeply loved El Islam" and "visited North Africa, Algeria and Morocco" where a Christian monastery "in a suburb of Rabat, was trying to realize, in an integral contemplative life, the blossoming of Islam in Christianity".¹ It is not recorded when and why he lost his love of El Islam. What we are told suddenly is that "beyond all else, it was India that drew him". Perhaps he found the Muslim countries too hostile to his work. Being in the same business, Muslim missionaries have always been more than a match for their Christian counterparts. So his imagination was fired when he came to know of how "Francis Xavier was called to gather to Christ the India of the Portuguese in the XVIth century, and de Nobili, a hundred years later, the India of the Tamils".²

He prepared himself for India "by a more thorough study of Sanskrit, of the scriptures of Hindustan and her systems of philosophy" and "when he was authorised by his Archbishop he entered the Society of Auxiliaries to the Missions". He waited for an assignment in India till "he met an Indian Jesuit of the Madura Mission" who put him in touch with the Bishop of

Trichinopoly.³ The Bishop invited him to India where he reached in 1939. He was appointed an assistant priest in the parish of Panneipatti.

In a letter written from Panneipatti on March 3, 1940, he proclaimed: "I have come to India for no other purpose than to awaken in a few souls the desire (the passion) to raise up a Christian India... I think the problem is of the same magnitude as the Christianisation, in former times, of Greece... It will take centuries, sacrificed lives, and we shall perhaps die before seeing any realizations."⁴ He flew on the wings of his own fancy and continued: "A Christian India, completely Indian and completely Christian, may be and will be something so wonderful. To prepare it from afar, the sacrifice of our lives is not too much to ask."⁵

P.A. Antony, the Christian *tahsildar* of Kulittalai in Monchanin's parish, was impressed by him. He thought of establishing Monchanin at Kulitallai where "Brahmins, Vellalars, Naidus, Chettiars, all Hindus of good caste form the greatest part of the population". Monchanin's knowledge of Sanskrit, familiarity with Indian philosophers, Hindu mystic poets and chaste Tamil "combined to assure him rare possibilities of contact and influence". The *tahsildar* discussed the plan with Monchanin and then proposed it to the Bishop. "The parish of Penneipatti was divided, and the northern part skirting the Kavery, with a central residence at Kulittalai, was put in charge of Father Monchanin."⁶

A presbytery was planned for Monchanin near the existing church at Kulitallai. He thought of calling it an ashram and wrote to a friend in September, 1940 that "I shall write for you some short notes about our ashram, an heralding image of the whole of India wholly transfigured into the Dead and Risen Christ and the Spirit he sent".⁷ And again in April, 1941: "The tahsildar is going to begin the work of the ashram building (Bhakti Ashram, in Kulittalai). Two months (or three) will be enough. I hope to be installed there for the parochial feast, St. Christine, 24th July." Monchanin had coined a Hindu name for his contrivance. But doubts assailed him. "I feel both hope and anxiety," he confessed, "when I think of Kulittalai. I am wanting in so many things to be a witness of the Risen One amidst Hindus."⁸

He did not feel at ease even after he started living in the Bhakti Ashram. "I am a strict vegetarian and I sleep on a mat. But am I truly Indian? that is the question which torments me."⁹ He was dreaming of "the definitive ashram" where "reclad in the ochre cloth of the Hindu sannyasi" he could live "in the manner in which Upadhaya Brahmabandhav, the great Bengali Christian, had presented the ideal to the Indian Church some fifty year before".¹⁰

He, however, did not live in the Bhakti Ashram except at brief intervals. He went out again and again, visiting places and meeting people. He delivered lectures on Hinduism. "A few days before the independence of India Father Monchanin was staying in Tiruchi" when "the Bishop gave him a letter to translate which he had received from France". The letter was from another French missionary, Henri Le Saux, seeking permission "to settle somewhere in the Tiruchi area and to lead there, in some hermitage, the contemplative life in the pristine traditions of Christian monasticism and the closest conformity to the traditions of Indian sannyasa".¹¹ The permission was given and Henri Le Saux reached India in 1948. We have already seen how the two joined together in setting up the Saccidanand Ashram at Tannirpalli.

In 1951, Monchanin contributed a section to *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* which he had authored jointly with Henri Le Saux. The future that he saw for India can be summarised, in his own words, as follows: The spiritual society essentially set apart for the said end is Holy Church, the Bride and the real Mystical Body of the Risen Christ. Christ expects from every land and people an outburst of praise and love, which they alone can offer him. India cannot be alien to this process of assimilation by Christianity and transformation into it. She was for centuries the foremost intellectual and spiritual leader of her neighbouring countries, and even of the Far East. Is not India to Asia what Greece was to Europe? Therefore the christianisation of Indian civilisation is to all intents and purposes an historical undertaking comparable to the christianisation of Greece. Besides, India has received from the Almighty an uncommon gift, an unquenchable thirst for what is spiritual. We may rightly think that such a marvellous seed was not planted in vain by God in the Indian soul. Unfortunately, Indian wisdom is tainted with erroneous tendencies, and

looks as if it has not yet found its own equilibrium. So was Greek wisdom before Greece humbly received the Paschal message of the Risen Christ. India has to receive humbly from the Church the sound and basic principles of true contemplation, to keep them faithfully, to stamp them with her own seal, and to develop through them along with the other members of the Church. Should India fail in that task, we cannot understand, humanly speaking, how the Mystical Body of Christ could reach its quantitative and qualitative fullness in his *eschatological Advent*.¹² The trickster was certainly capable of coining some tall talk in terms of that deceitful jargon which Christian theology has hammered out during its long career.

Next year, he wrote another article, *The Christian Approach to Hinduism*, in which he listed four obstacles which Christianity was facing in India: 1) the hold of Hinduism due to a) the strength of inherited traditions, and b) national pride in their philosophical and spiritual lore; 2) the lack of attraction of Christianity because a) Christianity is scarcely known, and b) owing to the foreign outlook of Christianity, Hindus are, in general, very little attracted to it; 3) the peculiar turn of mind of most Hindus in a) Logic, and b) Metaphysics and Psychology; and 4) the common belief in the equality of all religions. He concluded that "Too often the dialogue between Christian and Hindu is a colloquy between deaf men".¹³

He was all for a meeting (or dialogue as they call it these days) between Hinduism and Christianity so that Hinduism could be purged of its errors and perfected into Christianity. "It is the creation," he wrote in a letter in January 1955, "which has to be rethought or rather situated anew in the light of the revealed Christian mystery. In that mystery, Hinduism (and especially Advaita) must die to rise up again Christian. Any theory which does not take fully into account this necessity constitutes a lack of loyalty both to Christianity-which we cannot mutilate from its essence-and to Hinduism-from which we cannot hide its fundamental errors and its essential divergence from Christianity. Hinduism must renounce its equation 'atman-brahman' to enter in Christ."¹⁴ In simple language, Hindus were to be asked to renounce their *rishis* and run after a ruse.

He was, however, not able to achieve any noticeable advance towards this momentous meeting between Hinduism and Christianity before he died

in 1957. Missionaries who promote the myth of their great sacrifices believe, and would like us to believe, that he died because the hard life-eating vegetarian food and sleeping and sitting on the floor-he had imposed upon himself in the service of the mission, told seriously on his health. They are pretty good at manufacturing martyrs.

Henri Le Saux

He was born at St. Briac, a small town on the north coast of Brittany in France and became a monk in the Benedictine monastery, Abbe of Sainte Anne de Kerogonan. He came to India in 1948 on invitation from Jules Monchanin. During 1949, he paid two visits to the Ramana Ashram at Tiruvannamalai before preparing a plan for a Catholic ashram. The plan was cleared by the Bishop of Tiruchirapalli and the ashram was formed in 1950. It was given a Latin name, Eremus Sanctissime Trinitatis (Hermitage of the Most Holy Trinity). But to Hindus it was made known as Saccidananda Ashram, Saccidananda of the Upanishads being presented as an equivalent of the Christian Trinity. Both the founders had adopted Hindu names. But Henri Le Saux alone succeeded in getting known as Swami Abhishiktananda.

He shared in full Monchanin's fond hope that India could be annexed to the Catholic Church by dressing up Christian dogmas in the language of Hindu philosophy. Only his language was more sophisticated or, in other words, less straight-forward than that of his elder colleague. The goal was "the Christianisation and assuming into the Pleroma of the Risen Lord that unrivalled thirst for the Absolute which threw and still throws out to the world, in quest of 'salvation', crowds of *elect* in the Hindu as well as in the Buddhist and Jain people".¹⁵ Hindus, Buddhists and Jains could constitute only "crowds" for him. Christians alone were a community.

He paid several more visits to the Ramana Ashram in 1952-53 and picked up the Hindu mystic term, " *guhâ* (cave of the heart)". It was in this mystic corner that he tried, for the rest of his life, to stage a meeting between what he called the "advaitic experience" and what was known to him as the "Christian experience". He went out on a tour of Northern India in March 1957 in search of some place where he could carry out his own experiment in the "cave of the heart". But his trip was cut short by

Monchanin's illness. He had to rush back. After Monchanin's death, he lived in the Saccidanand Ashram for some more years. He had planned to divide his time between the South and the North. But the pull of the North, particularly of the Himalayas, proved stronger. He built a place for himself at Uttarkashi in Garhwal and left the South for good in 1968. By now he had written several books and was being hailed by the Catholic as well as many non-Catholic Christians as a profound theologian and a mystic luminary. He was in great demand in all sorts of seminars and conferences on the latest mission strategy of holding a dialogue with Hinduism. So he could stay at Uttarkashi only for short periods. He suffered a heart attack and died in 1973. He also, we are told, had ruined his health by leading a hard life.

During his life, he was out "to show to our Hindu brethren that the Christian experience does not fall short of the Vedanta, but that, without in any way threatening the essential value of the Hindu experience, it reveals within it even greater depths of the unfathomable mystery of God".¹⁶ But in the plethora of his works, he never explained what he meant by the "Christian experience". The only thing that does become clear, as one plods through the pages, is that he never arrived anywhere near the "Hindu experience" which he often described as the "advaitic experience". In fact, it is highly doubtful whether, with all his study of the Upanishads, he ever understood what *Advaita* really means. His obstinate obsession with Jesus and the Church prevented him from breaking the barrier. He was rather fond of the phrase "cave of the heart", but he was not prepared to see there anything except Jesus hanging on a gibbet. He remained chained to the Church to the end of his days. He never learnt the elementary truth that *Advaita* must remain a mere word for those who refuse to rise above their mental fixations.

"A sinful refusal of Christ," he wrote towards the end of his life, "-like that of Lucifer or the religious leaders who, according to St. John knew truth but refused to submit to it-is inconceivable except in the case of a man who is still 'on the way'. He might then refuse the Lord in the name of an Advaita of his own conceiving, one which only glorified his own ego and puffed him up with pride. Or it might happen in the case of one who was a jnani or yogi in appearance. In such an individual, far from his empirical

self vanishing in the supreme self, what has happened is that the ego of his phenomenal consciousness has taken to itself the supreme and absolute character of the 'I' of the real self. In fact, he has magnified himself after the fashion of the devas in the Kena Upanishad-a temptation which many unfortunately fail to resist." [17](#) Here Hindus are asked to take lessons in *Advaita* from a man whose sole occupation in life was torturing Upanishadic texts into the dogmatic framework of a gross monolatry. It is difficult for a Christian missionary to renounce the role of a teacher even on subjects about which he knows next to nothing.

In the case of Henri Le Saux there was an added difficulty: he was a poet. The flow of mellifluous phrases, particularly in his native French, was mistaken by him for mystic experience. One has to read his writings in order to see how he became a victim of his own word-imageries and figures of speech. Silencing of the mind, which is a *sine qua non* for spiritual experience according to all Hindu scriptures on the subject, remained a discipline which he never learnt. Small wonder that the man ended as a neurotic.

Bede Griffiths

Born in 1910 in an Anglican family, he became a Catholic in 1931 and was ordained a priest in 1940. He lived as monk in Prinknash Abbey and became Prior of Farnborough Abbey in England. He came to India as a missionary in 1955 and lived for two years in Bangalore before he joined Francis Mahieu to found the Kurisumala Ashram, a monastery of the Syrian rite in Kerala. In 1968 he took over the Saccidanand Ashram after Henri Le Saux left it for good. He was operating from there till his death in May, 1993.

Bede Griffiths wrote several books between 1954 and 1983 - *The Golden String* (1954), *Return to the Centre* (1978), *The Marriage of East and West* (1982), *Christ in India* (1966), *The Cosmic Revelation, Vedanta and Christian Faith* (1973). Another major book, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Christian Reading*, is expected to be published soon. But the clearest and most comprehensive statement of what he is trying to achieve is contained in his *Christ in India: Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*. This book was first published in England in 1966 under the title *Christian*

Ashram, and a simultaneous edition in the USA gave it the name by which it is now known. A Christian publishing house in India has reprinted it in 1984. In 'A New Introduction' which the author has added to the Indian reprint, he says that "I have come, therefore, to see that the Indian Church, in the words of the founder of our ashram, Jules Monchanin, has to be neither Latin or Greek or Syrian but totally Indian and totally Christian".[18](#)

This book was published soon after the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church had revised its view of non-Christian religions in a declaration made on October 28, 1965. Till that date the Catholic Church had held that all other religions were false and inspired by the Devil. Now the Church started saying that it "rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions" and that it "has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men". This by itself looked like a big concession. But in the next sentence the Council restored the supremacy of Christ in whom "men find the fullness of the religious life".[19](#) This pronouncement from Rome endorsed the Theology of Fulfillment which some Christian theologians in India and elsewhere had been propounding at intervals but which the Church had not recognised or recommended so far.

The "natural light" which Christian theologians, from Ziegenbalg onwards, had discovered in Hinduism is an old theme in Christian theology. Heathens, we are told, have had the benefit of a Cosmic Revelation which preceded the Mosaic and the Christian Revelations. Bede Griffiths has published a whole book by this name in 1983. The derogatory terms-heathen, pagan, infidel and the rest-which were used to describe a Hindu in earlier days have been dropped. He is to be called a Cosmic Man henceforward. Many Hindus who are not conversant with linguistic trickeries of Christian theology feel flattered. Bede Griffiths takes full advantage of this Hindu ignorance. He flatters the Hindus further by writing long passages in praise of their spiritual and philosophical heritage. But his central point is the same as announced by the Church, namely that Hinduism can find fulfilment only by surrendering itself, body and soul, to the Catholic Church. That, in brief, is the burden of all his books.

Before Bede Griffiths draws the inevitable conclusion, he makes two fanatical and fantastic assertions. The first assertion is that Jesus was, is and will remain the only manifestation of God in history. "What we can say with certainty", he writes, "is that at all times and in all places God (and that means Christ) is soliciting the heart and mind of every man through his reason and conscience, and all alike, believers and unbelievers, are to be judged by this hidden call and their response to it."[20](#) Again: "The resurrection of Christ is at once a historical fact, which has changed the course of history, and also a symbol of that ultimate truth in which human life and history can alone find their true meaning."[21](#) The second assertion is that the Church is the body and bride of Christ destined to embrace the whole world. "But we must add," he says, "that if Christ is present to all men, then the Church is also present in all mankind. There is one movement of the Church which is visible in history, which we can trace in its progress from Jerusalem over the Graeco-Roman world, then over Europe and America and now about to enter into vital contact with Asia and Africa. But there is also a hidden movement of the Church going on in the hearts of men drawing men to Christ without their knowing it, in Hinduism, in Buddhism, in Islam, even in agnosticism and unbelief. It is only at the last day that the full significance of this movement will be revealed, but even now we can discern something of this hidden path of grace in the other religions of the world."[22](#)

The conclusion he draws from his assertions is quite safe. Bede Griffiths is convinced that "a meeting must take place between the different religions of the world".[23](#) But he lays down a condition. "For a Christian," he says, "the meeting of religions can only take place in Christ."[24](#) Monchanin and Henri Le Saux had founded the Saccidananda Ashram in order "to lead India to the fulfilment of its quest for the experience of God by showing that it could be found in Christ".[25](#) Now it is the turn of Bede Griffiths "to show how Christ is, as it were, 'hidden' at the heart of Hinduism"[26](#), and how "Rama, Krishna, Siva, and the Buddha, all the mysteries and sacraments in Buddhism and Hinduism, are types and shadows of the mystery of Christ".[27](#) Christ "is the fulfilment of all that the imagination of the Indian soul sought to find in its gods and heroes, in its temples and sacrifices".[28](#) Christ is the 'goal which Vedanta has been seeking'.[29](#) The time has come when "Hinduism itself will be seen as a *Preparatio*

evangelica, the path by which the people of India have been led through the centuries of their history to their fulfilment in Christ and his Church".[30](#)
Quod erat demonstrandum !

A normal human mind is insulted when it is called upon to comment on these pompous pronouncements. Proclaiming that Hinduism will find fulfilment in Christianity, observes an amused reader of Bede Griffiths, is tantamount to saying that the holy Ganga will get purified by being poured into a puddle of hogwash. The puerile nonsense could have been dismissed with contempt but for the backing it has from a formidable apparatus which the mission has built in this country since the days of the Portuguese pirates. We have seen how the myth of "comrade" Stalin was sold for years on end by a well-oiled party machine. The Christian mission is much older and far more experienced. It will go on selling the myth of a "christ" Jesus till its apparatus is dispersed. That process of dispersal has already gone a long way in the West and the Church is now in a hurry to find a new hideout in the East. Will the East give shelter to this array of the most abominable superstitions which run roughshod over its own and superior spiritual tradition?

Incidentally, the trinity from Tannirpalli also consists of white men. The mission is not yet confident that the coloured people can lead the Ashram Movement, howsoever devoted they may be to the Christian dogmas.

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam: A Memorial*, pp. 5-6

[2](#) *Ibid.*, p. 7

[3](#) *Ibid.*, p. 9

[4](#) *Ibid.*, p. 202

[5](#) *Ibid.*, P. 203

[6](#) *Ibid.*, p. 14

[7](#) Ibid., p. 205

[8](#) Ibid., P. 207

[9](#) Ibid., p. 208

[10](#) Ibid., p. 14

[11](#) Ibid., P. 16

[12](#) Ibid., p. 159-170

[13](#) Ibid., P. 171-176

[14](#) Ibid., p. 222. His prescription has been discussed in some depth by Ram Swarup in his 'Liberal' Christianity, included in *Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam*, a Voice of India publication.

[15](#) *A Benedictine Ashram*, p. 3

[16](#) *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, Delhi, 1976., p. 9

[17](#) Ibid., p. 99

[18](#) *Christ in India*, Bangalore, 1984, p. 8. This statement does not square with the one he made to Swami Devananda in his letter of August 31, 1987: "Of course, if I held the same view as Father Monchanin you would be justified in suspecting me of deception."

[19](#) *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Bombay, 1983, p. 668

[20](#) *Christ in India*, "(and that means Christ)" are Fr. Bede's words and not an insertion, p. 196

[21](#) Ibid., p. 111

[22](#) Ibid., p. 177

[23](#) Ibid., pp. 14-15

[24](#) Ibid., p. 16

[25](#) Ibid., p. 63

[26](#) Ibid., P. 91

[27](#) Ibid., p. 100

[28](#) Ibid., P. 111

[29](#) Ibid., p. 170

[30](#) Ibid., p. 174

An Imperialist Hangover

CHAPTER 7

An Imperialist Hangover

The Christian mission equates the expansion of Christianity in different parts of the world with the march of the Holy Spirit. The history of Christianity helps us in understanding what the Holy Spirit really stands for—the march of European military machines, the forcible occupation of other people's motherlands, the massacre of heathens or their conversion at the point of the sword, the exercise of political pressures by imperialist establishments, the use of money and manpower and the mass media on a large scale, and the perfection of a scholarship which excels in suppressio veri suggestio falsi (suppressing truth and spreading falsehood). Christianity was a state enterprise for all European countries, some of which became imperialist powers from the sixteenth century onwards. The record of Christianity over the last nearly two thousand years provides no evidence that it ever prevailed over paganism by the moral or ethical or spiritual superiority of its teachings.

Till less than two hundred years ago, the Christian mission used to proclaim with considerable pride how many heathens it had killed or forced into the fold, how many orphans it had collected and baptised, how many pagan temples it had demolished, how many pagan idols it had smashed, how many schools and seminaries of the infidels it had closed down, and so on. The tales of the mission's brutalities were relished by the beneficiaries of the booty it brought home. Jesus was thanked in thousands of Churches for the bounties he had bestowed upon his beloved people. Europe, America, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and many islands in the Pacific were christianised not by pious missionaries mouthing catechisms but by armed mercenaries employed by the mission or its patron states. In any case, no missionary ever succeeded in making mass conversions in any place unless he was backed by the military or political power of this or the European imperialism.

The mission had to change its methods when it came to some countries of Asia and Africa which were not so defenceless or which had vibrant cultures of their own. India which had been invaded successively by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French and conquered finally by the British, was such a country. The British realized very soon that their empire would be imperilled if the mission was let loose with all its fury; so they kept it on a leash and allowed it to leap forward only in tribal areas. The mission, however, continued to use violent and vituperative language against everything held sacred by the Hindus, till it received a strong rebuff from resurgent Hinduism. Meanwhile, the struggle for freedom was gathering force. The two currents combined and reached their climax in Mahatma Gandhi. The mission was thwarted for the time being. It had to rethink, which it started doing from the Tambaram conference onwards.

India has become independent. But the mission is yet to admit that it has no role to play in India, and retire. It is still suffering from an imperialist hangover. It had once confused the superiority of Western arms with the superiority of the Christian creed. The confusion continues and will not be corrected so long as the mission wields the organisational weapon it had forged when India was in bondage.

We have traced elsewhere the history of Hindu-Christian encounters in the past.¹ It shows that Christianity was trounced whenever it entered into a debate with Hinduism. Christianity has survived in India not on account of any strength or merit in its arguments but because its machine continues to grind even when it loses the debate. Hindus have still to understand that game and defeat it on its own grounds.²

Footnotes:

¹ History of Hindu-Christian Encounters by Sita Ram Goel, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1989.

² The mission apparatus was partially discussed recently by Sri Ram Swarup in two review articles in The Times of India. We are reproducing them in this book, with some additions, as Appendices 2 and 3. They are a great help in understanding the working of the

missionary machine, in which Catholic ashrams are only a cog.
Some figures on mission finance have been given in Appendix 4.

Catholic Ashrams

CHAPTER 8

Catholic Ashrams

Adopting and Adapting Hindu Dharma

The Shantivanam Ashram looks like a rishi's home transported from Vedic times to the banks of the sacred Cauvery River at a forested place near Trichy in South India. A pilgrim's first impressions are strong, and very Hindu; the elaborately colourful Hindu shrine; the bearded, saffron-robed "swami" seated cross-legged on a straw mat; devotees practising yogic meditations, even chanting Hindu scriptures.

But these impressions gradually prove false. First, the eye detects that the courtyard shrine is for Saint Paul and that "puja" is actually, a daily Mass, complete with incense, arati lamps, flower offerings and prasadam. Finally, one meets the "swami", learning he is Father Bede "Dayananda" Griffiths, a Christian "sannyasin" of impeccable British background.

This is a Christian ashram, one of more than 50 in India, which are variously described as "experiments in cross-cultural communication," "contemplative hermitages that revolve around both Christian and Hindu ideals," or (less charitably) "institutions to brainwash and convert India's unwary masses." Are these places to be endorsed by Hindus as worthy attempts to share each other's spirituality? Or are they a spiritual oxymoron, a contradiction of terms, because the Christians are interested in sharing - dialogue is the term they use - only as a means to conversions?

This special *Hinduism Today* report will focus on the issue of Catholic adoption and adaptation of those things that Hindus regard as their sacred heritage and spirituality, a policy the Catholics have named "inculturation." It is a complex issue involving doctrine, cultural camouflage, allegedly deceptive conversion tactics and more. Many Catholics will be perplexed by the issues raised in this report. They don't see what could be wrong with their selectively embracing those parts of Hindu spiritual discipline and

culture which they find inspiring. And many Hindus, raised on decades of uncritical acceptance of any form of religious expression, may simply not care one way or the other.

Hindu leaders are more and more aware that the Indianization of Christianity is a serious matter. They remember the fate of the American Indian religion and the native spiritual traditions of Africa and South America. More recently they recall that the Hawaiian people who numbered nearly 500,000 a century ago, are now less than 50,000 - their culture gone, their language spoken by a mere 500 people and their gods worshipped by a dying handful of *Kahuna* priests. All this was the effective and intentional bequest of a few dedicated Christian missionaries - good people who thought their work necessary and divinely ordained. The purpose which drove these early missionaries to eliminate non-Christian faiths and cultures has not changed. It has become more subtle, more articulately argued. It is certainly more of a problem to Africans, but India's Hindus would do well to remain alert and informed. That is why it is essential to examine and understand such places as Father Bede's Shantivanam.

Shantivanam

Father Bede Griffiths is widely respected among Christians and Hindus alike. In the West the Catholics hold him in awe, a present-day saint whose lifetime association with the great religious traditions of ancient India is considered a courageous pioneering.

Shantivanam's brochure describes its objectives: "The aim of the ashram remains to establish a way of contemplative life, based alike on the traditions of Christian monasticism and of Hindu sannyasa. Hinduism has a tradition of sannyasa - 'renunciation' of the world in order to seek God, or in Hindu terms, 'liberation' - which goes back many centuries before the birth of Christ and has continued to the present day. Our aim at Shantivanam is to unite ourselves with this tradition as Christian sannyasis. Our life is based on the Rule of Saint Benedict, the patriarch of Western monasticism [the Ashram is an official monastery of the Camaldolese Monks, founded in the 13th century in Italy], and on the teaching of the monastic Fathers of the Church, but we also study Hindu doctrine (Vedanta) and make use of Hindu methods of prayer and meditation (Yoga). The ashram seeks to be a place of

meeting for Hindus and Christians and people of all religions or none, who are genuinely seeking God."

The residents of the ashram are generally Europeans, some of whom are initiated into "sannyas" by Father Griffiths and then return to their own countries. Others are novices of the order, sent for exposure to this way of life. All participate fully in the Indian life style of the place.

A November, 1984 article in *The Hindu* newspaper, published in Madras, describes some of the ashramites: "A psychologist by profession, a young lady from W. Germany, Maria, said she visited the ashram annually. Before her experiencing this atmosphere here, she thought that the Bible has no message for her and now after studying the Vedanta here she could now say that her attitude towards the Bible and Christ had undergone total transformation. She felt that there was nothing wrong with the Christian religion. Mr. Desmond, a young lad from Bombay and a drug addict said that after coming to the ashram he was a transformed man and when he returned to Bombay after Christmas he would be a reformed man." The article goes on to say: "Father Griffiths has so far initiated 20 to 30 persons belonging to different nations as sannyasis and sannyasinis and all of them were spreading the message of this peaceful coexistence of the Trinity and non-duality in their own countries."

The limits of Father Griffiths' experiment in inculturation are apparent in his theological stance on certain central Hindu beliefs: reincarnation, moksha and cycles of time. He has not adopted any Hindu beliefs which would be considered heretical by the Catholic Church. In a 1984 interview by Renee Weber published in *Revision* magazine, Father Griffiths said, "I consider reincarnation one of the most difficult doctrines to reconcile with Christian faith. According to popular belief the individual soul passes from body to body in a series of rebirths. I consider this entirely unacceptable from a Christian point of view." In regard to transcendent experience, the merging of the soul in God, the Moksha of Hindu theology, Renee Weber asked, "Was there this extraordinary openness and capacity for self-transcendence precisely in Jesus? Or can it happen again?" Father Griffiths replied, "In the Christian understanding, we would say no. He was open to the total reality of God. The rest of us have varying degrees of openness to

the divine." Another area of difficulty is time. Hinduism conceives of time as vast cycles of creation and dissolution. Father Griffiths' concept is that time is strictly linear, starting at one point in the past and ending at one point in the future, never repeating itself.

Though not covered in that particular interview, Father Griffiths would also have had to affirm his concept of God conformed with the five anathemas against pantheism stated by Vatican I and left unaltered by Vatican II. An anathema is a forbidden belief, a belief which contradicts the Catholic teaching. These forbidden five are: "1) Nothing exists except matter. 2) God and all things possess one and the same substance and essence. 3) Finite things, both corporeal and spiritual, or at least spiritual, emanated from the divine substance. 4) The divine essence becomes all things by a manifestation or evolution of itself. 5) God is universal or indefinite being, which by determining itself makes up the universe, which is diversified into genera, species and individuals." The Catholic Church forbids its priests to believe or preach any of these concepts, several of which are, of course, standard parts of most Hindu theologies. This shows that on the most central issue of theology - God - there is a vast chasm between Catholic and Hindu belief.

Father Griffiths is an anomaly - a Hindu on the outside, a Catholic on the inside. And he's not the only one.

Jeevandhara Ashram

Jeevandhara Ashram, another Catholic ashram which is near Rishikesh in northern India, was founded by Ishapriya (Sister Patricia Kinsey) and Vandana of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Considered the nun's equivalent of the Jesuits, this order has 7,000 members world-wide and deeply involved in education. Ishapriya was born in Britain, spent her novitiate in London and then a year in Rome. She was sent on mission to India where she was deeply impressed by the spiritual values of the country. She stayed on, first at the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, studying and eventually, she says, taking sannyas diksha from Swami Chidananda. Vandana was born in Bombay, ran away from home at 16 or 17, converted to Christianity and then entered the order, eventually becoming the provincial (head) in India. She and Ishapriya took sannyas together and founded the ashram.

Like Shantivanam, the majority of the people at the ashram are western Christians, usually Sacred Heart nuns. They are also involved in missionary efforts to convert Hindus in the local area. The ashram moved twenty miles north of Rishikesh due to objections by local Hindus.

A correspondent for *Hinduism Today* met briefly with Ishapriya in Carmel, California. She was conducting a six week retreat program in Ashtanga Yoga at the Angelica Convent. The white-haired nun, about 50, was dressed in a saffron sari and wore a large cross around her neck. *Hinduism Today* inquired if there is any Christianity in her teachings. She replied, "Of course, there is Christianity in my teachings, I am a Catholic." We asked if she also teaches Catholicism in her ashram in India. She said the Hindus who attend are aware that she is a Christian. "There is no problem with that. They know that it is a Catholic ashram." Sensing that he was asking about her motives she stated. "We are only trying to make the Christians more aware. You are completely on the wrong track. We are only trying to pray." When asked why she took sannyas, she replied, "Sannyas is just where the spirit leads," and quickly excused herself.

A Catholic nun's receiving sannyas from a Hindu swami seemed questionable, so *Hinduism Today* contacted Sadhaka Kartikeyan of the Divine Life Society at Rishikesh who was visiting San Francisco. He stated, "Our swamis would never initiate a Christian into Sannyas. Perhaps they were just given a mantram." Other Hindu leaders, including the head of Kasi Mutt in Tirupanandal, confirmed that it would not be possible for a non-Hindu to take sannyas. After all, sannyas is Hindu monkhood.

The general attitude of the Order of the Sacred Heart toward Ishapriya is one of deep reverence and respect. But outside the order, a Sister explained, the mother Church remains uneasy with her Yoga teachings and Eastern look and leanings.

Hindu Reaction

The general Hindu reaction to these ashrams is one of tolerant, even loving acceptance and respect. *Sarvadharmā samābhāva*, equal respect for all religions, has long been a fundamental principle of Hindu culture.^{[1](#)} Allowing another person to hold beliefs different from one's own without

attempting to change them, is dear to the Hindu's heart, and he does, in actual practice, accept an enormous range of beliefs within his own religion.²

Hindu History and Catholic Theology

Yet, among those at the vanguard of Hindu renaissance there is suspicion, resistance and even outright hostility as shown by comments collected for *Hinduism Today* in India on the subject of Christian ashrams. Here is a sampling: G.M. Jagtiani of Bombay wrote: "A mischievous attempt is being made by some Christian missionaries to wear the saffron robe, put tilak on their forehead, recite the Gita, and convert the Hindus to Christianity." S. Shanmukham of the Hindu Munnani, Kanyakumari, states: "Once I met an orange-robed sannyasin. I took her to be a Hindu sannyasin. When asked, she said 'I have put on this dress so that I can come in contact with Hindus very easily and tell them about Christianity'." R. Chidambasaksamma, Kanyakumari, said, "It seems to be a sinister plan to make people accept Christ as God, the only God. They adopt all the philosophies and practices of Hindus but would accept only Jesus as God. It is only a development of their original plan of Indianisation of Christianity."

At the root of these criticisms is a deep distrust of the Christians in India. Imposed by force from the outside, Christianity is still considered an unwelcome intrusion from the West. Even Mahatma Gandhi stated that from the time Christianity was established in Rome in the third century, "it became an imperialist faith as it remains to this day." This unfortunate legacy has never been forgotten by the Hindus. Though the military backing is no longer present, enormous sums of money are sent into India for the use of the missionaries. A well-monied and successful missionary is regarded as a threat to the national stability.

The official government document, *Madhya Pradesh Report on Christian Missionary Activities* (1956) stated, "Evangelization in India appears to be a part of the uniform world policy to revive Christendom for re-establishing Western supremacy and is not prompted by spiritual motives. The objective is apparently to create Christian minority pockets with a view to disrupt the solidarity of the non-Christian societies. The ulterior motive is fraught with danger to the security of the State."

Christians are only three per cent of India's population, yet they control 25% of all schools and 40% of all social service organizations. Their Western affiliations give them political entree and cultural clout beyond their numbers. Christians are widely viewed as not necessarily strongly loyal to the nation, the Catholics in particular being thought to be under the direct rule of the Vatican. The Madhya Pradesh report also says, "Because conversion muddles the convert's sense of unity and solidarity with his society, there is a danger of his loyalty to his country and state being undermined."

New Delhi's Sita Ram Goel wrote a book on the Catholic threat in India full of intellectual fire. *Papacy, Its Doctrine and History*³ was published in response to the Pope's 1986 visit to India. This small volume is a scathing account of the history of Christians in India. Some excerpts: "Hindus at large were showing great aversion to Christianity accompanied as it was by wanton violence, loud-mouthed outpourings of the friars against everything which the Hindus cherished, killing of Brahmins and cows wherever the newcomers had no fear of reprisals, the extremely unhygienic habits of the Portuguese including their 'holy men', and the drunken revelries in which they all indulged very frequently. The only people who associated with the *paranghis* were prostitutes, pimps and similar characters living on the fringes of Hindu society," Goel explains the indifference which Hindus showed to the Christian missionaries: "To an average Hindu, saintliness signified a calm self-possession and contemplative silence. The paroxysms of these strangers could only amuse him, whenever they did not leave him dead cold." Finally Goel mentions the problem which continues to face the Christians: "Christianity had failed to register as a religion with the masses as well as the classes of Hindu society. They continued to look at this imported creed as an imposition with the help of British bayonets."

It is against this background that any activities of the Christians are viewed. The early missionaries were not at all above acquiring converts by force, money or deception. And it's reported that unscrupulous tactics still abound. The present Catholic ashrams have inherited a history of intrigue and subterfuge. Here is a description from the *Madhya Pradesh Report*: "Robert De Nobili (A Catholic Jesuit priest) appeared in Madura in 1607 clad in the saffron robes of a Sadhu with sandal paste on his forehead and

the sacred thread on his body. He gave out that he was a Brahmin from Rome. He showed documentary evidence to prove that he belonged to a clan that had migrated from ancient India. He declared that he was bringing a message which had been taught in India by Indian ascetics of yore and that he was only restoring to Hindus one of their lost sacred books, namely the 5th Veda, called Yeshurveda (Jesus Veda). It passed for a genuine work until the Protestant Missionaries exposed the fraud about the year 1840. This Brahmin Sannyasi of the 'Roman Gotra', Father De Nobili, worked for 40 years and died at the ripe age of 89 in 1656. It is said that he had converted about a lakh of persons but they all melted away after his death."[4](#)

Critics also point to more recent examples of hidden motives in establishing ashrams and adopting the appearance of sannyasins. Noted Indian writer Ram Swarup in his pamphlet "*Liberal*" *Christianity*[5](#) quoted the intentions of one of the founders of Shantivanam, Father J. Monchanin: "Fr. J. Monchanin himself defines his mission in these terms: 'I have come to India for no other purpose than to awaken in a few souls the desire (the passion) to raise up a Christian India. It will take centuries, sacrificed lives and we shall perhaps die before seeing any realizations. A Christian India, completely Indian and completely Christian will be something so wonderful the sacrifice of our lives is not too much to ask.'"

It is precisely this goal, which can only be described as the spiritual genocide of Hindu dharma, which motivates leaders like Swarup and movements like VHP and RSS to protect India's religious traditions against overt conversion efforts.

The Catholic Response

Catholic leaders *Hinduism Today* spoke with consider all of these complaints to be problems of the past. Father John Keane, Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs officer of the Archdiocese of San Francisco said, "The main thrust of Pope John Paul II is 'irrevocable commitment' to the unity of the Churches [the various Christian sects] and to fostering dialogue and cooperation amongst the religions of the world. The Church began to realise that within non-Christian religions there is truth, there is goodness and there is beauty and it is about time we began to recognize it. Whatever policies

were directed toward non-Christian religions before, the Church has said [through the Second Vatican Council] are not according to what the Church through Jesus Christ has been trying to say," In other words, the Church has seen the errors of its ways.

When asked about militant or devious conversion tactics, he said, "Well, you know they're called 'Rice Christians.' The Church is getting nowhere through that. That type of missionary zeal is no longer really appreciated. We don't make friends with anyone by doing those kind of things. What [I have explained] is the official attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the Hindu tradition. If anyone in India feels that the Hindu tradition is pagan and has to be rubbed out, ignored or fought against violently, they haven't understood what the Vatican Council is trying to say."

Vatican II

The widespread support for these Catholic ashrams by the official Church is one part of the vast fall-out from the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) held from 1962 to 1965. Vatican II was an attempt to confront the challenge to Catholicism in the 20th century, yet it apparently precipitated, through its decision, an even greater crisis than it intended to solve. Many new interpretations of doctrine were set forth - one on non-Christians was a major one. As a result of numerous fundamental changes, the Catholic Church faces a crisis within itself. In America alone the Catholic Church is losing members at the rate of *one thousand per day*. In 1984 in the United States, 1,100 new priests were ordained compared with 14,000 in 1964. The conclusion from these figures is drawn by such persons as Bishop Jon Diegel of the American Catholic Church of the Malabar Rite: for its very survival, the Catholic Church must make an impact in Asia and Africa before it dwindles in the West.

One result of Vatican II was a new attitude toward Hinduism and other religions, released by Paul VI in 1964: "[The Church] regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with

prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men."

In regard to Hinduism, he stated: "In Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love."

Vatican II's new Code of Canon Law offers this definition of *dialogue*: "By the witness of their lives and their message, let the missionaries enter into a sincere dialogue with those who do not yet believe in Christ. Accommodating their approach to the mentality and culture of their audience, they will open up the way for them to reach the point where they are ready to accept the Good News [the Gospel of Christ]."

Inculturation has become a very central aspect of the relation of the Church to Asia and Africa and is the basis for the present existence of Catholic ashrams. A thorough exposition of the idea was made by the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in January of 1978. Here are statements from their report:

"The Church must make the attempt to translate the Gospel message into the anthropological language and symbols of the culture into which it is inserted. This is what is meant by inculturation of the Gospel. Yet the Church ought also to regard culture with a critical eye, denouncing sin and amending, purifying and exorcizing its counter-values and overthrowing its idolatrous values. The Church leads people on to abandon false ideas of God, unnatural behavior and the illegitimate manipulation of person by person. The Church inspires local cultures to accept through faith the lordship of Christ, without whose grace and truth, they would be unable to reach their full stature." Translation: "Let them keep those cultural forms we approve, but make them Catholics."

In a lengthy interview with *Hinduism Today*, Father Frank Podgorski, Director of Asian Area Studies at Seton Hall University, New Jersey [USA], spoke on the subject of the new approach of the Catholic Church.

He is a noted scholar in Asian studies and the author of the popular book, *Hinduism: A Beautiful Mosaic*. He said, "I don't deny that there have been difficulties in the past, and that there are difficulties in the reality of the present. But as part of the official Church thrust today, there is a call for reverence, respect, a call for making the Hindu a better Hindu, allowing the Hindu to be a better Hindu. In Africa, in recent days, after the India trip, Pope John Paul II called for a truly African Church to emerge. An African Church in which the African spirit would enter in and enrich the Church and make it more Catholic and by that he talks about basic customs entering into the tradition of the Church. Now we're talking really about adapting the natural habits in such a way so that the teaching of Christ, so that Christ may more fully communicate with the spirit of Africa and that means adapting natural prayer forms and things of that nature. So just as yoga may be adapted, so may various other ways."

Hindu/Catholic Dialogue: The Future

Father Podgorski's statement that "we're not talking about changing the Church theologically" is crucial and fraught with ramifications for the Hindu. As long as the Catholic Church continues to claim a divine monopoly on salvation, its tolerance for other faiths will be incomplete and its adaptation to other religions only superficial adjustments for the purpose of expansion.

Vatican II made the Church's ultimate stance crystal clear: "[The Council] relies on sacred Scripture and Tradition in teaching that this pilgrim Church is necessary for salvation. Christ alone is the mediator of salvation and the way of salvation. He presents himself to us in his body, which is the Church. When he insisted expressly on the necessity for faith and baptism, he asserted at the same time the necessity for the Church which men would enter by the gateway of baptism. This means that it would be impossible for men to be saved if they refused to enter or to remain in the Catholic Church, unless they were unaware that her foundation by God through Jesus Christ made it a necessity."

It is difficult for the Hindu to reconcile this statement with the declaration, on Non-Christian religions made by the same council. Clearly while striving for true tolerance, the Church is still anchored by its

fundamental "one path, one church" dogma. On the one hand the Church admits that there is truth and beauty in other religions. On the other it declares the Catholic Church essential for salvation.

Practical Applications of Dialogue and Inculturation

Hindus who have heard these semantic posturings and seen Hindu children slowly drawn away from their faith criticise this approach as clever maneuvering. Ram swarup in his "*Liberal*" *Christianity* pamphlet notes: "Their procedure is not to denounce Hinduism forthright: it is to take different categories of Hindu thinking and after exhausting all the positive points that Hinduism provides as solutions, proceed to show that Christianity gives fuller and ultimate solution to those and all other problems." He has quoted here from the book entitled *Indian Interiority and Christian Theology* which is a summary of a meeting by Christian theologians of India at Almora. Swarup recounts their evaluation of Bhakti: "Hindu Bhakti too has more demerits than merits. Its chief defects are that (1) 'the notion of love itself is not perfect;' (2) 'there is no integration between knowledge and love,'- one has to choose between them; and (3) it lacks a 'perfect concept of alterity [that God and His creation are separate] and there is no proper concept of sin.' Nevertheless, the Bhakti of a Hindu could still be a preparation for the final confrontation with the personal God who manifests Himself in the Christian Revelation." Swarup, who considers his religion the most enlightened known to man, is offended by the Almora conclusions.

A comparison might best illustrate Hindu concerns. Let us imagine that one day a Muslim missionary arrives in a poor section of America such as a part of the Catholic Hispanic (Mexican Origin) section of San Francisco. Well supplied with zeal and petrodollars from his own country, he learns Spanish, builds a Muslim cathedral along the lines of a Catholic building, outfitting it with pews, organs, choirs and so forth. Preaching from a Christian Bible appropriately edited according to the Koran, he puts on the clerical collar and black robes of a Catholic Priest and holds Sunday services which look just like Mass, except that prayers are to Allah and Mohammed instead of Jesus. In ministering to the local people, he tells them that his Islamic faith is just a slight variation of Christianity, one

which puts the crowning touches on it. Their father's religion, Catholicism was, he says, flawed but it is a good preparation for Islam. He gives loans to those in need, which need not be repaid if one joins his Church. He opens an orphanage and raises the children as Muslims though their parents are Christians. When accused of deceiving the people, he says he is only adapting his religion to the local context and expressing his Muslim charity and divine call to evangelize.

In this situation, would not the local Catholic leaders be offended? Would they not point out that this preacher was making an unfair and undue impact because of his foreign funding? They would ask why he did not simply come forward as he was, a Muslim, and not pretend that his religion was only an "improved" version of Christianity. They would challenge his right to wear the vestments their community honored, to sing the hymns their mystics composed, usurp symbols held to be holy, to draw their people away from Christ, thereby dividing the families and pitting wife against husband, father against son and neighbor against neighbor.

This is the situation the Hindu finds himself in, though it has developed over several hundred years. Christian missionaries have adopted Hindu ways of life, Hindu religious symbols, architecture, worship forms and declared themselves as Swamis. A Catholic priest who calls himself "swami" instantly attains the status and authority of a holy man in Hindu society, which he can use to make converts. By using Sanskrit terminology in his sermons he implies a close relationship of Hindu theology to Catholic theology, a relationship which does not really exist. Such missionaries speak authoritatively on Hindu scriptures and argue that their [Christian] teachings are consonant with everything Hindu, but add a finishing touch, a "fullness," to the traditional faith.

Hindus are seriously questioning whether yoga, puja, and sannyas, which are so deeply rooted in particular Hindu theological concepts, can ethically be adopted by Christianity. Christians don't believe in the practice of Yoga as the means to God-Realization - as taught by Hindus. Puja is based upon an understanding of Gods and Devas which Catholics do not share. And finally sannyas is Hindu monasticism, rooted in Hindu beliefs, leading not

to heaven and Jesus but to moksha - the Hindu's realization of Absolute Truth.

The Future

As the 21st century nears, Catholics are more interested than ever in India and in Hinduism, as indicated by the Pope's January visit to the subcontinent and by a growing number of faculty and departments in US Catholic universities dedicated to Asian Studies. As they have drawn closer to Hinduism, their history and motives in India and elsewhere have come under scrutiny.

Hindu spiritual leaders and intellectuals are open to the dialogue Catholics seek, but not if cooperation and brotherliness opens Hindu families to unethical conversion strategies. Obviously, the Catholic Church will legitimately adopt certain outer forms from Indian culture to serve existing members, but these have ethical limits. Among those actions of the Church which Hindus consider exceed these limits are the priests' and nuns' adoption of Hindu vestments and religious titles like "swami" and participation in non-Catholic sacraments such as sannyas. The misleading use of Hindu scripture and yoga teachings must also be examined, as should Catholic use of social and educational services which should not subtly erode Hindu faith or take advantage of Indian poverty to convert. Ethical guidelines must be crafted that allow Catholics to attend wholly to their members' spiritual needs, but do not impinge unscrupulously on Hindus.

Hindus continue to be wary of Christian expansionism and criticism of Hindu culture and theology. An energetic Hindu renaissance has turned wariness into open challenge to Christian conversions, with results yet to be seen. Still, Hindu respect all the great faiths, honor their spirituality. The difference today is that they demand that the Sanatana Dharma be equally respected and honored in the Vedic spirit of "Truth is one, paths are many."

Footnotes:

[1](#) This is not true. The slogan, *sarva-dharma-samabhâva*, was coined by Mahatma Gandhi in recent times, and extended to

Christianity and Islam. The medieval and modern Hindu acharyas have never accepted the prophetic creeds as *dharmas*.

[2](#) This is true if the beliefs do not lead to aggression. Hindus who extend tolerance towards doctrines of intolerance are not aware of their tradition vis-a-vis âsurika belief systems. They have become victims of the motivated propaganda, now internalised by many Hindus, that Hindus can and should tolerate, even respect, every doctrine howsoever devilish.

[3](#) Published by Voice of India in January, 1986

[4](#) The Niyogi Report seems to have swallowed the missionary propaganda about the extent of De Nobili's success. He had converted only 120 Hindus.

[5](#) Published in 1982 in *Manthan*, a quarterly from New Delhi, and included in *Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam* published by Voice of India, 1982. Reprinted in 1984, this book has been enlarged in a new edition brought out in 1993.

The J.R. Ewing Syndrome

CHAPTER 9

The J.R. Ewing Syndrome

Television and movies struggle mightily to be dramatic, humorous, tragic, colorful, sexy and outrageous. Video is modern man's moving canvas; like a painting, it can mimic but never match the real thing - life.

But perhaps it can help us interpret experience, find useful analogies, study the human condition. In fact, it did just that last night. As we pondered the front page story, seeking ways to explain the Hindu's profound concerns to the global Catholic community, our analogy appeared on the screen. It was J.R. Ewing. That's right, pardner, Dallas' powerful, scheming oil baron came to our rescue, This deserves a little explanation.

In this issue we tackled the confrontation of Catholic doctrine and Hindu dharma. Avoiding a temptation to replay history's horrors (high ratings, but not family viewing), the staff focused a journalistic lens on the simple, contemporary issue of Catholic adoption of Hindu spiritual forms and disciplines. Research deepened and two things became clear. First Catholics are struggling with the issue on their side, too. Almost every Catholic university has a special faculty member or even full department dedicated to Asian Studies; they teach Hinduism and Buddhism to students and theologians. They told us they love India and are genuinely drawn toward Eastern spirituality, finding its disciplines more profound, more effective.

Second, the Church still clings to the belief that the salvation of every soul on earth depends on Christ and on baptism in its cathedrals and by its priests. A few good Christians might get through, but God help Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, Muslims and free thinkers. This belief is so powerful, so compelling, so tenaciously held that it, all alone, destroys every effort of the Catholics to tolerate (I mean accept and leave alone, not merely endure) another culture's spiritual heritage. It is the motive upon which all priests, nuns and bishops act; it is the stone upon which all efforts at reconciliation

are built. This "there is one way" consciousness is not unique to Catholics. Fundamental Christians hold it even more dearly, so do Muslims, There are, at last count, 30,000 Christian and Islamic denominations each preaching a slightly different and singularly salvific path. This belief is the "J.R. Ewing Syndrome".

Think about it J.R. has one goal in life - to own the entire Ewing Oil Company and dominate the industry. Everything he does and says serves that desire. When he shakes a banker's hand, 60 million viewers know his intent - to own Ewing Oil. When he asks his brother Bobby to cooperate in some venture, he's after Bobby's shares. When he confesses to wifely Sue Ellen that, yes, he used to be a dirty dealer and a poor sport but is now a good ol'boy whom she should love and trust, he's up to something. You can be sure.

Yet time and again family, friends, bankers and a hopeful viewer or two get suckered by that winning smile and golden tongue. A moment's kindness and they embrace him, say they knew he would come around one day. Then, zap, JR. nails them when their back is turned. It's not his fault. It's illness. JR. is driven by the need to own it all. He will do anything and say anything (yes, even be nice) if it will get him Ewing Oil.

The Catholic Church suffers from a particularly virulent religious strain of the JR. Ewing Syndrome. It wants to own the company - which in this case is religion. Deep down, it hopes for a day when all men in all cultures will endorse its truths, worship at its altars, accept its Savior and enter its heaven. Catholics truly believe that they have a God-given duty to accomplish this. Their faith is unique, it is inherently better. For the good of humanity they do this, not for themselves; no doubt J.R. is equally certain that the company will be better off with him at the helm. Nevermind that Bobby will have to go, that Pam and Ray will suffer personal losses, that even his mother. Miss Ellie, will lose her rightful legacy.

I know what you're thinking. "These editors are living in the past. Sure, those things used to be so. But this is the 21st century. All men want to be brothers. It's different today, right?" Wrong. In Madras about three years back, local sisters were caught in a little ruse. It seems they took busloads of Hindu children to a popular snake farm every weekend. Oddly, the bus

always broke down. The nuns would fuss and fail to get it started, and ask the kids to pray, "First, let's pray to Ganesha, the Hindu elephant God." No results. Poor children! They might miss the snakes. "Well, let's all kneel and pray to Jesus for help." Lo, the bus started! Cheers, and a quiet voice assuring them, "You see, Jesus is more powerful. He loves you all."

Last week on our island a devout banquet manager invited two neighbors into his shrine room. One of them, a missionary immediately bellowed. "You're going to hell. I see satan in your eyes." Turning all deity pictures to the wall, he urged the man to accept Jesus Christ and abandon his Hindu heresies. Also last week a correspondent sent us photographs from a seminary in South India. They showed a giant statue of Christ, his two feet standing upon and completely covering the Indian sub-continent as sari-and dothi-clad devotees worshipped him. Wrote our researcher, "This is the dream of present-day Christians, the whole of India must be Christianised."

No one wants a true brotherhood of believers more than the Hindu, but such things must cease. Let Catholics tend their own flock as they wish. All the Hindu asks is to be left alone to follow his dharma, to sing his holy hymns, to raise his children as he deems fit, to seek his God in the way his scriptures and saints have revealed. The Hindu's spiritual heritage is priceless to him. He loves it as dearly as the Christian love his, and he intends to protect and preserve it. He has never imposed himself in Rome; and he doesn't want Rome to impose itself in Madras.

Listen to a Tamil Catholic priest recently describing his Indian students, "Some of them may never become good Catholics, but after my classes they will never be good Hindus." Sounds like J.R.? If a real family of man is ever to emerge on this earth (barring the terrible possibility that some Muslim, Christian or Hindu denomination succeeds in eradicating all other spiritual expressions), one in which all men are free to believe or doubt as they choose, then mankind must eradicate the J.R. Ewing Syndrome from religion. Anyone else who clings to the "my way is the only way" doctrine, must relinquish it forever. To use our analogy, as long as J.R. wants the whole company, his family and friends can never really trust him, never believe the things he says. Such ingenuous trust could be their destruction.

Christians have inherited a mischievous, peccant past. But the future could be different. After all, actor Larry Hagman (J.R.) meditates every morning and observes silence on Fridays! Let us see if Christian charity can be done purely and without a motive to convert. Let us see if the sisters can feed and clothe the poor Hindu, knowing he will be a stronger, healthier Hindu (not silently wishing he will stop wearing a tilak and give up beliefs in karma and reincarnation). Let us watch their schools educate our children, knowing their intellectual powers will strengthen and enrich the Sanatana Dharma. Let us welcome them to give selflessly, to desist from all expansionism, all proselytizing outside their church, knowing we will never sell them the family store. That is true charity. Anything less is business.

Will J.R. see the error of his ways and change? Will he devise a plot to usurp Ewing Oil Company? Tune in next week...

Interview with Father Bruno Barnhardt

CHAPTER 10

Interview with Father Bruno Barnhardt Immaculate Heart Hermitage

Father Barnhardt is a member of the same Catholic order-the Camaldolese Monks-as Father Bede Griffiths and has spent time at the Shantivanam Ashram. He shared some of his observations with Hinduism Today:

Q. What is your observation on how Shantivanam has been successful as a means of conveying the Catholic message to the Indian people?

A. For a long while for Catholicism to go into another country it would mean to bring some kind of European culture and implant it on top of the indigenous culture. Ideally Christianity can become incarnate in any different culture Father Bede's experiment is a courageous experiment in that direction and there has been quite a bit of resistance to it throughout the Catholic Church within the Indian Episcopacy of the church but it is gaining favor because, effectively, the central authorities have endorsed it. Actually on one level, it is not that far out, not that advanced. On the liturgy, for instance, there are no radical alternations of the Eucharist. He's added on some readings at the beginning which can come from Buddhist texts, Hindu texts, and others and then it proceeds. The only thing that is different in the sacramental gestures, there is use of flowers, fires, smoke, which is very impressive. He rightly perceives that there is no problem, no contamination of the Christian form by doing that.

Q. Is there any reaction from the local Hindu community that you are aware of?

A. There is quite a complacency in a sense, if not a resistance, a kind of indifference to interreligious dialogue on the part of educated Hindus.

However, the local people see the ashram as a genuine spiritual center and especially they admire Father Bede and esteem him as a spiritual leader.

Q. On Father Bede himself, we understand that he looks and lives like a Hindu swami wearing orange robes, practicing vegetarianism yoga, etc. How does the Roman Catholic Church view this?

A. I think some of the local clergy are probably turned off by it. You know some of the Catholic clergy in India are somewhat defensive, so anything that looks like a reversion to what they might consider paganism would be dangerous and threatening to them. However, there is an enlightened, broad and opened Catholic consciousness also there among the theologians and some of the Bishops.

Q. One Catholic nun, Ishapriya, claims to have actually taken the rites of initiation of a sannyasin from a Hindu swami.

A. That's a little unusual. Father Bede confers the rite of Sannyasin himself upon some of the people who stay at this ashram or who have become students, but for it to be received directly from a Hindu guru is unusual. One has to work that out in his own conscience, work out the way in which it relates to his Christian commitment. They see the sannyasin as a legitimate development of Christian spirituality. Consequently, Father Bede is able to ordain Christian sannyasins. I think that the Sannyasis that he has ordained are westerners who return to their western world and try to work out that commitment in their own context. They are not people who are going to infiltrate into Hinduism.

Q. The accusation is made that these priests take up the sannyas garb and ways as a means of infiltrating into Hindu society, claiming the place of religious authority within Hindu society which the Hindu Sannyasin holds and then using it as a means to make converts to Catholicism.

A. That could be. That has two sides of it, one is proselytism directly and a deceptive or improper use of the garb; however if a person really feels that his spiritual journey has carried him to that point and if he also has in mind that he is a witness to the gospel and really doesn't necessarily want to convert people but wants in some way to communicate Christianity in the form that makes sense to Hindus.

Q. Does he actually have a conversion program as far as bringing people into Catholicism from the Indian community?

A. Oh, no I don't know if there is any effort at all of that kind. I think he would not approve of that. What he feels is that what is needed more is a marriage of Hinduism and Christianity rather than bringing people over from one to the other. The conversion thing is not part of his style.

Returning to the Hindu Fold

CHAPTER 11

Returning to the Hindu Fold A Primer

What can a person do who finds himself a Catholic and wants to rejoin the Hindu faith of his ancestors? He need not wait until another incarnation, for his situation admits of a fairly simple solution-formal apostacy ("abandonment" from Catholicism, and readmission to the Hindu fold). Hindu religious leaders have always taken a liberal view of the return of converts to other faiths.

For example, Swami Vivekananda in 1899 gave his opinion: "Certainly [converts to other faiths] can and ought to be taken [back]. Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts; but on those who were alienated by conquest or strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed." And Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, former president of India, stated: "Devala's smriti lays down rules for the simple purification of people forcibly converted to other faiths and even of people who, for worldly advantage, embrace other faiths."

Saiva Siddhanta Church, with international headquarters in Hawaii, U.S.A., and missions in many countries of the world, has considerable experience with apostacy from Catholicism (and other western religions). This has come about in the course of its work with persons desiring to convert to the Hindu religion. It is their experience that the Catholic spiritual leaders consider the Namakarana Samskara (the name-giving ceremony) and the public declaration of affiliation to Hinduism as the specific act. Of particular relevance in Canon 2314 of the Code of Canon Laws of the Catholic Church: "All apostates from the Christian Faith and each and every heretic or schismatic are *ipso facto* excommunicated." Also relevant is the similar Canon 1364: "An apostate from the Faith, a heretic, or schismatic incurs a *latae sententiae* ['automatic'] excommunication." In

simple language this means excommunication is automatic if apostacy is made.

Here are two of the official letters received by Saiva Siddhanta Church members in response to requests for determination of apostacy: In a letter Rev. Edwin F. O'Brien, Vice Chancellor, Archdiocese of New York, states. "...according to the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, Canon 2314, paragraph 1, as soon as the bearer [of this letter] ...makes an act of public adherence to a religious faith other than Catholic, he is officially and automatically excommunicated from the Catholic Faith." (Dec. 29, 1978).

The Bishop John J. Ward, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles states, "No declaration can be given that you are an apostate. You may become an apostate if that is your desire. You would have to perform some action which would constitute apostacy according to the Code of Canon Law. If and when you perform such an action, it is possible that by that act you would become an apostate. The officials in the non-Christian religion which you propose to enter may possibly be the witnesses to your affiliation. If they are witnesses, they would need no further documentation of the apostacy which you intended and accomplished by that act of affiliation... [Your apostacy] will not occur until you go through the Hindu name-giving ceremony." (January 29, 1982).

Any competent Hindu priest may administer the name-giving ceremony, either with or without a ceremony of purification (depending on the circumstances). The new Hindu name and date of the event are then published in a local newspaper. As a result of this action, the person becomes once again fully entitled to all rites and benefits of the Hindu religion and, at the same time, deprived of the sacraments of the Catholic Church, including the right to be married or buried by a priest or to receive communion.

If it becomes necessary, a person may demand an official determination of his status within the Catholic Church through Canon Law Title I, Canon 16, Section 6, which reads in part: "When a person desires a judgment as to his status in the Church...it shall be the duty of the Bishop...to institute an inquiry and insure an impartial decision." A particular Catholic parish or diocese cannot ignore these Canon laws and claim, for example, that a

person making such public allegiance to another faith remains a Catholic in spite of his actions. But Canon Law 2314 states that excommunication is automatic and requires no action on the part of the Catholic Church.

Though local Bishops or priests may say otherwise, it is, in fact, quite easy to leave Catholicism and re-enter the Hindu fold. The laws are automatic-no authority is given to override them on the local level.

Malaysia Hindus Protest Christian "Sadhu"

APPENDIX 1

Malaysia Hindus Protest Christian "Sadhu"[1](#)

On November 8th and 9th, about 1,000 Hindus gathered at the Methodist Church in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur to protest and confront the Pentecostal Christian, "Sadhu Chellapah," who was making his third visit to Malaysia. An active propagator of the Christian faith in Malaysian estate and rural areas, he wears the orange robes (kavi) of Hindu monk and styles himself as a Sadhu (Hindu term for a wandering monk). The "Sadhu" declined a challenge to public debate with members of the Malaysian Hindu Sangam and the Sri Maha Mariyamman Temple over his statements on Hindu scriptures.

In his speeches, video cassettes and cassette tapes, "Sadhu" condemns, ridicules and misinterprets the Vedas, Upanishads and the Tirumurais to suit and explain his Christian faith. For instance, he interprets the mantra "Panchakaya Namaha" as "Lord with five wounds" meaning the crucified Jesus and the Rig Vedic phrase "Ekam Tat Sat" as "the One Lord who descends to earth only once," again implying Jesus.

At a meeting showing a video-tape by him containing his unreasonable interpretations and interpolations of the Hindu scriptures angry Hindus bombarded him with questions and demanded a public apology. Shaken by the raving crowd, some of whom promised him a coffin for his next visit, the "Sadhu" went up on stage and tendered his public apology.

However, three days later prior to his departure back to India, he summoned a press conference and said he made his apology under duress, hoping to avoid unwanted incidents.

Dr. Thomas Thangaraj, a Protestant from India who was in Kuala Lumpur as a delegate for the Second International Saiva Siddhanta Seminar was asked for his views about Sadhu Chellapah. He said "You can't interpret Hindu scriptures in such a way to suit Christianity, which is wrong and unfortunate. People are so gullible that they would swallow anything you say, it's part of psychology."

The Chairman of the Maha Mariyamman Temple, Mr. V.L. Kodivel said he will complain to the Prime Minister and the Home Affairs Minister.

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Hinduism Today*, Indian Ocean Edition, February-March, 1987.

Missionary's Dirty Tricks

APPENDIX 2

Missionary's Dirty Tricks [1](#)

R.K. Deshpande, president of Kalyan Ashram in Madhya Pradesh, India, submitted this news report translated from the Hindi newspaper Jansatta to Hinduism Today last month, as part of a campaign by the ashram to document and publicize the unethical conversion tactics practiced by many Christian missionaries.

In early 1982, Father Joseph Parekatil of the Catholic Church of Parasahi, Madhya Pradesh, destroyed the sacred murthi of the Goddess Visweshwari Siddheswari enshrined on the nearby Nawain Tekdi hill. After also burning a Forest Department tree plantation on the same hill, he erected a small wooden cross. His stated intention to gain possession of the sacred hill (presently government land) caused considerable consternation among the village's residents.

Famine conditions in the area diverted the villagers' attention and provided Father Parekatil an opportunity to carry out a scheme to get even a larger cross on the hill. He initiated a campaign demanding that wheat and gram be sent into the area. The request petitions were deceptively arranged with two forms. The signature on the first form requested food. The signature on the second, hidden form supported a plea to put a large cross on the hill.

A rumor was then started by an unknown person that permission to put up the cross had been granted. Seeing no reaction to the rumor, the father erected a 31 - foot high concrete cross on the hill on February 18th, 1983. Enraged villagers destroyed the cross a month later on March 17th. The situation remained peaceful and unchanged for two years, though the Goddess was not restored to the hill.

On February 20th, 1985, with the intent once again of trying to gain possession of the hill, Father Parekatil put on the orange robes of a Hindu sannyasin, built a hut on the hill, sat on a tiger skin and began performing worship in the Hindu style. A leaflet was distributed that claimed whoever came to the father's worship would have all their desires fulfilled. As a result, thousands of simple Hindus came to the hill on Fridays, unaware of the deception they were witnessing. On May 18th, Subdivisional Officer Jagir of the Forest Department registered a complaint at Akaltara Police Station and served eviction papers on the father, but to no avail.

Again there was agitation in the area, and this time, on October 1st, 1985, the villagers tore down the priest's hut and tossed away the remaining pieces of the concrete cross. Father Parekatil only gave up when he was arrested a week later for breaking the peace and released on bail with instructions to behave.

Father Parekatil told the press that he had no intention of taking illegal possession of hill.

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Motilal Vora, confirmed to M.L.A. Shri Munshilal that a complaint had been received about the illegal placement of the cross and a case registered of trespass on government land.

In his quest to "Christianize" the village of Parasahi, Father Parekatil: 1) destroyed a Hindu shrine; 2) burnt a government plantation; 3) illegally placed a cross on government land; 4) took advantage of famine relief to further his own aim; 5) illegally placed a second cross on the hill; 6) illegally moved onto government land; 7) deceptively disguised himself as a Hindu holy man; and 8) deceptively began worship in a Hindu manner. The only unusual aspect of this case is that the newspaper reports gave full attention to names, dates, places.

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Hinduism Today*, Indian Ocean Edition, December, 1988.

The First Dialogue

CHAPTER 12 The First Dialogue

Hinduism Today invited some interesting letters from its readers, Hindus as well as Christians. They are reproduced as below:

HINDUISM TODAY, APRIL-MAY 1987

Catholic Ashrams

The article on the above subject in your November-December issue exposes a fraud which Catholic missionaries have been practising upon unwary Hindus for a long time. An average Hindu does not know that the missionary clad in ochre robes is no sadhu, but a scheming impostor. So long as the Catholics stick to their exclusive theology, they will remain aliens in the land of Sanatana Dharma, no matter what disguises they don and what strategies of conversion they design... They are turning [Jesus] into a co-conspirator in their bid to subvert Hindu society and culture.

Vijaylakshmi Jain
Kamala Nagar, Delhi

The Preaching Balance

With reference to your long article and supporting editorial (Nov./Dec.,1986) on the "Catholic Ashrams," you conclude: "Let Catholics tend their own flock as they wish. All the Hindu asks is to be left alone to follow his dharma." This seems to me either anachronistic, ill-informed or disingenuous. If all the Hindu asks is to be left alone, why have these shores been saturated with gurus and swamis propagating, not just following, their dharma, especially these last decades? And as you know, their constituency has been largely the indigenous Judeo-Christian, not the transplanted Indian, a matter rather gleefully celebrated elsewhere in this issue.

Moreover, when I look at a charlatan like Rajneesh or a mercenary like Maharishi (whatever their standing in India, even if deplored), opposite a now rather benighted Bede Griffiths, I cannot help but think that you are getting the better of the exchange.

Dr. Christopher Nugent
University of Kentucky, Lexington

Catholic Ashrams

In our ashram we work on the basis of dialogue. It is a Christian ashram, just as other ashrams are Hindu, but we leave people...to follow any path to which they are drawn. I think that we are moving into a new age where people are learning to live with different religions in mutual respect. On the sociological level the problem of conversion remains, but on the level of prayer and meditation we transcend that level. I look on sannyasa as a state transcending creed and caste and all dharmas. One of the two founders of our ashram, Abhishiktananda, works very convincingly on this subject in his book *The Further Shore*. He was a personal friend of Swami Chidananda of Rishikesh. I hope that you are satisfied with this point of view. I feel that it is initiating a new understanding of Hindu-Christian relations.

Father Bede Griffiths
Tiruchi, S. India

Re: a "Catholic Sannyasini"

I am writing in response to your concerns which you have brought to the attention of the Holy Father [the pope]. We are presently checking with the proper Superiors concerning the activities of Sister Patricia Kinsey, RSCJ, [alias Ishapriya]. It is our sincere hope that we will be able to clarify the situation through these contacts and insure that nothing is being done to hinder honest, open and mutually tolerant relationships between Hindus and Catholics

V. Fagiolo Seer
Rome, Italy

The J.R. Ewing Syndrome

Your editorial "The J.R. Ewing Syndrome" brings to light the methods which today's Christian missionaries are employing to take advantage of India's poverty, illiteracy and simple culture. The question is why do the Christian missionaries find it so easy to dupe the Hindu masses. As you stated, the Hindu's respect for all religions is one cause. Other causes could be our lack of social service spirit, lack of organized religious bodies aiming at the spiritual uplift along with the social uplift of the masses.

Anjna Gupta
Saratoga, Illinois

HINDUISM TODAY, OCTOBER 1987

Hinduising Christianity

Your editorial in the January 1987 issue portrays the state of the majority of Christian sects. In this era of enlightenment when frontiers of knowledge are rapidly expanding, one cannot but pity their obscurantist attitude. The "J.R. Ewing Syndrome" very appropriately describes their deluded state. Since the establishment of the Church, due to vested interests, they have been brainwashed into the belief of "One Way- One Saviour." Hinduising Christianity in India seems to be their last ditch battle. We Hindus have suffered due to our indifferent attitude. We must give up complacency and organize ourselves to foil these "pseudo Christian Hindus" in their attempts to increase the number of converts. In this you are rendering yeoman service to the Hindu cause. Your paper is peerless among its kind.

Dr. S.G. Balani
Bombay, India

A Jesuit Writes

I am a Jesuit Catholic priest and professor of Hinduism (at Boston College). A colleague recently pointed out to me your article (Nov./Dec., 1986) on "Catholic Ashrams". On the whole I was quite impressed with the article and the questions it raises. While I have visited some of the Christian

ashrams mentioned and appreciate the efforts being made, I too have wondered about the extent to which Catholicism is being "dressed up" as Hindu without a sufficiently deep intellectual basis and real openness to new images and ideas not traditionally Catholic, and about how all this appears to Hindus. Your article raises these issues quite forcefully and well. I am curious what kinds of responses you have received, whether you think there is a valid level on which discussion might be pursued, etc. I ask this simply because it seems it would be a shame to let such a well-presented argument pass by without being taken seriously by all concerned. Thank you for the provocative piece.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

The Second Dialogue

CHAPTER 13 The Second Dialogue

An article in praise of Fr. Bede Griffiths, published in the *Indian Express* of Madras, provoked far more interesting exchanges, notably between Swami Devananda Saraswati and Fr. Bede Griffiths.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 18 MARCH 1987

An Apostle of Peace
(By R.R)

"Britain's appropriate gift to India is Rev. Father Bede Griffiths, the sage of Saccidananda Ashram, Shanti Vanam, Tannirpalli. The Trinity Sat-Chit-Ananda, is a genuine experience of the Godhead. The Christian experience leads to personal core identity at heart of the divine unity, as in later Hinduism, specially the Bhagavad Gita. This is the mystery of the trinity - dynamic identity to personal communion of love. This generated cosmos through the logos. The word 'trinitarian' is inadequate to indicate the full significance. The primacy of the mystical - experiential - God as loving presence has to be realised. Here, categories of immanence and transcendence collapse - entering the core of the heart (Guha) - there is an opening beyond all categories. All is in us and we are in God (Pantheism).

"The Shanti Vanam of Bede Griffiths is a place of dialogue, reconciliation and experience in depth, daily reading from the scriptures of Hinduism, Christianity, etc. This is indeed the 'peace capital' of the world"- thus observed Dr. Robert Wayne Teasdale in an absorbing talk on the life and thoughts of the Sage of Shanti Vanam on March 12 at 'Nirvan'.

After referring to the monastic antecedents of Rev. Father Bede Griffiths, Dr. Teasdale recalled that the Shanti Vanam Ashram was founded in 1968. The sage is a critic of rationalism and dualism - lowest level of

consciousness. "Scientific reason is inadequate, primordial tradition is philosophies perennis." New Science is now converging with the mystical, recognising the symbolic nature of myths. Reason and intuition have to be married - east and west - masculine and feminine counterparts. There is Advaitic experience in Christianity too - "I and the Father are, one" (Not I am the Father). The world religions must work together in practical ways on the concrete issues of peace, removal of hunger and poverty, ecology, solidarity, righteousness, sharing of resources, rational development, contemplation and action. The metaphor of the wheel (Dharma Chakra) is significant. The church is a possible matrix of humanity - reconciliation and unification.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 25 MARCH 1987

Shantivanam

Sir-This has reference to Dr. Wayne Teasdale's panegyric of Bede Griffiths entitled 'An apostle of peace' (I.E. March 19). Shantivanam Ashram was founded on March 21, 1950 by Father Jules Monchanin, a French priest who was deeply loved and is remembered by Christians and non-Christians in this area who had the privilege to know him. Dr. Teasdale wrongly states that Shantivanam was founded in 1968.

The philosophy underlying the ashram was formulated by Father Monchanin and the Father Le Saux (also from France) who assisted him.

I would recommend a beginner to start with Father Monchanin's book 'An Indian Benedictine Ashram' and to study it carefully in order to get the true message of Shantivanam.

L. STEPHEN,
Founder and Director,
Sachidananda Universal Brotherhood Centre,
Kulithalai - 639 104.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 30 MARCH 1987

Religious Purity

Sir-R.R. in his interesting column on religious discourses has on March 18 given a synopsis of one Dr. Robert Wayne Teasdale's appreciation of Father Bede Griffiths, a British priest living on the banks of the Cauvery in Tannirpalli, Tiruchi. Having visited Griffiths and his ashram a couple of times, permit me to offer a few comments.

Dr. Teasdale hails Griffiths as "Britain's appropriate gift to India". Britain's most welcome gift to India is cricket for thousands to enjoy and Shakespeare for the intellectuals. Griffiths is only an experimenter in the realm of spiritual matrix who commits the grave error of mixing Christianity and Hinduism to produce his own mix. This by no stretch of imagination is a gift to India. On the contrary it pollutes the inherent spiritual values treasured by us for centuries.

Rituals, rites, ceremonies in Hinduism have not to be changed to suit the whims of modern innovators. Griffiths, by superimposing the sacred word Om on a Cross imagines that he has created a new spiritual phenomenon. On the contrary he confuses and insults both Hinduism and Christianity. He fails to realise that by such acts he is neither enriching Christianity nor honouring Hinduism. One has to respect the unique rites and rituals of each religion, which placed in another context will be meaningless and confusing.

Some priests of the same mentality like Griffiths tried to graft Buddhist rites, mantras etc. in the Catholic Church in Thailand. The Buddhists vehemently objected to this as they considered it an insult to Buddhism. In India, Hindu tolerance is proverbial and hence men like Griffiths carry on their questionable experiments.

It may interest readers to know that a decade ago the Catholic Bishops of India in their National Centre in Bangalore had figures of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and dancing Nataraj prominently displayed on window grills of their church. Hindu Astheega [1](#) Sangham took them to court and had the figures removed. "If you wish to honour or respect Hindu deities, place them on your altars and not on window grills", argued Mr. Parasaran (now Attorney-General) on behalf of the plaintiffs.

Swami Kulandaiswami,[2](#)
6 Nimmo Road,
Santhome,
Madras - 600 004

INDIAN EXPRESS, 10 APRIL 1987

Religious Purity

Sir-Apropos of the letter of March 30 under the above caption, I wish to point out that Rev. Fr. Bede Griffiths is more than a gift for India. For centuries we have had men and women, who accepted Christianity in Indian patterns of thinking, expressions and actions. Fr. Bede is no pretender or experimenter. He is an international theologian of great reputation and author of several books. He has visited Europe, Palestine, the United States, and his talks are recorded.

The Saccidananda Ashram (Shanti Vanam) is a Christian ashram, where the wealth of goodness, truth and beauty in religious traditions of India is made clear through authentic forms of monastic life. These spiritual values belong to Christ Jesus, and they are a positive help for better Christian living. The wealth of Indian spirituality is also generously shared among all the people who experience Christian fellowship. From 1950 this ashram has catered to the spiritual solace of several persons belonging to different creeds. There they study Vedanta, and make use of Indian methods of prayer and meditation.

They read the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita as well as Tamil classics and other scriptures. They sing Tamil songs (bhajans), accompanied by drums and cymbals. Aarati is taken in solemn grandeur. At the morning worship sandal paste is used, as it is a symbol of divinity. Its aroma stands for Divine Grace. At noon kumkum is placed between the eyebrows as a symbol of the Third Eye, the inner eye of wisdom, which perceives Christ. Psalm 118/68, 95, 105 and 157 point to the discernment of Truth through the wisdom of Christ in us.

The 'Om' is universally used. It points to Lord God Almighty. It is the primordial sound from which the whole creation proceeds. To Christians

this word is the Cosmic Christ, made flesh on earth. Om has entered many citadels of Christian places of worship all over the world including the Vatican. Popes and Cardinals have not forbidden the use of Om by Indian Christians.

Prof. S. Radhakrishnan has observed: "If Europe has interpreted Christianity in terms of their own culture of Greek thought and Roman organisation, there is no reason why the Indian Christian should not relate the message of the salvation in Christ to the larger spiritual background of India. Cannot we have Vedantic tradition in Christianity?"

Ignatius Absalom,
1, Venkatasami Pillai St.,
Santhome,
Madras - 4.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 21 APRIL 1987

Not in Vatican

Sir-I am a Catholic priest who has just returned to India after three years of higher studies in Belgium, Germany and Rome. Our Ignatius Absalom in his letter 'Religious purity' of April 10 says that Om is universally used, it is Cosmic Christ, it has entered Christian places of worship all over the world, including the Vatican. This is not true. Only those Europeans who have joined the Hare Krishna movement or T.M.[3](#) know about Om. It is certainly not used anywhere in Rome and by no means in the Vatican.

Some priests in India use the word Om but the Pope and bishops have not given their permission for this. On the contrary they have said that Christians must respect all that is holy and sacred in Hinduism. Respect for each other's religion alone will help keep the purity of religions. Imitation will only lead to confusion. Hindus do not imitate anything Christian. They value their religion unlike some Christians who tamper with the purity of religion.

Fr. Joseph Pullikal,
42, Kavala Junction,

Changancherry.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 30 APRIL 1987

OM

Sir,-With reference to the letter 'Not in Vatican' of April 21, it may be pointed out that Archbishop Lourdusamy of Bangalore (now a Cardinal) celebrated the Holy Mass in the Indian Order before the De Propaganda Fide - the pet child of the Pope. This was done not many years ago, and the Om (while taking Aarthi) was visibly demonstrated thrice, while adoring Jesus in His Divine Presence.

Your correspondent, Fr. Joseph Pullikal, states (IE April 4): "Only those Europeans who have joined the Hare Krishna Movement or T.M. know about Om." This is not correct. TM is the Science of Creative Intelligence. It embraces all people, who know or do not know what Om means. All over the world S.C.I. (T.M.) is practised. It is neither contemplation nor meditation or concentration.

The purity of the Catholic faith is not in the least tainted or corrupted by absorbing or adapting all that is the best, holy and sacred from non-Christian scriptures.

IGNATIUS ABSALOM
1, V. Samy Pillai Street
Santhome, Madras-4

INDIAN EXPRESS, 1 JUNE 1987

No Experimenter

Sir-In early March this year, I gave a talk on Father Bede Griffiths of Shantivanam Ashram, Tannirapalli near Kulitalai to the group at Nirvan. Ale talk was summarised by R.R. in his column on March 18. Subsequent to the appearance of R.R.'s column and in response to it, Swami Kulandaiswami of Madras took strong objection to Bede Griffiths and his approach (IE, March 30). I should like to challenge Swami's contentions. In

my lecture, I spoke of Father Bede as "Britain's appropriate gift to India" because he is the best England has to offer. The context of the remark was India's colonial experience, a period in which Britain took from India, giving little in return.

Bede Griffiths came to India in 1955, and from the very beginning he did not hold himself above her people, as the English did in the colonial period, but adopted their way of life, respecting their customs and beliefs. Furthermore, he learned Sanskrit and studied the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita as well as other texts sacred to the Hindu tradition.

I think it is profoundly unjust and inaccurate to brand him an 'experimenter', as Swami Kulandaiswami does. Rather than being an experimenter, as Swami alleges, Bede Griffiths has an extraordinary grasp of the Hindu and Christian faiths.

Bede Griffiths' approach cannot be appreciated by two brief visits to Shantivanam, but only by a careful study of his position, his life, practices and actions, including exposure to him over a long period of time. Doing so, one would discover that he is a Christian with a totally open heart to Hindus and Hinduism, and a clear understanding of the value of the Hindu tradition and the necessity to preserve it.

Nor is it accurate to assert, as Swami Kulandaiswami does, that Father Bede pollutes Hinduism. For Father Bede adopts elements of Hindu ritual and prayer not to "produce his own mix", but rather to express the Christian faith in terms intelligible to Indians. There is never any doubt at Shantivanam, for instance, that when mass is celebrated in the Indian rite, using symbols, gestures and rituals borrowed from Hinduism, that it is anything but the mass. What does pollute Hinduism, however, and really devalues it as a spiritual path, is the failure to actualise its teachings in one's own life, the compassion and spiritual perfection or true holiness. This goes for Christianity as well. Father Bede has achieved the ideal in both traditions, and so speaks as a realized master.[4](#)

Dr. Wayne Robert Teasdale,
Benedictine Priory,
1475 Pine Ave., West,

Montreal, Quebec H3G IB3
Canada.

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO INDIAN EXPRESS⁵

Early June, 1987

OM

Sir-Wayne Robert Teasdale has registered his holy indignation and thrown down the Benedictine gauntlet on behalf of Bede Griffiths of Shantivanam. As realized masters are also known by their works, Swami Kulandaiswami has legitimately questioned the works of Bede Griffiths and expressed his opinion, which represents the opinion of a large number of Hindus and Christians. The Catholic Laity Congress at Bombay circulates pamphlets denouncing Bede Griffiths for his syncretism and calls for disciplinary action by the Church. Shantivanam was placed under the protection of a foreign Benedictine house to escape just such an action and it remains for Bede Griffiths to explain himself to a concerned public.

Ten years ago in the Vatican, I suggested to a papal nuncio that I might don a friar's habit and preach Hinduism in the Italian countryside. I was promptly warned that I would be charged with impersonating a cleric and public mischief, as Roman Catholicism was the protected state religion and in full control of Italian education.⁶ Hinduism is neither protected nor India's state religion, and we find priests like Bede Griffiths in the garb of Hindu sannyasis preaching Christianity in the Tamil countryside. As these priests know our rites and traditions and are aware of our sensibilities, by what right or authority do they wear the ochre robe?

I do not think any Indian opposes Bede Griffiths for earnestly saying his prayers (except, perhaps, a few deep thinkers like Taranath Kamath and S.M. Hussain who fancy we are only biological machines with interchangeable parts).⁷ But whatever he has grasped, Bede Griffiths has no grasp at all of the Indian psyche. It must be brought to his attention that he is meddling with the soul of a very old and sophisticated people by continuing his experiments at Shantivanam. This is an exceedingly dangerous activity for even a *brahmavid*⁸ to indulge in, and it cannot be

considered as anything other than another spurious gift from stepmother England.

Swami Devananda
RCC (Avadi) P.O.
Madras - 600 109
CC. Bede Griffiths

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO INDIAN EXPRESS⁹

June 17th 1987
Saccidananda Ashram
Shantivanam,
Tannirpalli - 639 107,
Kulittalai, Tiruchi Dt.,
Tamil Nadu.

Sir-Swami Devananda has suggested that no one who is not a Hindu has a right to wear the ochre robe of the sannyasi. I would like to question this in the light of the Hindu tradition itself. The ochre robe is the sign of sannyasa and sannyasa according to ancient Hindu tradition signifies renunciation of all worldly ties, the transcendence of all 'dharmas', that is, all social bonds, whether social or religious. Does not the sannyasi undergo a funeral rite, thus marking his death to all social ties?

In the light of this I would suggest that it is possible to see in sannyasa the sign of the transcendence of all religious limitations and the opening to the transcendent Reality, from which all religion springs. To-day we feel more than ever the need to go beyond the limitations of the different religions and seek for the source of unity which can unite them in the service of humanity. This is how we understand sannyasa in our ashram and why we feel justified in wearing the ochre robe. I may say that in all my more than thirty years in India I have never before known a Hindu sannyasi object to this.

I may add that our ashram belongs to the Benedictine order, which is the order of monks in the West, which corresponds as closely as possible to the order of sannyasis in India. We see in this one way of bridging the gulf

between Hindus and Christians and working towards that unity among religions for which the world is looking to-day.

Bede Griffiths

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA

July 8th 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Indian Express^{[10](#)} which I wrote in reply to the letter which you sent me. I am thankful that your letter was not printed, so that my reply was not needed, as I don't think that the Indian Express is a good platform for such debates.

I also enclose a leaflet on our ashram which explains the principles which have guided the ashram since its foundation. I may say that these principles have received the approval of the Church both in India and abroad.

I don't see why a Hindu should object to this any more than a Christian objects to Ramakrishna order and many other Hindu ashrams incorporating devotions to Christ in their worship.^{[11](#)}

As regards dress, the Ramakrishna monks have no hesitation in adopting the clerical dress of a Christian clergyman in America and none objects.

Can't we get beyond mutual hostility and work together for peace?

Yours sincerely,
Bede Griffiths

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS

21 July 1987

OM

Sir- Hindus are very aware of the abuses perpetrated by Roman Church in India since 1947,^{[12](#)} and how priests like yourself misrepresent and exploit the *Sanatana Dharma*. That the Church sanctions your work is no

surprise to us, for it is in her own ideological and political interests to do so. This misappropriation of our cherished symbols (the pranava [OM] in your official device) and sacred traditions (*sannyas*) is unethical at least, and your attempt to justify the wrong with Hindu philosophy and modes of thought only adds insult to injury. We do not need Christian priests to interpret and teach us our *dharma*. Teasdale says you don't hold yourself above the Indian people; I say you do, with presumption. To disprove my charge, you must seek the guidance and sanction of our representatives, *acharyas*, *mandaleshwaras*, *mahapeethadipathis*, and *gurus* when incorporating Hindu forms and symbols into your experiment. Indian culture cannot be divided from Hindu religion, though the Church, working in concert with our own boneless intellectuals, tries hard to do so. This self-evident fact is especially true of the *sannyas* tradition, for the *sannyasin* is the very embodiment of *Sanatana Dharma*.

The Calcutta High Court has recognised *sannyas* as a Hindu religious institution; declared the minimum actions, before witnesses, that must be made before a person is renounced; and defined *sannyas* a 'civil death' within the Hindu Code.

In the Dec/Jan edition of *Hinduism Today*, the spokesman for the Divine Life Society (Rishikesh) stated categorically that *sannyas* cannot be given to a non-Hindu, and the *peethadipathi* of Kasi Math (Tirupanandal) has unequivocally said the same. Dasanami *mahamandaleshwaras*, the recognised authority for *sannyas*, emphatically confirm this opinion. They assure me that the Naga *Akhadas*, whose sadhus police the *sannyas* community, would strip you of your cloth if they had the opportunity. You get away with this impersonation because the Tamil maths are more or less indifferent to the unseemly drama.

Prior to *sannyas*, a person must have a *guru* and fulfil very stringent conditions which include that he be a Hindu and recognise the authority of the Veda. Though the *viraja havana* is a central rite, it is not the key act by which a person renounces (a point you evidently don't understand). Rituals aside, a *sannyasin* must be part of a lineage originating with Narayana, and be recognised by the *sannyas* community, whose members witnessed his completed *samskara*, and, finally, his death. To insure this line of

succession of *gurus* and *rishis*, *sannyas* is given by an *acharya mahamandaleshwara* on behalf of the candidate's guru. Theoretically one *sannyasin* can make another, and there are other extenuating circumstances that are recognised but do not apply here. It follows, as stated earlier, that a *sannyasin* is implicitly a representative of Hinduism.

You cannot ignore the above facts or philosophise them into oblivion. The Church does not recognise a priest outside of the apostolic succession of Peter, and we do not recognise a *sannyasin* outside of the Hindu *paramparas*. In that you are a Roman priest and Benedictine monk, you cannot possibly be a *sannyasin*; it is verily a contradiction in terms.

There are many other factors involved here, which I will spare you from out of compassion.

The countryside is crawling with Christian missionaries in Hindu religious garb (there are two in my own village, not counting the Pentecostals and their loudspeakers,) and legitimate *sannyasins* are treated with suspicion and hostility by the public, who rightly, are afraid of being deceived. We are now obliged to carry identity papers from our *acharyas* and *maths*, an absurd situation (in a Hindu country) that is almost a contravention of the ideals of *sannyas*.

It goes without saying that only Lord Shiva knows who is the real *sannyasin*. This is a spiritual condition (truth), expounded by Lord Krishna in the Gita, and does not apply to external forms or functions or identity. It is true of all persons who have attained the state many of whom do not wear ochre, call themselves *sannyasins*, or have the right to do so. This *sannyas* is a mystery of the heart and great secret, and does not support your own claims.

The *sannyasin* does not renounce *dharma* (however you define this word); he enters the fourth *ashrama* within the Hindu *dharma*. Only the *avadhuta* stands outside of the four *ashrams*, and he does so by discarding the ochre cloth or never taking it in the first place.

The example of the Ramakrishna Mission is also inadmissible, as their conduct and practices are not the standard Hindu norms are measured

against. They were an anomaly long before they left us.

The Vedanta is not a doctrine (ideology) but a *darshana*, a point of view, and only one point of view among many accepted by Hinduism. It has become the last refuge of the Christian missionary, who sees the possibility of turning its sublime non-dualism into a monstrous monotheism. We will never admit this perversion, believe me.

You sin against Hinduism by nailing the holy *pranava* to the Roman cross and incorporating the same in your official device. The *pranava* is the very essence of Hinduism, and identifies it to the world exactly as the cross identifies Christianity. (This is really an issue to be taken up by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.) We know what the Nazis did to the divine *swastika*, and we will not permit the same to happen to the *pranava*. Neither Francis of Assisi nor the Bible support your conjecture about this sacred word and amen. The Malaysian courts ordered the removal of Muslim symbols from Satya Sai Baba's crest, as he doesn't represent that religion. And note that the one serious complaint against Gitananda of Pondicherry was that he hurt the Hindus' religious sentiments with his original iconography.

Christianity, from its inception to today, has subsumed and subverted the deities, symbols, rituals, and philosophies of the peoples it wishes to conquer. This activity, which is imperial and not spiritual, must cease before hostilities and mistrust will die; hostilities, by the way, that we never invited in the first place.

There is no unity of religions on the level of religion, each being a distinct entity. If you wish to take sannyas, first renounce your priesthood and obtain a certificate of apostasy from the concerned Church authority. We can then accommodate you.

By trying to justify your position as it is now, you impugn Hinduism, slur sannyas, rout reason, ruin meaning, mutilate categories, transpose symbols, deny sacred convention and usage, profane principles, philosophise, and generally present an argument that is oxymoronic.

Swami Devananda

P.S. The Indian Express is not sympathetic to Hindu concerns, we being a minor majority rather than a majority, and it is to your advantage to debate in their columns. They will give you the last word, which is a psychological if not a moral victory.

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA

July 23rd 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

Thank you for your letter. I am interested in your view of Hinduism and appreciate your point of view, but it is very different from that of the vast majority of Hindus whom I have known. I have known many Hindu sannyasis, visited many ashrams and had many Hindu friends, but no one before has ever objected to anything that I have done. You are anxious to establish Hinduism as a separate religion with its own unique doctrine and symbols which differentiate it from other religions. But most Hindus hold the opposite view and maintain with Ramakrishna and Vivekananda that all religions are essentially the same and differ only in accidental characteristics which can be ignored. I have myself difficulties in accepting this position but I would have said that it is the prevailing view among educated Hindus to-day.

As regards sannyasa, you maintain the strict tradition of sannyasa and I have every respect for this, but you must know as well as I do that there are any number of Hindu sannyasis who wear the Kavi dress but have had no initiation or training and are often little better than beggars. There are also Hindus who simply take the kavi when they feel the call to sannyasa; there is one staying in our ashram at present who has done just that. You may be interested to know that there are two other sannyasis staying with us at present, who have both spontaneously expressed their appreciation of our way of life. I have nearly always found that Hindus give me the same respect as they would give to a Hindu sannyasin and I have often been deeply touched by it. You yourself mention that there is a sannyasa of the heart and this surely is the key to the whole subject. It is not the outer garb or the symbols in which he believes which make the sannyasi but the renunciation of all desires, that is of all egoism. You may be interested to know that one of the two founders of our ashram, Swami Abhishiktananda,

wrote a book on sannyasa called *The Further Shore*, the contents of which were originally published in the Divine Life of Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. Many Hindus have told me that they consider it the best book on sannyasa that they have read. In it he makes the point that the attempt to make Sannyasa part of the Hindu *dharma* has been frequently questioned. It is an attempt to institutionalise what is essentially beyond all institution. He uses the term *dharmatita* and even *turiyita*. I think that you would find it very revealing.

Perhaps my chief quarrel with you is that you are trying to institutionalise Hinduism, to turn it into a sectarian religion, which seems to me to be the opposite of its true character. I feel that you do the same with Catholicism. That Catholicism has a strong institutional character I do not deny, but I would say that there is something in Catholicism which transcends its institutional structure as there is in Hinduism and that is what really matters. I would probably share many of your objections to Christian missionaries and would certainly not defend much that has been done in India and elsewhere in the name of the Church.¹³ Our search to-day is to go beyond the institutional structure of religion and discover the hidden mystery which is at the heart of all religion. It is this that sannyasa means to me.

As I say, I respect your position and see the value of the principles which you defend, but I can hardly see them as representative of Hinduism as a whole, any more than our friend Kulandaswamy's view of Catholicism is representative of Catholicism as a whole.

With my respects,

Bede Griffiths

P.S. I enclose an extract from Abhishiktananda's diary which expresses his (and my) point of view:

"My message has nothing to do with any *dharma* (religion) whatever. That is the case with every fundamental message. The message of the Upanishads, as regards its formulation, still depends on its Vedic-Brahmanic roots, but it is self-luminous - svapraksa; it reveals the depth in its proper light. It reflects it.

"Similarly, the Gospel message is no more bound to the Jewish world in which it was revealed. Its universal value consumes and melts the wax vessels of the Judaeo-Greek world in which this honey was deposited. It echoes the very depths of the human heart: the message of love, of mutual giving, of relationship. The message that mankind's condition is divine. The Upanishadic message has moulded the Indian mind, and the Gospel message that of the West, though passing through channels that are further and further removed from the Source; and with waters more and more adulterated.

"We have to recover the source, and place humanity (distracted by the devas, by religious alienation and superimposed sacredness) face to face with itself, with its own depth. To make man discover 'that he is' at a level deeper than any external identity or any analysis of himself, even existential."

-From *Abhishiktananda's Dairy*, 14.12.71

SWANU DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIMTHS
30 July 1987 (C.E)[14](#)

OM

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni,
and he is the heavenly Winged Bird.
The sages speak of the One by many names:
they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

Sir-I would like to give you the benefit of the doubt (as do many of my brothers). I am not able to do so because the inherent tolerance and secularism of Hinduism has been abused by your kind too long. I appreciate that you do not want a sectarian Hinduism, for that would directly threaten your own vested interests. But there is more to my doubt than this: Like the prostitute who lectured young men on morals, your position is wrong where your words are right. It is the means that are in question, not the spiritual ideals. And because your means are in question, so are your motives.

I have read Christian history and doctrine, lived in Franciscan houses, and faced the Jesuits in their own Roman lair. My view of Christian ideology and practice is far less charitable than Kulandaiswami's. I am convinced that Christianity's advent is one of the great disasters in the history of mankind. This view does not include Christians themselves (of whom I have many friends), but it most certainly does include that soul-sucking, carnivorous, leviathan the Church, and, by extension, her ideologues. Church motives are always suspect when they are not openly vicious, and the means she employs to further her own wicked ends has never had any relationship to the ideals she preaches at others. You have been in India long enough to know that we idolators are more interested in what we see than what we hear. We want action, right action, not words.

That a few of the six million sadhus in India wander into your house, flatter you for a meal (Do you offer them the flesh and blood of Jesus too?), use your library, or study you (as I have), is of little consequence. That these sadhus wear ochre is fine, for the simple reason that they are Hindus and not Roman priests. And herein lies the great contradiction of your position: you preach the transcendence of religion but remain yourself an official of a sectarian religion.

And not only are you a Roman priest, but the moment you get into trouble you run to mummy Church for financial, emotional, moral, psychological, and doctrinal aid. How is this foreign aid and first allegiance going to bring about the Indianisation of Christianity, much less the transcendence of religion? Yet you have the insolence to suggest that Hinduism not organise herself in her hour of need. You will teach us religious transcendence from the very pit of religious institutionalism, a pit we have not fallen into in 10,000 years. I think your motives are clear; indeed, the idea is worthy of a Jesuit! We will transcend our dharma and the Roman Church will happily reap the benefits of our foolishness, being already on the scene to fill in the void we leave behind us. If you were remotely serious about the spiritual ideals expressed in your letter, you would renounce the Church forthwith and humbly place yourself in the hands of God.

Hinduism has always been a commonwealth of religious and spiritual institutions, some highly sectarian, though we have avoided the curse of centralisation. There are times when centralisation is justified, when Hindus of conviction must work together for a common goal. This is not sectarianism; it is common sense. I do think Dayananda and Vivekananda would disagree with me here. Shankara himself institutionalised sannyas for the same reasons that the institution must be revitalised to-day: to protect *dharma*. We have always maintained and practised the spiritual ideal of transcending institutional limitations, and have succeeded where others have failed because our spiritual disciplines demand that the correct means be employed. The first injunction observed by all seekers is that they do not interfere with, bastardise, or destroy the culture, traditions, symbols, and religion that support them on their journey, even when they have passed beyond these institutions. And passing beyond these institutions does not mean meddling with them on the way. God has always given us reformers when we need them. Do you qualify, Bede Griffiths?

Westerners have great difficulty with Hinduism because they arrive with all their religious baggage and prejudices. They see in our Gods and religious diversity only anarchy and superstition. They think in linear modes almost exclusively, which results in a passion for centralised order and a desire to impose their will on history (the Church is the best example of this egocentric fear). Being unable to penetrate our psyche, they call us hypocrites when they don't understand us. As good pagans, we are Janus-faced, but this natural subtlety is hardly hypocrisy. These Westerners, like you, would like to skim the spiritual cream off the Hindu milk, put it in a bottle of their own design, and run off with it. They feel no obligation to the people, country, culture, or religion that produced this precious drink. There is neither responsibility nor commitment on their part, and we forgive them this juvenile delinquency because they know not what they do. But you cannot be forgiven so easily, for you act with mature intent and are already committed to Rome. You stay married to the Scarlet Woman¹⁵ when it is the Divine Cow of Hinduism who produces the *amrita* you hanker after. If your Woman were not barren and dry, you would not have come to Hindustan in the first place. I am surely a Hindu chauvinist, but you are the very worst kind of spiritual colonialist.

As the Americans say, you are caught between a rock and a hard place. You may be able to resist us by crucifying the sacred Omkara, but should we decide to swallow you up, you will never survive our catholic digestive powers. Or so I predict. I am only a gadfly and drama critic, Father Bede, and am rather sorry to see an old hippie get himself into such a karmic fix.

Your own Self,
Swami Devananda.

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA
July 31st 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

Thank you for your letter. It is clear from all you say that you are a fundamentalist.¹⁶ Whether Hindu or Christian or Buddhist or Muslim, a fundamentalist is one who clings to the outward forms of religion and loses sight of the inner spirit. You think that you are defending Hinduism but you are really defending the outer shell, while you destroy the inner spirit. It is the same in your attitude to Christianity. You attack the outer shell of Christianity but of its inner spirit you have no idea at all. I consider fundamentalism in all its forms the greatest danger in the world to-day. It is destructive of all genuine religion altogether. Nothing could be further from the spirit of the great Hindus of the past, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi or Ramalinga Swamigal. They remained firmly Hindu in their religion but were open to the spirit of truth in Christianity and in all other religions. I consider myself a Christian in religion but a Hindu in spirit, just as they were Hindus in religion while being Christian in spirit.

Your attitude to sannyasa shows the absurdity of your view. A Hindu who may have no initiation, no discipline and no understanding of the real meaning of sannyasa can wear the kavi and be accepted, but anyone else who seeks to live according to the authentic values of sannyasa must be rejected. It is the same with the Om. A Hindu who has no understanding of its depth and uses it purely superstitiously is all right but anyone else, who has deep reverence for its authentic meaning must be condemned.

It is obvious that we differ fundamentally in our understanding both of Hinduism and of Christianity and indeed of religion in general, so I will not continue this correspondence.

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely,
Bede Griffiths.

SWANU DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIMTHS
7 August, 1987 (CE)

OM

And that work which is done with a confused mind,
without considering what may follow, or one's own powers,
or the harm done to others, or one's own loss, is work of
darkness

- *Bhagvad Gita*, 18.25

Sir-Thank you for a last letter, though, I confess, I am very disappointed with its purple contents. I had hoped that when you took refuge in humbug jargon. I would at least rate above a superstitious fundamentalist. Chinmayananda is often dubbed a communalist, and I was looking forward to some dramatic monotheistic curse like great satan or antichrist.

It remains that you have avoided every specific issue, with generalisations and specious philosophising; it remains that you exploit our tolerance, secularism, and hospitality; it remains that you abuse and pervert our symbols and traditions to your own motivated missionary ends.

One of the uses of symbolism is to convey knowledge directly to the psyche by bypassing the discursive, analytical mind. When your symbolism and curious liturgy requires explanation and apology, it immediately fails in this primary purpose. Your combination of the holy Omkara with the

unholy cross is a true bastardisation, the product of artifice; but then Christianity itself is the product of artifice, not revelation.

As you are a Christian in religion, wear the cloth of a Christian in religion (as the Hindu saints you name wore Hindu dress). And if you have a Hindu spirit, then let me recommend a good Hindu exorcist.

You have not transcended religion and you have no intention of doing so, whatever your pious declarations. You have an overriding ambition to subvert and subsume us with our own spiritual concepts, just as Paul subverted and subsumed the Greeks with their's. As you see parallels in history, so do we, and we are thus forewarned and forearmed. We will not be meekly sold down the river like Constantine![17](#)

The Kanchi Pariaval has devoted his life to salvaging what little is left of Vedic Brahminical orthodoxy, which is, need I tell you, concerned with externals, with rites and rituals, with birth and caste (he will not give me prasada because I am neither a brahmin nor orthodox). Yet he is a brahmarshi, a living national spiritual treasure whose wisdom and compassion are universally recognised. As a free soul above sectarian religion, he continues to live within the strict disciplines of Vedic orthodoxy (without meddling in the affairs of Christians and Muslims). It can only be that this so-called outer shell of brahminical Hinduism has some value today, and I respect but do not recommend his way of life. He would agree that there are other equally good spiritual disciplines within Hinduism and advises them himself. He would also censor me for quarrelling with you, as he would invite you to drop your pretences and return to traditional Christianity. From your point of view, he must be the most superstitious, literal-minded fundamentalist outside of Islam (though a number of your own people are deeply attached to him).

It is a moot question whether wishy-washy, self-seeking liberalism has done more harm in this unhappy world than fundamentalism. It seems to me that both have contributed equally to our sad predicament.

Yes, we have many bad sadhus, as you have spoiled priests (who, the papers report, are busy spreading the new plague among choirboys in America and dying of it themselves).

Malachy [18](#) long ago prophesied Christianity's demise and the popes take him very seriously (as they should, this rex mundi being the third to last one). Hinduism has no such prophet of doom, knows no birth in history, and will not die even if it loses all its outer accoutrements. But this does not mean that your mischievous work can go unnoticed or that I should cease to protest.

I am not the protector of *Sanatana Dharma*; Narayana is the only protector of *Dharma*. This is an awful truth for you to admit, Bede Griffiths, and one that neither you nor I will escape.

Your own Self,
Swami Devananda

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA

August 11th 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

I will not answer your letter, as I said, but since you quote the Bhagavad Gita in reference to me, perhaps you would like to look up Bhagavad Gita, 16, 4. [19](#) and see how far it applies to you.

Yours sincerely,
Bede Griffiths

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIMTHS

14 August, 1987 (CE)

OM

My dear sir:

I say, what a very clever way for a self-styled brahmavid to tell me to go to hell!

The quotation applies nisi Dominus, *frustra*. [20](#)

I have just learned that your brilliant countryman Colin Wilson refers to Christianity as Crosstianity. What a marvellous insight!

Your post card has been put in *puja* - and, please note, not malevolently nailed to an imperial cross - with a garland of sweet smelling flowers around it.

Narayana remembered,

Your own Self,
Swami Devananda.

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
27 August 87 (CE)

OM

Father Bede:

Since the end of our correspondence (which I did not directly invite in the first place), I have been doing some research on your *ashram* and its founder, Fr. J. Monchanin. I discover that his writings directly confirm my suspicious about your motives and activities in India (see the enclosed clipping). You have shamelessly tried to mislead me, even drawing the red herring of Abhishiktananda's dairy across my path, but my own conclusions are now fully vindicated.

In my considered opinion, you are nothing more than another deceitful and militant 'Crosstian' missionary, who would stand on the hoary head of Hinduism at any cost. This being the case, you have no moral authority to address or advise seekers of Truth.

Narayan ki Jay,
Swami Devananda

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA
August 31st 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

Thank you for your letter and the enclosure about Father Monchanin. Of course, if I held the same view as Father Monchanin, you would be justified in suspecting me of deception. But you must remember that Father Monchanin was writing forty years ago and immense changes have taken place in the Church since then. The Vatican Council introduced a new understanding of the relation of the Church to other religions and all of us have been affected by this. Swami Abhishiktananda (Fr. le Saux) in particular early separated himself from Fr. Monchanin, especially after his profound experience with Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvanamalai. This changed his whole outlook and he went on to develop a completely different way of relating Hinduism and Christianity. His diaries show what a struggle it was for him to reconcile Christianity with his advaitic experience but in the end he came to what I consider the most profound understanding which has been reached by any Christian, and it is his view that I follow. This is found in his book, *The Further Shore*, which was the last he wrote and gives his deepest insight. I will send you a copy of this and I beg you to read it carefully. If you want to attack me, you must know what I really believe; otherwise you are just shooting arrows in the dark and can effect nothing. You must realise also that the view which I hold is not peculiar to me. It is approved by the authorities of the Church both in India and in Rome. Many Catholics, of course, will not agree with it, but the understanding of the relation of the Church to other religions is only slowly growing and there are many different views in the Church to-day.

With best wishes,
Bede Griffiths

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
7th September 1987 (CE)

OM

Father Bede Griffiths:

As a public figure seeking public acclaim, you are subject to public scrutiny and criticism. This is also true because 1) you are an official representative of a foreign sectarian power that seeks ideological hegemony

in India and because 2) you wilfully meddle with our sacred tradition and symbols, causing grave offence.

There is no evidence that the Church has changed her wicked ways in the last forty years. On the contrary, since the checks placed on the Church by the British were removed, she has been busy making hay in our tolerant secular sunshine. The methods of conversion have changed, but the Church's ancient ambition for world dominion has not changed. The pope himself contributes over fifty million dollars a year towards missionary work worldwide, and this does not include the vaster sums of money available to Christian evangelists of all persuasions for their so-called charities. What has happened in the Church is that the term 'heathen' has been changed to 'non-Christian' (with the prayer that the 'non' will soon disappear). There have also been some unctuous platitudes uttered about our spiritual heritage at official functions. Rome, in her eternal conceit, thinks we will accept the facelift at face value and not probe into the heart of the person who wears the mask. This presumption itself is an example of patronising Christian arrogance. If the Church had in fact changed her ways then the dirty work of converting our poor and humble masses to Christianity would have long ago ceased.

What Christians overlook is that most Hindus don't recognise Christianity as a religion at all, except as a public courtesy. Hindus do recognise it as a militant ideology with sanctimonious pretensions. It is the mother-sister of Communism, itself an heir to Abraham's ideological patrimony. Its only true home is hell, and its violent export to Europe, Asia, and the Americas was disastrous to those once-spiritual cultures. This is not my opinion. The facts are recorded in every history book, and if you don't like history then read Chaucer. In the *Canterbury Tales* he says in his own special way that Roma is the very antithesis of Amor.[21](#)

There is no evidence that the vindictive and malevolent nature of Jehovah, of his prophets, of his people, and of his son's church is divine; there is no evidence that the worship of a dead and out-dated foreign god purifies the heart or elevates the mind; and there is no evidence that the superstitious belief in vicarious salvation makes a person a better person. But there is overwhelming evidence that the belief-system of Christians

thrives on guilt and despair and panders to the id,[22](#) the most base instincts in mankind.

This review aside, I must say that the idea that Abhishiktananda had to reconcile his advaitic experience with Christianity is absurd. If it is true, then I postulate that he did not have the advaitic experience. Advaitic experience is self-contained and its own proof. It does not require reconciliation with any sectarian creed. It transcends them. Both you and your PR man, Teasdale, imply that you are in the transcendent advaitic state. This is of course silly. Your acts disprove your words. No man of advaitic realisation would quarrel with me, would need to prove himself to Rome (whose dogmas already deny the possibility of the advaitic state). I suggest you forget advaita and look up the words 'reconcile' and 'transcend' in the dictionary.

You do not need Church sanction to experiment with Hindu traditions and symbols or to call yourself a sannyasin. You do need - and refuse to seek - the sanction of traditional Hindu authorities. Hindus do not recognise Church decrees vis-à-vis acts that affect them and their religious culture. Your declarations of Church approval is part bluff, part appeal. As we do not permit you to stand on our head you seem to think we will permit the Church to stand there instead. This is exactly the message your bastard symbol of Omkara and cross conveys to us. We utterly reject both the symbol and the message.

The truth is that you need the spiritual support of the Hindus as a bulwark against your critics in the Church. JP-[223](#) is a very conservative man, for all his public clowning. The Church permits you to continue only because it furthers her indoctrination program in India, euphemistically called 'inculturalisation' in Vatican double-speak. Read the following from *Pontiff* by Gordon Thomas & Max Morgan-Witts, two authorities who have been deep inside the Vatican's head: "They (the Chinese Catholics) are the product of centuries of relationship between China and the Church. It began when the Jesuits walked into Peking in the sixteenth century. They were warmly received. Then, in a momentous blunder, Rome rejected the Jesuits' idea of integrating Chinese and Catholic culture. Had this been allowed China might well have become a Catholic country." The pope has been very

busy rectifying this momentous blunder, under the auspices of Vatican-II of course.

Except as a psychological curiosity, I am no more interested in your personal beliefs than I am in those held by the political commissar at the local Russian consulate. Like him, you will argue that my beliefs compel me to respect your beliefs and thus accept your actions, even if they are detrimental to my traditions. I am very interested in your actions and how they affect Hinduism, and I do not accept them. I have said this before and it is what lies at the heart of my letters. In reply, you manifest that syndrome the Germans call *vorbeireden*, translated as 'talking past-the-point'. This is a tactic to avoid contact with relevant issues. It often involves deceit and/or self-deceit; but it does not mean that you misunderstand the situation. It is a verbose device to circumvent truth; and this, I concede sadly, is exactly what you have done. I really think it is time for some serious introspection.

Narayan remembered,
Swami Devananda

P.S. I have read *Christ In India*:[24](#) your expressed attitudes and ambitions for us are little different from Monchanin's. I have also read an account of Abhishiktananda's death, though not his own works. I understand that he separated himself from you as well as Monchanin. I do not pretend to judge his spiritual state, but, from his actions, I gather that he was a seeker of integrity.[25](#) You might follow his example.

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
28 September 1987 (CE)

OM

Father Bede Griffiths:

I have read Abhishiktananda's book carefully and am not bewitched. This man was a Christian romantic a la Rousseau camouflaged as a Hindu existentialist. The romantic and the existentialist are forever opposed, both within the man and within society, for, spiritually, the latter cannot countenance the sentimental illogicality of the former.

But, to give Abhishiktananda his due, he did try very hard, and has said in another place: "Why do people run here and there, trying this religion, this other religion, or trying to add to or change already existing ones, trying this master, this other master? Why not keep to the teachings of the Upanishads and the Rishis?"

Yes, why not? I suggest that you read Sri Krishnaprema^{[26](#)} who, being that rare combination of *bhakta* and *jnani*, Ramana^{[27](#)} identified as a very extraordinary sadhu. He truly was one of England's great gifts to India.

Narayan remembered
Swami Devananda

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
Vijaya Dasami^{[28](#)} 1987 (CE)

OM

Dear Father Bede:

You will appreciate that, as mendicants, we do not have private lives, and, as religious, our controversial differences must be exposed to public criticism and review. We are both accountable to the Indian people, who feed us, and for this reason our correspondence will be published soon. If you wish to comment on this project or add to your opinion, please do so now.

Yours faithfully,
Swami Devananda

FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA
October 7th 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

Thank you for your letter. As you know, the letters which I have written to you were not written for publication, but as you wish to publish them together with your letters to me, I have no objection. I would only

emphasise that the view I have put forward is not peculiar to me in any way, but is accepted by the Catholic Church as a whole to-day. The second Vatican Council introduced a profound change in the attitude of the Church to other religions. In it the Church declared that the Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in other religions and encouraged Catholics to 'recognise, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values as well as the cultural and social values' of other religions.

This has resulted in two movements, one towards dialogue and the other towards inculturation, which have received the express approval of the Pope in recent times. By dialogue we understand the meeting with people of other religions in order to learn to understand one another and work together for the good of the country and of humanity as a whole. By inculturation we mean sharing the cultural values of another religion. I think that it would be of great assistance towards communal harmony in India, if we were to distinguish between culture and religion. No one will expect a Christian or anyone of another religion to accept the Hindu religion, that is, to worship the Hindu gods or to take part in Hindu rituals, but Hindu culture is another matter altogether. By culture we understand the 'customs and traditions of the people, their wisdom and learning, their arts and sciences'. Hindu culture in this sense is not confined to Hindus but is universal. Every Indian, whether Hindu or Christian or Muslim or unbeliever can share in the riches of Hindu culture, its philosophy and spiritual discipline, its music and dance, its way of life.

I regard the syllable Om and the rite of sannyasa, to whose use by me you have objected, as having this universal meaning. The syllable Om signifies not any particular Hindu God or limited form of being but the Infinite and Eternal, the transcendent Mystery towards which every religion aspires. In the same way, sannyasa in my understanding signifies the commitment to the one beyond all name and form, the ultimate Truth, which is our common destiny. In this way I feel that using these symbols we are assisting in that movement towards the transcendent unity of religions, which is the hope of humanity to-day.

Yours sincerely,
Bede Griffiths.

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
13 October 1987 (CE)

OM

Dear Father Bede:

Thank you for your letter of the 7th. My letters were also not written for publication, and therein lies the value of our debate.

I think that your peculiar utterings on transcendental unity are for the most part hyperbole and have nothing to do with the cold realities of integration, communal harmony, or world peace.

As for Vatican II, most unprejudiced scholars acknowledge that the Church is a congenital liar who has seldom suffered the smallest prickings of conscience throughout her blood-soaked career. We in India have directly experienced her repressive policies and evil deeds for centuries. Why should we now believe that Rome has had a sudden change of Heart? Birth defects are never cured, not even at Lourdes.[29](#) W.R. Inge, the late Dean of St. Paul's, has said that there is no evidence that the Holy Spirit has ever been present at Church councils. This is an astonishing admission for a leading churchman to make, and it raises issues that go back to the original Council of Nicea.[30](#)

Many Christians would agree with me when I say that if the Church ever got the upper hand again, the first thing she would do is dust off the rack and reinstate the Inquisition. Certainly your own deeds don't encourage us, for you have nailed the sacred Omkar to a Roman Cross.

I sometimes wonder if you have even the most superficial knowledge of Hinduism. Om is intimately associated with all knowledge of Hinduism. Om is intimately associated with all our Gods and very specifically with two of them: Devi Saraswati as Vak and Vighneshwar, who is the personification of the divine syllable.[31](#) When Vighneshwar's body - or ear - is abstracted it becomes the symbol Om; and again, Vighneshwar and Om are interchangeable in rituals. Even if the symbol could be divorced from Hinduism, of which it is the unique identifying mark, is your crucifixion of

it an edifying cultural event? When the pope can arrange fake encounters with our sadhus for publicity purposes, why can't you go one step further and consult our dharmacharyas about your experiments when they directly affect Hinduism?

But my argument is best summed up by Sri Madhava Ashish: "Certain sorts of half-baked Vedantists abuse the true teaching that good and evil are transcended in states of being beyond space and time by applying it to the their daily lives in justification of amoral behaviour. This is to confuse eternity with time. In eternity, where all is one, there is neither right nor wrong, neither order nor chaos. In time, where all is multiple, there are both order and the chaos into which order falls. Yet out of chaos we reach up first to reestablish order in multiplicity and then to partake in the unity which supports the whole. But before we can attain to direct perception of the timeless truth we who live in time need a rationally acceptable guide to behaviour which is based on our perception of the truth and its immutable values. Because our understanding is limited, such a code of behaviour will be but an interpretation of the truth. Nevertheless, it must be a genuine interpretation and not a travesty. Only thus may we again find significance in human endeavour and dignity in human life."

The distinction between culture and religion is a false distinction, and when the division is effected the spirit of a people becomes atrophied as we see in Russia and the West today.

Our correspondence is going to press soon and I will send you copies of the book when it is available.

Narayan remembered,
Swami Devananda

FR. BEDE GKWFITHS TO SWAMI DEVANANDA
October 16th 1987

Dear Swami Devananda,

Thank you for your letter. Of course, Om can be used in a sectarian setting, but I am thinking of its essential meaning. It seems to me that you

are defending sectarian Hinduism (of which I know little) while I am concerned with the universal essence of Hinduism, as found in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, and in modern masters like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi and Mahatma Gandhi. These have always been my guides.

Of course, Om is by no means confined to Hinduism. It is found in Buddhism as well. Would you like to write to the Dalai Lama and tell him to stop the Tibetan people from using their most sacred mantra: Om mani padma hum?

Yours sincerely,
Fr. Bede

SWAMI DEVANANDA TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
21 October 1987 (CE)

OM

Dear Father Bede:

You are repeating yourself, and it is very boring indeed. Are you trying to teach me your curious catechism by rote? I have never learned anything by rote, but I do see that you are teaching a cosmic catachresis and not a catholic catechism.

Do the Vedas, Upanishads and Gita, along with the great masters named in your post card, advocate the hanging of the Omkara on a sectarian Christian cross or encourage sectarian Christian priests like yourself to wear ochre cloth and call themselves sannyasins?

Apparently you know as little about Buddhism as you do about Hinduism, both of which are Sanatana Dharma.^{[32](#)} They have the same roots and traditions and usages and a mutual spiritual ideal that goes far beyond their differences. This is not true of the Semitic ideologies, which, by their own definition, claim to be superior, unique and exclusive. Voltaire warned of these closed creeds when he wrote: "The man who says to me, 'Believe

as I do or God will damn you,' will presently say to me 'Believe as I do or I will kill you'."

Think about this carefully, Father Bede, for you are the ordained representative of one of these creeds.

And you seem to know even less about *mantra* than you do about Sanatana Dharma.

Perhaps you would like to write to the Shankaracharya of Sharada Peetham at Sringeri and ask him if you can nail the Omkara to a Roman cross, don ochre cloth on your own authority and call yourself a sannyasin?

Do let me know what he says.

Narayan remembered.
Swami Devananda

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Āstika* in northern way of writing Sanskrit.

[2](#) Many Hindus took Kulandaiswami to be a Hindu sannyasin. It turned out that he was a Catholic who had written a whole book in protest against what he regarded as pollution of Catholicism by the likes of Bede Griffiths.

[3](#) Transcendental Meditation of Maharshi Mahesh Yogi

[4](#) Dr. Teasdale does not take notice of Fr. Joseph Pullikal's letter of 21 April 1987

[5](#) The letter was not published by the *Indian Express*, but a copy of it which he had sent to Bede Griffiths brought a reply.

[6](#) Since then a new Concordat has been signed between Italy and the Vatican and Roman Catholicism is no longer the state religion of Italy.

[7](#) The taunt is aimed at atheists and materialists

[8](#) One who knows the Brahma, that is, the Supreme Truth. This alludes to Bede Griffiths' pretensions.

[9](#) It was a reply to Swami Devananda's first letter to *Indian Express* which was not published. Bede Griffiths' reply, too, was not published by the Indian Express.

[10](#) The forgoing letter dated June 17, 1987

[11](#) The Ramakrishna Mission denies that it represents Hinduism. See *Ramakrishna Mission in Search of a New Identity* by Ram Swarup published by Voice of India, New Delhi, 1986.

[12](#) He could have said "since 1500" when the first Catholic missionaries arrived in India in the company of Pedro Alvares Cabral, a Portugues pirate who called himself captain of the second Portuguese expedition.

[13](#) It would have been more correct to say "on orders from the Church". The orders can be documented.

[14](#) Common Era. Swami Devananda prefers this abbreviation to A.D. (*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord) which was coined with reference to die birds of Jesus whom Christians regard as the Only True God.

[15](#) The woman referred to in Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. Early Christian theologians took it as a reference to pagan Rome. But Protestants like Martin Luther interpreted it as a reference to Papal Rome.

[16](#) It is to be noted that the word "fundamentalist" was very much in the air as a pejortative term at the time this dialogue took place. All sorts of self-appointed secularists were bandying it around, without ever explaining what it meant. A member of the Catholic

Church calling a Hindu sannyasi "fundamentalist" sounds like a Stalinist naming Mahatma Gandhi as "fascist".

[17](#) The Roman emperor who became a Christian in 313 and made Christianity the state religion. The force and fraud which the Christian Church then used for destroying all ancient religions in the Roman Empire, is recorded history.

[18](#) Malachy O'Morgan (1094-1148) was an Irish priest who foretold the identities of 112 popes from Celestine II in 1143 to the present one and beyond. According to his prophecy, the present pope, John Paul II, is the third before the last pope. Malachy is the first formally canonised saint of the Catholic Church. Many Roman Catholics esteem him because his prophecies have been found accurate. The Church, however, disowns his prophecies.

[19](#) Ostentation, arrogance and self-conceit, anger and also harshness and ignorance belong to one who is born, O Partha, for a demoniac state.

[20](#) Latin phrase which means, "Except the Lord [keep the city, the watchman waketh] but in Vain" (Bible, Psalm cxxvii).

[21](#) "Amor" means "love" in the Latin language but came to signify the opposite of "Roma" (Rome), the headquarters of the Catholic Church and the seat of the Pope. "Roma" is "Amor" spelt backwards, conveying that "Roma" (the Church) is the very antithesis of "Amor" (Divine Love). The tradition of using the two terms in opposition started with the Cathars (Albigenses) of South France who were proclaimed heretics by the Pope and against whom the bloodiest crusade of medieval times was launched and carried out in 1209. Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales has a character named Nun who wears a locket with a Latin inscription which includes the word "Amor". The great English poet is known for his making fun of the Church.

[22](#) It is a technical term used in the psychology of Sigmund Freud for the "sum total of primitive instinctive forces" operating in the

Unconscious and subverting the rational and moral principles in man.

[23](#) John Paul II, the present Pope.

[24](#) A book by Fr. Bede Griffiths, first published in England in 1966 and reprinted as a paperback in India (Bangalore) in 1986. We have quoted from it in Chapter 6, and shown what Bede Griffiths really stands for.

[25](#) This is a wrong impression. Fr. Abhishiktananda was as much for absorbing Hinduism into the Catholic creed as Fr. Monchanin.

[26](#) An Englishman who became a Vaishnava sadhu and set up an Ashrama at Mritola near Almora, Uttar Pradesh

[27](#) Ramana Maharshi

[28](#) October 2

[29](#) A place in France where Virgin Mary is supposed to work miraculous cure of disease.

[30](#) The First of the Christian councils, held in 325 A.D., which proclaimed the fundamental Christian creed.

[31](#) In a subsequent letter to the author, Swamiji wants this sentence to read, "who is the traditional personification of the divine symbol for this Day of Brahma."

[32](#) Christian missionaries in particular and Western scholarship in general have done great mischief by proclaiming Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism as not only separate religions but also as revolts against Brahmanism which, in its turn, has been termed reactionary and orthodox Hinduism. There is no ground whatsoever for this splitting of Sanatana Dharma into "revolutionary" and "reactionary" creeds.

The Third Dialogue

CHAPTER 14 The Third Dialogue

This dialogue developed around a letter which K.V. Ramakrishna Rao wrote to the *Indian Express* in protest against Christian missionaries masquerading as Hindu sannyasins.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 13 FEBRUARY 1989

Crucifying the 'Om'

Sir,-Nowadays, we find several Christian missionaries putting up ashrams at various places in India donning ochre robes, building temple-like churches, reciting Sanskrit slokas and practising other Hindu rites in the guise of 'inculturation' - synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity.

In Tamil Nadu, one Fr. Bede Griffiths runs the "Sachidananda Ashram," Shantivanam at Tannirpalli near Kulitalai in Trichy district. There one finds a temple-like church with *vimana* and *disaratchakas*. Inside, Hindu poojas are performed and Hindu scriptures recited. He has even super-imposed the sacred word 'OM' on a cross.

The National Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NCLC), Bangalore-5, has published "An order of the Mass for India," which gives the manner in which the traditional Hindu "*pooja vidhanas*" like *arati*, *jala suddhi*, *sthala suddhi*, *janalokha suddhi* and *purna suddhi* are to be carried out. Typical Sanskrit slokas to be recited between the rites are also given.

Everybody knows that 'OM' has been a sacred word and symbol for Hindus since time immemorial and its sacredness has been revealed in the Vedas, Upanishads and Ithihasas, before the advent of Christ and Christianity. The Hindu believes what Lord Krishna has said in the Bhagvad Gita 3102 years before Christ: "Of all words, I am the syllable OM" (Gita X-25), "I am the pranava OM in the Vedas" (VH-8)." The three

words 'OM, Tat and Sat' are mentioned in the scriptures to indicate Brahman (XVH-23).

The NCLC has gone to the extent of asserting that Vatican has given divine sanction to the use of OM and Hindu rituals, rites and scripture in their eucharist and mass. But the Vatican-II document about dialogue with Hinduism exposes their motivated plan, as it has clearly mentioned that it should be declared that they (the truths contained in Hindu scriptures) actually show the way, truth and life of Christ. People (Hindus) look for the perfection of religious life only in Christ. In Him alone has God revealed everything.

Fr. Bede Griffiths' counterpart at Sangmner, Ahmedabad, one Fr. Hans Staffner, has also clearly opened his mind unwittingly in this regard, "Inculturation in India means that a Hindu is able to become a follower of Christ without ceasing to be a Hindu both socially and culturally." (P.72, "Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community: Is a synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity possible?", Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand).

So their pretension does not hold water anymore.

But one wonders what authority the Vatican or the Pope has to accord approval or give permission to misuse or abuse Hindu symbolism and spiritualism.

Would they dare to conduct this type of experiment with Islam by building mosque-type churches, nailing the crescent on the cross, and reciting verses from the Quran so as to reach Jehovah through Islam? Would Fr. Bede Griffiths or Fr. Hans Staffner dare to start an experiment to synthesize Islam and Christianity?

This is nothing but blatant misuse or abuse of spiritualistic symbolism, when the christians themselves are ideologically against symbolism, idol-worship and ritualism. So, unless religious identity and purity are maintained in a country like India, the spirit of spiritualism cannot be nurtured.

K.V. RAMAKRISHNA RAO
10, Venkatachala Iyer'St.,
West Mambalam, Madras - 33

NOT PUBLISHED BY THE INDIAN EXPRESS

9, Dr. Ramaswamy Street,
Vijayalakshmipuram,
Madras - 600053

14.02.89

Unethical Methods

Dear Sir,

This refers to Shri K.V. Ramakrishna Rao's letter (I.E. dated 13.2.89) on 'Crucifying the OM'

The dirty tricks played by the Missionaries are not new. It is a way of life for the Mission since its inception.

Shri Gibbon in his book, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has observed that "The conquest of Crescent was purer than that of the Cross", for the Roman Catholic Church, in its zeal to win converts to its fold, adopted the pre-christian modes of worship and other social system of the people among whom they spread their new religion.

In India, the activities of the missionaries are not different. Their unethical tactics are buoyant especially in tribal belts. During 1985, 'Janasatta' exposed Father Joseph Pareekatil of Catholic Church of Parasahi, Madhya Pradesh. Later he was arrested. The charges include, inter-alia, destroying of a Hindu-shrine and creating a 31 feet high concrete Cross on that spot; deceptively disguising as a Hindu Holyman and worshipping in a Hindu manner.

The incident is not just isolated one but is indeed only the tip of an iceberg and a lot remains to be exposed.

Some readers may have felt that using of OM by Christian missionaries should be welcomed as it implies that Christianity accepts the greatness of OM and it is indeed a glory for Hinduism. But we must remember that OM is being used to mislead the masses and not to sanctify it. Even if the intention is to accept OM, the missionary should propagate the relevance and reverence of the PRANAVA in the West first, starting from Rome.

The use or misuse of Hindu symbols has been tacitly approved and abetted by Rome. Rome should remain Rome and should not become a Babylon, as envisaged by Martin Luther.

Finally, it is the fundamental right of every Indian citizen to profess and propagate any religion. But the constitution does not guarantee any right to the christian missionaries to use unethical means for conversion of the illiterate masses. The Government should put a check on these illicit activities, lest the problem may snowball into a trouble of a great magnitude.

Yours faithfully,
N. Padmanabhan
N. Srinivasan

INDIAN EXPRESS, 16 FEBRUARY 1989

The Pranava and the Cross

Sir,-The caption, contents and conclusion of Mr. K.V. Ramakrishna Rao's protest (IE, Feb.13) against some Christians using in their worship Hindu symbols, language and rituals betrays a perverse misunderstanding alien to the perennial freshness of living religions.

Mr. Rao's dragging in of Islam in this context is both irrelevant and recklessly mischievous.

Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Ramana Maharshi and the Paramacharya of Kanchi, earnest Christian leaders like Dom Bede Griffiths and Swami Abhishiktananda are trying to make all believers in Higher Power to understand, experience and practise their mother-religions better

and more fruitfully. In this endeavour Christians here try to communicate the eternal message of Jesus through symbols and modes of worship familiar to Indians. Why blame them for using the local language?

Why quarrel over differences or exchanges in the material, size or shape of lamps, or over the forms and functions of instruments in an orchestra? Why not rejoice in the greater brightness and the richer music? Harmony is not synthesis.

Why should Christians object to a staunch Hindu meditating on the Holy Cross as a diagram of the human life divine, holding firmly together our inherent moksha or freedom, our *paraspara* Godward growth, and *dharama* responsibility, the *paraspara* obligation to our fellow creatures?

It is too late to attempt converting *sanatana* into *puratana* dharma or the New Testament to the Old.

K. Swaminathan
Dharmalayam
246 TTK Road
Alwarpet
Madras - 18.

Sir,-Mr. Ramakrishna Rao has quoted profusely from the Bhagavad Gita. But what about the crucial (!) verse in it which says that in whatever way a devotee of Krishna (i.e., God) approaches Him, he will be welcome? If that is so, why should not a devotee approach Krishna through and as Christ?

If we Hindus profess universal tolerance and grow red in the face when it comes to actual practice, are we not hypocrites?

P.S. SUNDARAM
1, Kamalabai St.,
Madras - 17

Sir, - Mr. Ramakrishna Rao has perhaps not visited the Adi Parasakthi" temple of Melmaruvathur. There you are provided with the symbols of Holy Cross and that of a Star and Crescent even near the main shrine and the

preaching of "three-in-one" is carried on under the auspices of "Samaya Manadu" frequently when a few Muslims and Christians preach "Samayam" also.

I do not think any of the Hindu heads would have given sanction for allowing such mixtures into our temples.

M.S. SOUNDARARAJAN
34, Devadoss Reddy St.,
Vedachala Nagar,
Chengalpattu - 603 001

Sir-Mr. Ramakrishna Rao has expressed a genuine apprehension about the future of Hinduism. But the Pranava "OM" is not the monopoly of any individual - not even of all the *Hindus*. It belongs to *all* mankind.

If "OM" is "Brahman" and "Brahman" is "Om", then nobody can crucify or destroy "OM" because "Brahman" is indestructible

If there is no efficacy in "Om", then there is no worry as to who does what to it. The greatness of Hinduism, the Vedas and the Upanishads is their universality and Catholicity.

V.T. VASUDEVAN
118, G.S.T. Road,
Chengalpattu.

Sir,-Mr. Ramakrishna Rao's objections to Christians inducting orthodox Hindu symbols and their sacred rites and traditions into Christian worship, church architecture, Christian literature, lyrics, sermons etc., are quite valid, and this obnoxious tendency on the part of certain sections of Christians calls for severe condemnation by the followers of Christ.

Hinduism and Christianity are not comparable and can't be subjected to the mockery of so-called "synthesis or fusion."

The "Church of South India" in Madras and the South, is in the forefront of such a venture. This reckless trend on the part of some sections, is not

crucifying "Om" but Christ Himself upside down!

Christ said that his followers should worship in "spirit and truth." Those who are phoney and bereft of "spirit and truth" in their own religion resort to cheap gimmicks of importing from other faiths.

They belong to "Trisanku Swargam" and not to the Biblical paradise!

V.D. SPURGEON
44, Medawakkam Tank Road,
Madras- 10.

NOT PUBLISHED BY THE INDIAN EXPRESS

11, Hanumar Koil Street
West Mambalam
Madras 600033

February 17, 1989

Ends and Means

Dear Sir

This refers to Shri K. Swaminathan's letter on usage of Hindu symbols by the Missionaries. (IE dt. 16.12.89).

When the Missionaries started preaching Christianity in Africa, they caused some confusion with their colour scheme of 'White' Jesus and 'Black' Devil. There was a real spurt in conversions when some genius changed the colour scheme declaring Jesus Black and Devil White.

There is nothing wrong in speaking in the local language, says Swaminathan. Missionaries also do not bother about the means. So does Mao - 'Why worry about the colour of the cat, so long as it catches the mice.'

But the people of Africa have a different story to tell: 'When the priests came to Africa, we had all the land and they had the Bible. They gave each

of us a Bible and we prayed together. When we opened our eyes, we had Bible in our hands and they had all our lands.'

It is indeed worthless to talk about the utterings of Mahatma Gandhi on the importance of ends as well as means.

Yours faithfully,
M.N. Ganesan

Room No. 11
Soukath Mansion,
4 Pillayar Koil st. (II Land),
Triplicane,
Madras - 600 005

18.02.89

Cheating the Illiterate

Dear Sir

This refers to Shri K. Swaminathan's letter (I.E. dt. 16.02.89) on using of Hindu symbols, especially the Pranava by the Christian Missionaries.

Philosophy, Mythology and Ritual are the three parts of a religion. Every thought in the mind has a form as its counterpart. This is called Nama-Rupa viz. Name and Form.

Ritual (Karma) is in fact concretised philosophy. As a common man could not comprehend the essence of the abstract philosophy, it is indeed impossible to dispense with the symbolic method of putting things before us.

Every religion has symbols of its own and it is obvious that certain symbols are associated with certain ideas in our mind.

According to Swami Vivekananda (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 1, Page 74), "The association of particular temples, rituals and other concrete forms with particular religions has a tendency to

bring into the minds of the followers of those religions, the thought for which those concrete things stand as symbols; and it is not wise to ignore rituals and symbols altogether. The study and practise of these things form naturally a part of Karma Yoga."

Therefore it is obvious that a common man can very easily be deceived by the usage of Hindu symbols and rituals by the Christian Missionary.

It is said 'Do not hate the sinner; hate the sin'. I do not want to cast aspersions on the Christian Missionary. But the cheating of illiterate masses is clearly unethical, illegal and should be stopped forthwith.

Yours faithfully
R. Muralidharan

25, Sarojini Street, T. Nagar,
Madras - 600 017

27.2.99

Highly Outrageous

Sir,

This has reference to K. Swaminathan's letter with the caption "The Pranava and the Cross" (I.E., Feb. 16), wherein he has written, "Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Ramana Maharshi and Paramacharya of Kanchi, earnest Christian leaders like Dom Bede Griffiths and Swami Abhishiktananda are trying to make all believers in Higher Power to understand, experience and practice their mother-religions better and more fruitfully."

It is highly outrageous and objectionable to compare the above Hindu leaders and religious heads with the Christian missionary experimentalists like Bede Griffiths or Hans Staffner. The writer brings in another Christian missionary Fr. le Saux, the so-called Abhishiktananda without any reference. In any case, Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Ramana Maharshi and Paramacharya of Kanchi never resorted to such experimentation of

"cocktail religion" or "Masala or Kichidi religion" by mixing religious symbols, donning the dress of Father or Mullah, building church-like or mosque-like temples, fabricating Bible- or Quran- like Hindu slokas, or asserting that Rama or Krishna or Shiva is the only God and by accepting Him alone one can get salvation!

I quote some of the utterances of Fr. Bede Griffiths from his book 'Return to the Centre' published by Collins, U.K., 1976:

"While Krishna is primarily a legendary character belonging to the world of myth (with all the deep meaning the word implies), Buddha comes before us as an historical person" (p.83).

"Though there may have been a historical Krishna - in fact, there were probably two or three - he has become a 'mythical' person, that is, a person in whom the symbolic character overshadows the historical" (p.84).

"Yet again we must remember that Krishna belongs to the world of myth, that is, to archetypal world beyond time and history... By contrast Jesus does belong to the world of history. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate" (p.85).

"What is more, he (Krishna) is morally ambivalent. He is a symbol of the highest divinity, yet as a man he is shown to be a trickster, a deceiver who brings disaster on his people and is finally ignominiously slain" (p.76).

"He is the symbol of the purest love but this is in terms of gross sexuality. It is the same with Siva. He is the God of love, of infinite beauty and grace, whose nature is being, knowledge and bliss, the Father, the Saviour, the Friend. Yet his symbol is the lingam and like Krishna has many wives" (p. 76-77).

"It is said that Krishna came on earth to enjoy himself" (p.84).

But, what about Christ?

"The love of God was revealed in Christ not in poetry but in history. It was shown not in ecstasy but in self-giving for others, in surrender of his life

on the cross... not in play but in agony of blood and sweat, not in joy but in suffering" (p.85).

"The man Jesus is a human being as real as Socrates and Confucius, yet the divine mystery is present in his very humanity, making him one with God" (p.77).

The person who is following the path of Sannyasi, or trying to follow the path of Sanyasi, while comparing religions and Gods, would not have given this type of blasphemous remarks about God of another religion as against his own God, when his very aim should be to tell the greatness of all Gods. None of the above Hindu leaders or religious heads ever commented like this. A true God believer cannot even think such things about any God.

His objection to the mention of Islam in this context clearly shows his utter ignorance about the cited Vatican II document dated 28th October, 1965 which includes Islam in its inculturation programme. This document was supported by 2221 and opposed by 88 and this is a clear indication that even at Vatican level there was protest. But inspite of protest, because of the vested interests it was passed.

As Fr. Bede Griffiths in another book, 'Christ in India' (published by Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore - 560 025) and Han Staffner in his 'Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community', have clearly expressed their views and methods to make Hindus to accept Christ, to spread Christianity in India and to hasten for church growth in India, anybody's secular or universalist interpretation of their mundane activities cannot be accepted.

Yours faithfully
S. Venkatachalam

INDIAN EXPRESS, 1 MARCH 1989

No 'divine sanctions'

Sir,-In his letter "Crucifying the "Om" (I.E. Feb. 13) Mr. K.V. Ramakrishna Rao has stated that the National Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore, have gone to the extent of asserting that Vatican has

given divine sanction to the use of OM and Hindu rituals, rites and scripture in their eucharist and mass.

His Eminence Cardinal Rubin (Rome 12,8.1980) of the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Rites had informed the Hierarchs of the Syro-Malabar Church that "Notwithstanding the attempt made in various quarters to offer an accommodated Christian interpretation, it (OM) remains so strongly qualified in a Hindu sense, is charged with meaning so unmistakably Hindu, that it simply cannot be used in Christian worship... OM is an essential, integral part of Hindu worship." Further OM is not one of the 12 points permitted by the Holy See.

Besides neither the Vatican, nor the Catholic Bishops's Conference of India, nor the local Archbishop of Bangalore have ever given their approval for "An Order of the Mass for India".

S. SANTIAGO1

No. 52, 13th Trust Cross St,
Mandavellipakkam,
Madras - 600 028.

Sir,-If the message of Jesus was exclusive, it would be impossible to borrow a symbol of another "message" without compromising on the exclusiveness of the former. In our effort to respect and tolerate other faiths, it is not necessary to aim at homogeneity - that would be syncretistic.

JOSEPH THOMAS
(Asst. Pastor)
St. Andrew's Church,
Egmore, Madras-8.

Sir-The traditional Catholics have been constantly raising their voice against these methods of 'inculturation' but there has been no response from the Church. I hope protests from our Hindu brethren will make it realise that this is a blatant intrusion into the territory of other faiths.

At the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre at Bangalore, the grills in the prayer hall had figures of Siva, Brahma and Vishnu. Objections raised by the Catholics were ignored and the images were ultimately removed only when a Hindu organisation went to court.

A. SELVARAJ CARVALHO
D 113 A, Sangeetha Colony,
Madras - 78

INDIAN EXPRESS, 9 MARCH 1989

Real Inculturation

Sir,-It is no exaggeration to aver that the Roman Catholics in Tamil Nadu are quite secular in their religious observances, especially during the performance of marriage in the Church and the community functions that follow at home. The entire fabric of the socio-religious and cultural background of a Catholic Tamil is quite akin to that of his Hindu brethren.

This is real inculturation. The worship of our Lady of Health at Veilankanni Church is a typical example of inculturation par excellence.

Thus the time-honoured Tamil Catholic socio-religious observances have profound relevance to the meaning of Articles 37 and 38 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy enunciated in Vatican Council-II documents. They are as follows:

Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Culture and Traditions of Peoples:

Article 37: Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of various races and peoples. Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound-up with superstition and error, she studies with sympathy and if possible, preserves

intact. Sometimes, in fact, she admits such things into her liturgy itself so long as they harmonise with its true and authentic spirit.

Article 38: (In similar strain with a particular stress on mission-lands of which India also is one)

Any other innovations and aberrations of the neo-modernists like Fr. Bede Griffiths and the Directorate of National Catechetical and Liturgical Centre at Bangalore and the Management of Aikya Alayam at Madras do not have any sanction under the Vatican Council-II documents or from Rome. If Salman Rushdie, the infamous storywriter could be universally condemned to death for his "Satanic Verses", why not these abettors of ear-heresy perceptions in the Roman Catholic faith be atleast excommunicated by Rome?

FRANCIS S. MORAIS
11, Gengaiamman Koil St.,
Choolaimedu,
Madras - 94

INDIAN EXPRESS, 15 MARCH 1989

Crucifying the Buddha

Sir,-Apropos of the letter of Mr. K.V. Ramakrishna Rao (I.E. Feb.13) and Mr. Francis S. Morais (I.E. March 9) regarding the aberrations and innovations that have crept into the postconciliar (after Vatican Council II) Church in India, especially in Tamil Nadu, mention should be made of the Buddhist Zen-meditation that has come to stay in Dhyana Ashram, 13, Mada Church Road, Madras-28, an abode of the Jesuit Priests where Catholic religious seminars, conferences and retreats are being conducted periodically in which both the clergy, including the cloistered nuns and the Catholic laity participate. Zen meditation teacher Fr. Amasamy S.J. is the principal exponent of this pseudo meditation imported from Japan.

A Zen meditation hall has been erected in the "Ashram". A Buddha idol adorns the centre of the hall and a Crucifix is placed in another corner of the hall.

Zen meditation was inaugurated a year ago by the Vicar General of Madras-Mylapore Arch-Diocese, while two Buddhist monks from Japan conducted the ceremony.

Fr. Amasamy S.J. by his adventurism has crucified Buddhism in the Jesuit Ashram in Madras.

JUDE ANTONY ANANTH
7, Dr. Gopalamenon Street,
Kodambakkam,
Madras - 24

INDIAN EXPRESS, 23 MARCH 1989

'Inculturation'

Sir,-The subject of inculturation in the Catholic Church has come up several times in these columns recently. As my name has been mentioned more than once in this connection, perhaps I may be allowed to clarify the issue.

The basis of inculturation was laid by the second Vatican Council in its 'Declaration on Non-Christian religions, where it was said that "the Church rejects nothing which is true and holy" in other religions and Catholics are exhorted to "recognise, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values of other religions as well as their cultural and social values".

It was in response to this call that the National Centre was set up by the Bishops of India in Bangalore to aid the process of inculturation. At the same time many ashrams dedicated to the ideal of living a Christian life in the context of the ashram tradition in India were started. All these ashrams, contrary to what has been suggested, have the full support of the bishops and the religious orders to which they belong.

There are many different religions in India, and many different sects in Hinduism, each with their own distinctive ritual and doctrine, yet sharing a common cultural tradition.

It is hoped that by sharing in this common cultural tradition the Christian churches also may be able to enter the mainstream of Indian life, bearing their own distinctive witness to the truth, and working together with other religious communities for the good of country as a whole. It is an urgent need that the different religions of the world should learn to co-operate with one another and not be a source of division and conflict, as is so often the case. This seems to be the only way forward for humanity to-day.

BEDE GRIFFITHS
Saccidananda Ashram,
Shanthivanam,
Tannirpalli (Po).
Kulithalai, Tiruchi - 639 107

INDIAN EXPRESS, 27 MARCH 1989

Freedom more than communion

Sir,-It is strange that Dom Bede Griffiths does not see the incongruity of foreigners like him preaching inculturation to the Church in India (I.E., March 23).

Christian Gospel must incarnate in Indian soil. This spontaneous process is helped best by the Indian Christian community under the leadership of Indian bishops and the priests working under the bishops.

Dom Griffiths' observation on Christian churches in India entering the mainstream of India's life is nothing but an attempt to shift the blame for the foreignness of the churches in India from foreign missionaries and foreign missionary societies to the Indian Christian community.

The Catholic Church in India is still dominated by the personnel of foreign-based missionary societies like the Jesuits, the Salesians, the Fransiscans and so on, under the pretext of the Church in India being

'young'. It is this that presents the Church in India as the long arm of western Christianity.

No doubt most of the members of these societies (referred to as 'religious') are now Indians. But as members of foreign-based societies they claim exemption from the jurisdiction of the bishops in India. The new code of Canon Law of 1983 has abolished this claim for autonomy technically called "clerical exemption", for doctrinal reasons. But the societies still persist in the claim for autonomy and run a parallel church, relying on the theology that would have done credit to the age of colonisation.

In the discussion on the relation between the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Religious, India (CRI) in Goa in 1986. Archbishop Casimir, himself a Jesuit, said that the religious "value independence and freedom more than communion with bishops".

But as early as 1926, Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* emphatically pleaded for replacing foreign missionary societies by new indigenous societies "such as may answer better the genius and character of the natives and be more in keeping with the needs and spirit of the country".

So long as this sound theology remains suppressed, there is no point in talking of inculturation.

R. RUBIN
12, Third Main Road,
Seethamma Colony,
Alwarpet, Madras - 18.

INDIAN EXPRESS, 28 MARCH 1989

Pollution of Hinduism

Sir,-I was surprised to read Bede Griffiths' claim that "All these ashrams... have the *full support* of the bishops and the religious orders to which they belong" (I.E, March. 23) because he has not denied that any of the activities pointed out by me and other readers in these columns are not carried on!

Does he mean that the so-called bishops and the religious orders to which they belong have *approved and accorded them permission* to pollute Hinduism under the guise of inculturation?

Then what about Cardinal Rubin's say on OM (Rome 12-8-80)?

He arrogantly writes that the church rejects nothing that is *true and holy* in other religions and that Catholics are exhorted to "recognise, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values of other religions as well as their cultural and social values".

Do they think Hindus are not capable of recognising, preserving and promoting their spiritual and moral values?

It is enlightening to read Bede Griffiths' books, *Return to the Centre* and *Christ in India*. In the former, he glorifies Christ against Hindu Gods, Siva and Krishna, treating them in bad taste, on par with E.V.R. In the latter like Hans Staffner, he expresses his views and outlines methods to make Hindus accept Christ, to spread Christianity in India and to hasten Church growth.

If believers of Gods abuse Gods, seekers of Gods destroy Gods, faithful followers of one religion question the faith of others and, against all moral and ethical codes and universal principles, conduct pseudo-spiritual and psychological-religious warfare against one religion, then these activities are not "inculturation" but "outculturation", as religion and culture are inseparable for Hindus.

Theocentric and theocratic eclectics are as dangerous as nuclear warheads. The concept "My God is your God, but your God is no God", does not foster understanding and cooperation. The concept should be changed to "Your God is my God and my God is your God" and accepted by people of all religions.

This is the only way for humanity today. Super God rivalry, religious superiority, theocratic world domination and neo-spiritual globalism cannot make "believers" live in peaceful co-existence.

K.V. RAMAKRISHNA RAO
10, Venkatachala Iyer St.,
West Mambalam,
Madras - 33

Sir,-With reference to Fr. Bede Griffiths' letter "Inculturation", the attention of interested readers is directed to the book *Catholic Ashrams: Adopting and Adapting Hindu Dharma*, published by Voice of India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi- 110002 (Rs. 40), which contains a comprehensive over-view of the Church's inculturation (indigenisation) programme in India and a lively debate on the issue between myself and Fr. Bede Griffiths.

The Pope in Rome and his priests in India have no right or authority whatsoever to meddle with Hinduism, appropriate its sacred customs, titles, dress, symbols and rituals, and put them to uses that are at least unethical and at most highly offensive to devout Hindus. By indulging in these questionable experiments and devious Hinduized proselytization tactics, Christians demean their own religion and exploit Hindu tolerance to the limit.

Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts write in their book *Pontiff*: " (The Chinese Catholics) are a product of centuries of relationship between China and the Church. It began when the Jesuits walked into Peking in the 16th century. They were warmly received. Then, in a momentous blunder, Rome rejected the Jesuits' idea of integrating Chinese and Catholic culture. Had this been allowed. China might well have become a Catholic country."

Inculturation is the means by which the Church seeks to correct this "momentous blunder" in India. If this is not true and conversion of Hindus to Christianity is not the objective of inculturation, why aren't recognised and qualified Hindu Dharmacharyas consulted by Church authorities before they permit their missionaries to embark on reckless religious and cultural adventures.

It is very doubtful if the ochre-clad priests who employ a bastardized Om-and-Cross symbol in their missionary work, as do Fr. Bede Griffiths and his comrades throughout the country, have ever considered that God

Ganesh is known to every Hindu as Pranavaswarup - and all the sophistry in Rome and Bangalore cannot explain away this fact.

SWAMI DEVANANDA SARASWATI
RCC (Avadi) Post
Madras - 109

NOT PUBLISHED BY THE INDIAN EXPRESS

25 Sarojini St.,
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Madras-600 017

28.3.89

Provocation

Sir-This has reference to Swami Devananda Saraswat's letter with the caption "Pollution of Hinduism" (I.E., March 20)

He is correct in saying that the object of inculturation is to convert Hindus to Christianity.

A simple reading of Fr. Bede Griffiths's books such as "Return to the Centre" published by Collins (UK, 1976) and "Christ in India" (published by Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore) will reveal that inculturation is another method to make Hindus, particularly illiterate Hindus, to accept Christianity.

In this modern scientific world, we must try our best to make people forget about their religious differences and live peacefully. Provocation in the name of spreading one's religion at the cost of another religion should be stopped to save humanity.

S. Venkatachalam

INDIAN EXPRESS, 1 APRIL 1989

For human unity

Sir,-In the letters 'Pollution of Hinduism' (I.E., March 28), Mr. K.V. Ramakrishna Rao and Swami Devananda have condemned what many of us welcome as well-meant steps in the world-wide, Gandhian movement for human unity in spirit and truth through (not inspite of) our great religions.

For us in India. Truth is one, though sages speak of it variously. The one fault of the Semitic religions is intolerance, the untenable claim of being the *one* true faith. The cure for intolerance is *not intolerance*.

Nothing is lost and something by way of harmony is gained, when Christians use Sanskrit, Tamil, the syllable Om and the rites of *doopa* and *deepa*.

Religions are not candles struggling for standing space. They are candle-flames whose light and warmth merge and bring spirit nearer to mind and matter.

K. SWAMINATRAN
Dharmalaya,
TTK Road,
Madras - 18

NOT PUBLISHED BY THE INDIAN EXPRESS

RCC (Avadi) Post
Madras - 600 109

1 April 1989

Foreign Funds

Dear Sir,

Either Prof. Swaminathan (I.E. April 1st) does not know anything about Semitic religions except that they are intolerant, or he is deliberately avoiding the central issue of conversion by means of inculturation and trying to shift the blame for intolerance onto those few Hindus who raise a voice of protest. Certainly, there is no religious contest between Hindus and

Christians, as the latter do not have anything Hindus need or want. But it is also true that Hindus cannot meet Christians on the level of ideology and foreign funds. Christians spend U.S. dollars 165 million every year to convert India's Hindus to their closed and exclusive belief-system, and Hindus, for a variety of reasons, primarily ignorance and poverty, cannot resist the Christian ideologue with his promises of health and wealth. Since the 1960s, inculturation has become the preferred method of proselytizing Hindus. Inculturation means that all Prof. Swaminathan's candle-flames become one Christian candle-flame at the alter of Jesus, the only son of God Jeovvah. If this the kind of "human unity" we want?

Yours truly,
(Swami Devananda Saraswati)

Footnotes:

[1](#) The full text of Cardinal Rubin's letter, quoted by Mr. S. Santiago, is as follows: Report on the State of Liturgical Reform in the Syro-Malabar Church by the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches. (Text sent to all Hierarchs of the Syro-Malabar Church. 12.8.80)

Section 3: Observations on certain points of the 'Indian Mass' and the 'Indianized Mass (Dharmaram CMI group)' and related questions.

The 'Om' according to what innumerable Passages of the Upanishads continually and repeatedly affirm, is the synthesis of all the Vedas-, and of all the 'gnosis' of Hinduism. Notwithstanding the attempt made in various quarters to offer an accommodated Christian interpretation, it remains so strong - qualified in a Hindu sense, is charged with meanings so unmistakably Hindu, that it simply cannot be used in Christian worship. 'Om' is not a revealed name of God. Besides, if even the Old Testament tetragramme itself can no longer be used, how can this syllable, so charged with special meanings, and charged with ambiguity, be used to invoke God? Moreover, 'Om' is an essential, integral part of Hindu worship.

Bede Griffiths Drops the Mask

CHAPTER 15

Bede Griffiths Drops the Mask

Hindus who are not conversant with the history and methods of the Christian mission, have been taken in by the soft language adopted by the mission strategists in recent years. Shri K. Swaminathan whose letters to the *Indian Express* have been reproduced in the previous chapter, is a typical example. It is, therefore, necessary to point out that soft language by itself means little if it does not spring from a sincere mind, and is not good-intentioned. There is no evidence as yet that the missionary mind has become sincere or well-disposed towards Hindu society and culture, not to speak of Hinduism. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that this mind remains as deceitful and mischievous as ever before.

How negative, hostile, and aggressive the missionary mind remains towards Hindu society and culture, was revealed by a dialogue which developed between Ram Swarup and Fr. Bede Griffiths in 1990 in the wake of a review-article which the former had sent to the latter. We are reproducing the dialogue.

FROM FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO RAM SWARUP

February 17th 1990

Dear Mr. Ram Swarup,

Thank you for sending me your review¹ of the book *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. As you know, it is very much the work of the 'avant-garde' among christians and would not be accepted by the majority of orthodox christians, though, as you say, it may well point to the future. In any case they are all serious thinkers and need to be taken seriously, and some like Panikkar are respected theologians.

But I think that you underestimate the extent of this movement in Christianity in the past, as though it were a pure novelty. This openness to other religions has been present in Christianity from the beginning, though the opposite attitude of rejection has generally prevailed. The Bible itself, though it becomes more and more exclusive, always had an opening to the 'Gentiles'. The book of Genesis begins with the creation of the world and of man and has stories of the early history of mankind before it comes to the beginning of Izrael in chapter 12. The God of Izrael was always conceived as the God of all humanity, although interest centres more and more exclusively on Izrael. In the same way Jesus in the New Testament goes out of his way to proclaim the presence of God among other nations and commends a Roman centurion for his faith by saying: 'I have not found such faith in all Izrael.'

In the same way in the early church Justin Martyr in the 2nd century, Clement of Alexandria in the third, both proclaimed that God made himself known to the Greeks through their philosophy before he revealed himself in Izrael. Of course, it is true that this tradition was obscured by the popular view "extra ecclesiam null salvis", but it never died out. When I was received into the Catholic Church in 1930 it was this belief in the presence of God among all nations that I accepted. Still I admit that it was rare and it was only at the Vatican Council in 1960 that it was officially acknowledged by the Church. For me this was only the formal acceptance of what I have always believed and practised.

On the other hand, I think that you tend to believe too easily that Hinduism has always had the answer. I do not believe that there is an easy answer to the question of how religions relate to one another. In my experience most Hindus believe and practise a facile syncretism which simply ignores essential differences. I don't think that anyone, Christian or Hindu, has the final answer. We are all in search. I would be inclined to say that Buddhists tend to be more objective and understanding than most people. But I think we all have to learn how to be true to our own religion while we are critical of its limitations and to be equally true to the values of other religions while we recognize their limitations.

Your sincerely
Bede Griffiths.

FROM RAM SWARUP TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITH
31.3.1990

Dear Rev. Bede Griffiths,

Thank you for your kind letter of Feb. 17 and also for the gift of a copy of your Hibbert Lecture 1989. I read both of them with great interest. Both of them make observations which need our earnest attention and require larger discussion.

In your letter, you also strike a personal note and tell me that when you were received at the Catholic Church in 1930, you already believed "in the presence of God among all nations". This personal history is not merely interesting but it encourages me too to make a personal confession.

Like all or most Hindus, I too began as a believer in "all religions say the same thing". But some academic interest took me to look at the *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics* a good deal in the fifties. I however found nothing in it to support my belief. I also saw that in its twelve volumes, it hardly saw anything good in what it regarded as pagan religions including Hinduism. I wondered at a religion which taught its best people (the *Encyclopaedia* was written by about 450 scholars of distinction) to think so ungenerously of all religions except their own. I began to reflect more deeply on the subject.

Sometime in the early sixties, I also chanced to see the proceedings of a Seminar held at Almora by Christians, most of them connected with "Ashrams" and "Niketans". Most participants began by pretending that they saw something good in Hinduism, but as they proceeded, they could not sustain their thesis for long. At about the same time, I also saw a book by Fr. F. Monchanin, the founder of Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam - the institution over which you preside now. I would not hide it from you - I found him most disappointing.

It was my first contact with "liberal" Christianity, and I thought it was the old missionary "war with other means". After twelve years or so, I wrote an article on "liberal" Christianity.² I am sending a copy of this article, though your might have already seen it. I find that it also mentions you briefly.

While reading this kind of literature, I found a studied attempt to say the same old thing in a somewhat less offensive language. For example, it was conceded that the pagans knew something of God and God was present among them too in some way. Even a high-sounding and flattering expression was used for this - cosmic revelation. But it did not avail and it was found that it was inferior and merely preparatory to Christian revelation. No wonder, this position is unacceptable to the pagans and also to many other advanced thinkers of our age.

Let us admit that Christianity is throwing up some thinkers of a different kind who however do not belong to the mainstream. But the spirit of the age is on their side, and they will increasingly do well. Meanwhile, we must not neglect mainstream Christianity, the Christianity of missionaries and hot gospellers. In this connection, I may send you an article (a review-article in *The Statesman*, March 25)³ which shows how massive is missionary Christianity and how it is still the order of the day. What the leaders of organised Christianity need most is not phoney dialogues but a good deal of self-reflection. I have with me twenty volumes of what may be called "Christian Witness" brochures issued by the Lausanne Committee For World Evangelization. They talk of studying other religions and cultures, but these are like the studies which War-Offices make of their enemies. They talk of "dialogues" but they are determined that their victims should reach the same conclusions as they do. Their means are flexible, but their aim is fixed. The situation and the truth of the matter demands that we look, not on their arguments but on their mind.

I thank you again for your letter. I believe your influence would be for the good among your colleagues and friends.

With kind regards and best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Ram Swarup

Enclosures:

1. A brochure "*Liberal*" Christianity
2. The Great Command (article in *The Statesman* March 25, 1990)

FROM FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS TO RAM SWARUP
April 6th 1990

Dear Mr. Ram Swarup,

Thank you for your letter and enclosures. I am not quite sure what your purpose is in your attack on Christianity and Christian Missions. Is it simply to foment communal strife in India between Christians and Hindus, or have you some deeper purpose? If you want to attack Christianity itself, you will have to make a far deeper study of it than you have yet done. Above all you will have to recognise the profound wisdom and goodness to be found in it, as all unbiased Hindus have done, just as if I were to attack Hinduism, I have to recognise its profound spirituality which none can question.

It seem to me, though, that if you want to defend Hinduism, you have to recognise the other side of its spirituality just as I as a Christian have to recognise its long tradition of violence and intolerance. I suggested to Mr. Sita Ram Goel that you should both make a study of the shady side of Hinduism, if you want to be honest about it, just as I have to face the shady side of Christianity. How do you account for the fact that with all its long tradition of wisdom and spirituality, India today is generally considered one of the most corrupt and immoral countries in the world? Of course, you can reply that the so-called Christian countries have their own style of immorality and corruption but this only means that we have all to face the future of religion today.

I suggested to Mr. Goel that the Voice of India might well make a special study of various aspects of Hinduism. I suggested as a beginning the history of human sacrifice and temple prostitution from the earliest times to the present day. I myself was in touch with the police who were investigating a case of human sacrifice in a temple some years ago in Bangalore. As for temple prostitution a sadhu who also visited our Ashram some years ago told me that he had a child by a temple prostitute, and the institution is

known to be well established in Carnataka. I am sure that investigations would reveal many examples.

Another institution is the practice of sorcery and magic. I have been amused to find how many families in Madras are victims of black magic perpetrated by people hostile to them. Above all, of course, there is the problem of untouchability. Surely one of the greatest crimes in the history of religion. These things should be known and faced by those who defend Hinduism just as Christians have to face the dark side of their religion.

I hope that you understand that I am not saying this in order to score off Hinduism. I love Hinduism, not only the Vedas and the Gita and Vedanta but popular Hindu piety and its cultured traditions but I try to get a balanced view of it. It seems to me that religion itself is being questioned today and those of us who profess a religion have to be honest about it and face also the negative aspects of which people today are aware. I much hope if all of us were honest about our own religion and tried to be honest and objective about it, we might help to restore the dignity of true religion and enable the rest of the world to appreciate its real values.

Yours sincerely
Bede Griffiths

FROM RAM SWARUP TO FR. BEDE GRIFFITHS
24.4.1990

Dear Rev. Bede Griffiths,

Thank you for your letter of April 6. It is so different from your Hibbert Lecture which probably presented a more formal and public face, while the letter revealed a more conventional traditional-christian or missionary visage. It was surprising that it took it so little to surface so readily. I was however glad to read your letter and make acquaintance with some of your more intimate thoughts.

You had in your hands three things by me besides my letter: 1) my brochure on "liberal" Christianity; 2) and 3) my review-articles on *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* and *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelise the*

World. All these discussed missionary Christianity, its theology, its apparatus and plans. In your letter you say not a word about the subject and simply assert that the pieces are an "attack on Christianity"; and you ask me if the aim of my writing them is "simply to foment communal strife between Christians and Hindus" if indeed I do not have yet a still "deeper purpose." It is most unfair, to say the least; perhaps, you did not mean it, but you used the language of blackmail and even threat to which Hindus are often subjected when they show any signs of stir. As a missionary, probably you think that the missionary apparatus is innocent and indeed we should be thankful to it for the spiritual aid it offers. But many do not think so. Why do you put on hurt looks if they do not take this apparatus at its Christian face value and look at it in the light of historical evidence and their own experience?

Your further say that if I "want to attack Christianity," I shall "have to make a far deeper study of it than (I) have yet done," and will "have to recognize the profound wisdom and goodness found in it." Please let me make it clear that I have no set intention of attacking Christianity, and that when I study a subject, it is not with the idea of attacking it. I study a subject in the first instance mainly to understand it, though later on, I may find that it has certain obnoxious aspects which need to be attacked. There was a time when I studied communism in that spirit and found it had many revolting aspects. I wrote and spoke extensively against them, much against the intellectual fashion and dominant politics of the day. Today, events have vindicated me and I am thankful to God that I was able to make a contribution to an important debate.

But I must admit that to a scholar like you, my studies of Christianity must appear to be inadequate, particularly when they have not led me to your conclusions. But I must beg you to take into consideration scores of others of impeccable Christian scholarship, whose scholarship was at least as good as your own, who however failed to find that "profound wisdom and goodness" claimed by you in Christianity. On the contrary, they found in it arrogance, exclusive claims, contentious spirit, superstitions, lack of charity. Other scholars found that whatever was good and true in Christianity was found in other cultures and traditions as well but whatever it claimed to be special and unique to it - like virgin birth, resurrection, sole

Sonship - was just make-believe and not of much worth. The more they studied it, the less they thought of it, particularly of its uniqueness and speciality.

You quote the authority of many "unbiased Hindus" who have found this wisdom. I have known some of these Hindus, and they are quite a sample. They believe in the wisdom and goodness of Christianity, not on the basis of any study, but because they have been brought up on the Hindu idea of respecting other peoples' creeds. But once some of them take to studying it, they are somewhat disconcerted at its claims. They are also "unbiased Hindus" - unless you mean that either they reach your conclusions or they must be biased - and they have to be taken seriously.

You say that "India today is generally considered one of the most corrupt and immoral countries in the world?" I have no means of ranking India in the moral scale, but I can readily believe that its place in the missionary world you inhabit must be very low, and it must also be low wherever the missionary influence reaches. It is the country of the missionaries "where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile". Vivekananda had spoken of mud which missionaries have thrown on India, an amount which not all the mud in the ocean-bed will equal. The practice continues with few exceptions here and there. Just recently, Hinduism was described by the spokesman of the 700 Club, Christianity's hot TV show, seen by an estimated 70 million viewers, claiming Pat Robertson, the US presidential candidate in the last election as its former host, in this language: "Satan, beasts, demons. Destruction of soul in hell. This is what Hinduism is all about." Daysprings International did the same somewhat earlier in a 2-hour programme on Manhattan's cable television network. It described Indians as "without spiritual hope," and it informed Americans, quoting Mother Teresa, how they are hungering for Jesus. The documentary as it was called was screened in India.

Not surprisingly you suggest that Voice of India, in order to "get a balanced view" of Hinduism, should study "human sacrifice and temple prostitution from the earliest times to the present day," and the "practice of sorcery and magic" and the problem of untouchability. You offer your own testimony and say that you yourself were "in touch with the police who

were investigating a case of human sacrifice in a temple some years ago in Bangalore," and that "some years ago a sadhu told you that he had a child by a temple prostitute".

I do not know what you want these studies to achieve and what is to be their scope. Would the proposed study of human sacrifice, for example, include religions in which human sacrifice and even cannibalism form central part of their theology and where they celebrate them daily in their most sacred rites? Medieval Christianity reports many cases where its more visionary members even "saw a child being cut limb by limb", and they saw the "chalice being filled with blood" and the "host was flesh indeed." One boy reported: "brother Peter devoureth little children, for I have seen him eat one on the altar." All these visions were valued and they were used to give authenticity to the rite of the Mass, to convince the sceptics and to deepen the faith of the believers.

Similarly, about temple prostitution. I do not know what you mean and what is to be its scope. Will it cover temple prostitutes, male and female, at Jerusalem often mentioned in the Bible? Will it include nunneries and monasteries, and the whole system of "consecration of virgins," where morals are often described not always without documentation in the language you use for the Devadasi system?

While on this subject, I must say the missionaries have blackened a great institution. I believe that even during the evil days that had befallen them, the morals of most devadasis were not worse than those of most "brides of Christ." But I have no heart in saying all this, and they are all, whether in India or Europe, our sisters and daughters and I think of them as fellow-pilgrims who have done their best according to their circumstances and light. I invoke no moralists' judgement on them. We should know that some theological virtues have been more deadly than some common vices and some so-called saints have proved worse than many sinners.

You also want a study of "sorcery and magic," of which you have found many cases in Madras. You of course know that this is a wide-spread phenomenon and is by no means limited to Madras and to our own times and neighbourhood. You must be knowing that the first Christian pastors were known to be magicians and exorcists and that every church had its

exorcists. Even now exorcism is central to baptism and every child brought to the church for baptism is exorcised twice or even thrice - you must correct me here. John Wesley, the founder of Methodists, said that "giving up witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible."

At the end, I must say that Voice of India cannot undertake studies you have proposed. Its aim, so far as it can implement it, is a different one. It wants to show to its own people that Hinduism is not that bad and other religions not so wonderful as they are painted by their theologians and televangelists. I believe that considering our situation, no fair criterion or assessment can find anything wrong in it.

Too often the missionaries have set our agenda for us. They taught us to look at ourselves through their eyes. What they found wrong with us, we too found wrong with ourselves. Voice of India wants that Hindus use their own eyes in looking at themselves and - also in looking at others.

Not that Voice of India wants Hindus to slur over their problems - they will do that at their own peril. But those problems should be defined in the light of their experience. They should neither borrow those problems nor their solutions on trust from others. In fact, Voice of India has already published a small brochure, *Cultural Self-alienation and Some Problems Hinduism Faces*. But you will see that these problems do not include those which are uppermost in your mind: human sacrifice, temple prostitution and witchcraft.

Pardon me for anything in which I may have hurt you. With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,
Ram Swarup

Footnotes:

[1](#) See the article, 'Different Paths Meeting in God', in Appendix 1 to this chapter.

[2](#) See the article in Appendix 2 to this chapter.

[3](#) See the article, 'The Great Command and Cosmic Auditing', in Appendix 3 to this chapter.

Different Paths Meeting in God

APPENDIX 1

Different Paths Meeting in God

This is an anthology¹ of 12 articles contributed by distinguished theologians Catholic and Protestant, all belonging to prestigious divinity schools and universities. Some authors speak more philosophically, others more sociologically, but the book has a kind of unity which comes from a shared outlook. The authors also met at the Claremont Graduate school, California, where their first drafts were subjected to mutual criticism, thus ensuring further unity in the final product.

The authors represent a minority view among Christian theologians, probably the future view too. They are rendering a great service to Christianity by trying to improve its ideological quality - they are trying to make it think more charitably of its neighbours' religions, a quality which it has traditionally lacked.

We in India used to a liberal religious outlook can scarcely realize the boldness and difficulty of their venture. To us, the views they represent are normal, but to their fellow-theologians in the Christian world, their views are abnormal. Hindus tend to regard different religions as different paths which eventually meet in God, but Christianity has looked upon this plurality as wicked and as the handiwork of the devil. From its beginning, Christianity has believed that it is the sole guardian of truth and salvation and all outside of the Church are mere, "*massa damnata*, an abandoned heap, excluded from salvation", as Fulgentius Ruspe, disciple of St. Augustine, put it.

But due to many reasons into which we need not go here, during the last half century, a new approach was tried. An unceremonious and soulful denunciation of other religions became less evident. It was conceded that they were not that depraved and that they also contained some positive elements of moral and spiritual life. But the superiority of Christianity still

remained beyond question. Christianity is "unique", it is "absolute", its revelation is "final and definitive", it provides the standard by which other religions are to be judged which by themselves are not sufficient and which truly find their fulfilment in Christianity - these still remained the premises of Christian theologians. Arguing it out proved an interesting game for them and they played it with enthusiasm and proficiency. In the process, they developed the art of sounding liberal without ceasing to be diehards.

But under a continuous pressure silently exerted by Hinduism-Buddhism, even this approach is found to be unsustainable. Therefore, a new theology is coming up which not only recognizes a plurality of religions, but also accords them some sort of a rough and ready parity. Other religions are co-valid. The authors of this anthology are spokesmen of this view. They are doing pioneering work.

No wonder mainline theologians resist this view, which puts them in a great dilemma. As Hans Kung puts it, "If all religions contain truth, why should Christianity in particular be the truth?... the fate of Christianity itself is in question." But not deterred by this difficulty, the new theologians of pluralism and parity keep pressing on with their views.

Langdon Gilkey, Professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, argues that "the sole efficacy had even superiority of Christianity are claims we can no longer make, or can make only with great discomfort". John Hick of the Claremont Graduate School, California, one of the editors of this anthology, makes an outstanding contribution. He rejects Christian "absolutism": he shows how Christianity and imperialism have been inseparable; he quotes the British historian, James Morris, who says that "every aspect of (British) Empire was an aspect of Christ".

Rosemary Ruether, Professor at Garrett Evangelical Seminary, holds that the traditional understanding of Christianity as the bearer of the only or highest revelation has led to "an outrageous and absurd religious chauvinism". She finds it astonishing that "even Christian liberals and radicals fail to seriously question this assumption".

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Dean at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, tells us of the "invidious effects that follow when one mode of

humanity is made normative for others". Writing as a feminist, she says that Christianity's practice of absolutizing one religion, such that becomes normative for others," has its parallel in its "sexism, whereby one gender is established as the norm of human existence".

She thinks that much of current Christian liberalism is phoney. She discusses the celebrated Hans Kung counted among liberal theologians, and points out how he establishes false comparisons: according to her the "fearsome, grimacing gods of Bali" - this is how Kung describes them - may be no worse than "some bloody depictions of a crucified Christ". Similarly, one is not very sure if the devadasi system of the Hindus described as "temple prostitution" by many missionaries is very different from Kung's "Christian consecration of virgins".

Tom F. Driver, Professor of Theology and Culture at the Union Theological Seminary, New York, observes that from an early date Christianity's "attitude to other religions has been shaped by the colonial mentality"; that when "local religions could not be brought under the Christian banner.... these religions were eradicated not infrequently by the burning of books destruction of symbols and the torture and slaughter of infidels".

W.C. Smith is Professor Emeritus of the Comparative History of Religions at the Harvard University. Older generation in India will remember him as a teacher in pre-Partition days at Forman Christian College, Lahore, and author of an excellent book, *Modern Islam in India*. He says that he has given up for good the word, idolatry, a Christian's fond name for Hinduism. Several decades have passed since he used the word last, for he now believes that no one has ever worshipped an idol though "some have worshipped God in the form of an idol". He says that he came to this realization when he read in the *Yogavasishta*: "Thou art Formless. The only form is our knowledge of Thee." He now believes that a Christian "doctrine" too is no more than a "statue" and that for Christians to think that "Christianity is true, or final or salvific is a form of idolatry". He adds that Christianity has been our idol. In the same vein, Tom Diver says that there is "such a thing as an idolatrous devotion to God and that Christianity has a lot of "Christodolatry".

Raimundo Panikkar, Professor Emeritus of the University of California, another contributor, is well known in India. Heir to two religious traditions, he was born and brought up in Spain as a Catholic, became an ordained priest and a celebrated Christian theologian (Martin Heidegger dedicated to him a poem of his, perhaps his very last). But as he grew up, he also claimed his patrimony from his father's side and became an interpreter of Hindu thought to his fellow-theologians in their arcane language. In 1964, he wrote a book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. But it will not disagree with his new thought if he now wrote a book, *The Unknown Krishna of Christianity*. He has successfully crossed the theological Rubicon.

Dr. Panikkar narrates how Christian missionary work from its early beginning has passed through various phases, the current phase being that of Dialogue. He reminds us that this word has come into prominence after the dismantling of the colonial order and that "were it not for the fact of the political decolonization of the world, we would not be speaking the way we are doing today".

Paul Knitter, Professor of Theology at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, writes as a liberation theologian. According to him, the essence of Christianity is "doing the work of resolving hunger, injustice, and war - work that God through Christ called people to do". So we are back to the same old story and dramatic personae: a mandate communicated to the people at large through a favoured medium. In this format too, Jesus remains the first and even the sole fiddle and messianism retains its full play. The only difference is that religious messianism is replaced by a secular one which is no less arrogant and no better as communism has proved. But the old power-adepts know that secular-radical slogans sell better these days; therefore, they are up-dating their packaging legends and marketing strategy.

If the medium is also the message in some way, we have to be wary on that account. We know how liberation theology operates in India; its work is full of mischief. We have to remember that it has been floated by the same old Imperialist set-up.

At a recent International Conference of Mission Work in Rome, Cardinal Josef Tomko criticized theologians like Knitter for being more occupied

with "social work" and "inter-religious dialogue" than with announcing the Gospel. The answer to this criticism by one truly pluralist was obvious: that announcing the Gospel was redundant, that it was even arrogant, that other people do not need a Christian Gospel and probably many of them have a Gospel of their own as good as the Bible.

But Dr. Knitter's answer was very different. "We are not saying outreach evangelization should only consist of action of human welfare but we are saying that working for human welfare, is an essential part of the work... It is essential to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," he said. Missionary strategists will have no difficulty in agreeing with this view. They already know that "social work" is a great aid to proselytizing.

A true pluralist would demand that Christianity liquidates its missionary apparatus. What does it matter what theory is propounded so long as this apparatus is intact.

The poor of the earth, the Third World countries have no chance against it whether it stays religious or goes secular.

We cannot mention here all the contributors of the anthology but it is thanks to their pioneering work and of others like them that a pluralist theology is already in sight. But a fundamental question has yet to be asked: How could Christianity live without pluralism for the last 2,000 years and do with so much hate for other ways and other fraternities? Is it an accidental lapse or does it arise from a serious defect in its fundamental spiritual vision, from an inadequate view of man and deity? Has it to do with its Semitic origin? Or, even, is it at all the spirituality of the meaning in which the word is understood by Hinduism-Buddhism, Taoism, or Stoicism?

Footnotes:

[1](#) *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Edited by John I-Eck and Paul F. Knitter (Orbis Books \$ 17.95.) reviewed by Ram Swarup in *The Statesman*, Sunday Edition, January 14, 1990.

"Liberal" Christianity

APPENDIX 2

"Liberal" Christianity¹

Whether Christianity improves the general morals of its followers is doubtful, but it is certain that it does not widen their intellectual sympathies and does not open their hearts to the larger spiritual wealth of different peoples and cultures. This is also true of Islam, another revealed religion, but in the present discussion we shall restrict ourselves to Christianity alone.

From its early days, Christianity has claimed a monopoly of things divine. It has held that there is no salvation outside of the Church. But the world has considerably changed during the last two hundred years. A wave of rationalism and humanism has reached the shores of Europe. This has made Christian theology with its exclusive claims look pretentious. This has also fostered a new spirit of liberalism and universalism and also a new awareness of a wider human family, including within itself members who are neither European nor Christian and yet are rich in the things of the spirit.

This new intellectual ferment has not left the Christian theologians entirely untouched. In the past, they saw in religions other than their own nothing but the hand of the Devil and it cost them little pang of conscience to send even the best and wisest of the men of these religions to Hell. But in the new intellectual and humanist climate, this will not do. The Christian Devil and Hell have lost their terror; their old monopolistic claims have also become laughable. In the new context, if they are to be heard at all, they must appear somewhat more modest, and must not appear to reject altogether or too summarily religions other than their own.

So under the changed conditions there is a new theology under construction. This does not regard other religions as the handiwork of the Devil. On the contrary, it says that there is a natural religious impulse which

has been at work throughout history and throughout the world giving birth to natural religions having their own validity. But, it further adds, that this impulse, so necessary at a particular stage, finds its culmination and fulfilment in the *revealed* religion of Christianity. Other religions are preparatory to Christianity.

There is also another problem that the new theologians face, the problem of finding a place in their scheme for non-Christian saints and good men. True, they cannot yet be sent to Heaven - Christian theology precludes that - but they cannot also be so unceremoniously sent to Hell as in the good old days. The new intellectual climate does not countenance it.

So some theologians, liberal and ingenious, have been at work trying to find a solution. One of them was the late Cardinal Jean Danielou. In his *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, he observes that even the Bible mentions saints who are not Biblical. Abel, Seth, Henoah, Daniel, Noe, Job, Melchisedec, Lot, the Queen of Sheba are examples of non-Christian and even non-Biblical saints mentioned in the Bible. Abel was anterior to Abraham; and so were Henoah and Noe. Lot was a relative of Abraham but was not a party to the God's Covenant. Daniel was a Phoenician and Job an Edomite; the Queen of Sheba was a non-Jewish princess.

All these examples show that some sort of saintliness or holiness is possible outside the Christian fold though, according to the Cardinal, that holiness by its very nature "must always be inferior to Christian holiness." But "nonetheless, the fact remains that holiness of that sort is possible."

This does not seem to say much or concede much, but considering that it comes from a Christian theologian trained to see Devil in everything connected with non-Christians, it is a great deal. Danielou goes on and makes a further concession. He admits that "there are men who did not know Christ either because they lived before Him or because knowledge of Him did not come their way [presumably because a Christian missionary had not reached their locality], and yet were saved; and some of these too were saints." But that is all. For he hastens to add that "they were not saved by the religions to which they belonged; for Buddha does not save, Zoroaster does not save, nor does Mohomed. If they were saved, then it is because they were saved by Christ Who alone saves, Who alone sanctifies."

Again, if they were saved, it is because "they already belonged to the Church for there is no salvation outside the Church."

II

The new theology will not go as far as to say that the holy men of other religions are damned, though it knows that they are not saved except through the Church.

These holy men are not saved partly because their holiness is not holy enough. There are three levels of holiness, the pagan holiness being the lowest, governed as it is merely by the law of conscience and not by God's own revealed Laws. Danielou tells us that God's will is "expressed on the Christian plane by the law of the Gospel, on the Jewish plane by the Mosaic law, on the cosmic plane by the law of conscience," the last being obviously an inferior agency of holiness corresponding to the inferior religion of the pagan which is merely *natural*, merely *cosmic*. According to Danielou, at the lowest level, which is the pagan level, "holiness within the sphere of cosmic religion consists in a response to the call of God made known by conscience." At a more advanced stage, God makes His will known through a Revelation to Moses. Finally, God comes down into the world in a human form as Jesus Christ completing His Revelation. Hence the three degrees of holiness and three orders of holy men. "The glory which shines from the face of Jesus Christ overshadows, as St. Paul tells us, that which shone from the face of Moses. In like manner, the glory shining from the face of Moses overshadows that which shone from the face of Noe."

Man's religion, like holiness, has progressed from the natural or cosmic to the Jewish, to the Christian. "All Christian liturgy - Easter, Pentecost, Christmas - have at the back of their Christian significance, a Jewish significance; and behind the latter there is a cosmic significance."

This three-level development is evident in all spheres and aspects touching on religious life. For example, there is a three-level development in the mode of worship. On the lowest level, the pagan level, there is a cosmic temple. The house of God is the whole Cosmos, heaven His tent, and the earth His footstool. In the Old Testament, this primitive atmosphere

still lingers. Abraham has that *parrhesia* with God - that freedom of speech which in ancient Greece was the right of free citizens.

This gave way to the Temple of Moses. The establishment of the Tabernacle, whose ultimate form is the Temple, is the fundamental mission entrusted by God to Moses. The Covenant was Abraham's mission, the Temple that of Moses. Up-till then, God was everywhere but from the time of Moses till the death of Christ, when a still higher stage begins, the Temple is the dwelling in which the glory of Yahweh abides. Up to the time of Moses, sacrifices could be offered to God anywhere. But after that only those sacrifices were pleasing to God that were offered in the Tabernacle. "Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree." (Bible, Deuteronomy 12.2)

In a divine plan, we are assured by Cardinal Danielou, this was a necessary stage, for the great danger was polytheism; the singleness of the sanctuary was, as it were, the sign of the Oneness of God.

Thus a second great step is taken. The religion of Sinai creates a gulf between God and man. No longer does Yahweh talk on easy terms with the patriarchs. Henceforth, He dwells in the secrecy of the Holy of Holies. Separating man from God marks an advance, for it draws attention to two things: first, to God's transcendence, His incomprehensibility, that He is wholly Other; no easy-going anthropomorphism any longer; second, to man's sinfulness, his essentially fallen nature. Without this, the next and third step was not possible.

In the next stage, the abode of Yahweh is no longer the Temple, but the Manhood of Jesus. "The glory of the lord dwelt in the Temple until the coming of the incarnation. But from that day it began to dwell in Jesus. 'Me divine presence is no longer to be found in an enclosure of stone, it dwells in Jesus Himself. With Him the Mosaic order comes to an end.'" There is a qualitative leap, as the Marxists would love to call it, for Jesus is not just "a higher kind of Moses. Moses and the Temple are figures but Jesus is the reality."

From this to the Temple of the Church was a most natural and easy step. In fact, it was no new step at all. It is a mode of saying the same thing. "It is the Manhood of Jesus that is the Temple of the New Law, but this Manhood must be taken as a whole, that is to say, it is the Mystical body in its entirety; this is the complete and final Temple. The dwelling of God is this Christian community whose Head is in the Heaven." God now resides in the Church.

There are other variations but the above is the essential theme of the new liberal theologians. For example, there is Henry de Lubac, the author of *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (Publishers: Bums, Oates & Washbourne, London, 1950). In this book, he says: "Outside Christianity humanity can doubtless be raised in an exceptional manner to certain spiritual heights, but the topmost summit is never reached, and there is the risk of being the farther off from it by mistaking for it some other outlying peak. There is some essential factor missing from every religious 'invention' that is not a following of Christ. There is something lacking, for example, in Buddhist charity: it is not Christian charity. Something is lacking in the spirituality of great Hindu mystics; it is not the spirituality of St. John of the Cross. Outside Christianity nothing attains its end towards which, unknowingly, all human desires, all human endeavours, are in movement: the embrace of God in Christ."

If this is true, then his conclusion is a fair one: "So long as the Church does not extend and penetrate to the whole humanity, so as to give it the form of Christ, She cannot rest."

F. H. Hilard in his *Man in Eastern Religions* finds that to the question what is man, the Christian answer is the best. According to Christians "man is to be understood as primarily a person and not a mere manifestation." In this view man is "an individual," while the others, "Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, agree in thinking of man primarily as an aspect of ultimate Reality."

Nicolas Berdyaev, in his *Spirit and Reality* (Publishers: Geoffery Bles, Centenary Press, London, 1939) says: "Theosis makes man Divine, while at the same time preserving his human nature. Thus instead of human

personality being annihilated, it is made in the image of God and the Divine Trinity. The mystery of the personality is intimately related to that of freedom and love. Love and charity can flourish only if there are personal relationships. Monistic identity excludes love as well as freedom. Man is not identical with the cosmos and with God; man is a microcosm and a microtheosis."

Again, he says: "in Hindu and Platonic mysticism everything is diametrically opposed to the dialogical and dramatic relationship between man and God, between one personality and another. Spirituality is interpreted as being opposed to personality and, therefore, as independent of love, human freedom and a relation between the plural and the one. The mystical way is that of Gnosis rather than that of Eros." According to him, Hindu spirituality "is an austere and unloving mysticism. The absence of love is explained by the fact that this mysticism is unconscious of personality; it is concerned with abdicating rather than preserving the personality."

Evelyn Underhill, the well-known author of *Mysticism* (Publishers: Methuen & Co., Ltd., London, Reprint 1952), too seems to share this scheme. She says: "In Christianity, the natural mysticism which like natural religion is latent in humanity, and at a certain point of development breaks out in every race, came to itself; and attributing for the first time true and distinct personality to its object, brought into focus the confused and unconditioned God which Neo-Platonism had constructed from the abstract concepts of philosophy blended with the intuitions of Indian ecstasies, and made the basis of its meditations on the Real."

She repeats similar sentiments at another place. After making the statement that a mystic is "willing to use the map of the community in which he finds himself," which means that mystical experience is compatible with different theologies about it, she continues to add that "we are bound to allow as a historical fact that mysticism, so far, has found its best map in Christianity," and that "the Christian atmosphere is the one in which the individual mystic has most often been able to develop his genius in a sane and fruitful way."

III

In India, too, there is a group of Christian theologians working in the direction of liberalism. These theologians have become noticeable after India's independence. While Christian money and missions continue to work by and large in their old style (see the *Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee*, Madhya Pradesh), there is a group of Christian theologians who want an encounter with Hinduism on a different plane.

Here their greatest difficulty is the rival slogan that is fashionable among Hindu intellectuals that all teachers preach more or less the same things and that different religions are just different paths to the same goal. The problem of these new liberal Christian theologians is how to salvage their religion from this demolishing, equalizing slogan. So they preach that every religion is unique and that we should all meet in our individual richness in a fruitful dialogue. While secretly hoping that this dialogue would prove that they are unique in a superior way, they invite us all to this encounter. And this should be welcome.

Some of them have taken Hindu names, live in Indian style and have put on Indian dress. Some of them have even donned the habits of Hindu Sanyasins. The motives are mixed. Some may be following St. Paul's practice "to become all things to all men, by all means to win over some of them" (1 Cor. 9.22); others because they find this style more informal and under Indian conditions more comfortable; still others, as they argue, in order to understand and enter into the Hindu psyche better. For some it may be no more than a change of tactics and fronts, but there are genuine elements too. They simply don't have the heart to send a whole people to eternal perdition which their orthodox theology demands.

The late Dr. Jacques-Albert Cottat, the Swiss Ambassador to India in the 1950s, poses the problem and invites us to this dialogue. He says in his *The Spiritual Dialogue of East and West* (Max Muller Bhavan publication): "The West inclines to exclusivism, the East to syncretism. The view that salvation is only possible within the visible Church - a view expressly rejected by the Catholic Church - has been sustained by missionaries and eminent theologians even today; such blindness for the spiritual riches of the East, for its mystical depth and intuition of the transience of the

cosmos to higher Realities, such blindness always implies a blindness for some basic aspects of Christianity itself. The East is tempted by the opposite extreme, syncretism; it consists in wrongly equating biblical values with Eastern religious categories. Such universalism is undoubtedly more tolerant, less violent than Western Exclusivism, but equally blind to the specific inner visage of Christianity and other biblical spiritualities." Dr. Cuttat teaches that each religion is unique and different religions should meet and encounter each other in their individual uniqueness. He is a philosopher of *uniqueness, encounter, dialogue*, and exchange.

Another eminent name which has to be mentioned in this connection is that of the late Fr. J. Monchanin. He was attached to India and settled in Tiruchirapalli. He built for himself a retreat to which he gave the name Sacchidananda Ashram. He himself assumed the name Swami Param Arubi Anandam and put on the dress of an Indian Sanyasin. From these facts one should not assume that he became a Hindu monk. He understood his own mission differently. As the editors of his papers said when he died in 1957, his "mission here was not so much to become fully an Indian or to realize in himself the final synthesis of West and East as to bring to India in a pure form, yet with a remarkable sympathy and understanding, the riches of a Christian soul." He himself defines his mission in these terms: "I have come to India for no other purpose than to awaken in a few souls the desire (the passion) to raise up a Christian India. I think the problem is of the same magnitude as the Christianization, in former times, of Greece (the Hellenization of Christendom modelled on the forms of Greek sensibility, thought and spiritual experience). It will take centuries, sacrificed lives, and we shall perhaps die before seeing any realizations. A Christian India, completely Indian and completely Christian will be something so wonderful; to prepare it from afar, the sacrifice of our lives is not too much to ask."

Just two years before his death in 1957, he was writing: "I believe more in 'exchange'. India must give the West a keener sense of eternal, of the primacy of Being over Becoming, and receive, in turn, from the West a more concrete sense of the temporal, of becoming, of the person, of love (of which India alas! knows so little)."

Fr. J. Monchanin found a good deal in Hinduism which he appreciated. But let us see what all this 'appreciation' amounts to. All the merit Hinduism has accumulated is only a pointer to her conversion to Christianity. We give in his own language what he says on the subject:

"India has received from the Almighty an uncommon gift, an unquenchable thirst for whatever is spiritual. From the Vedic and Upanishadic times, a countless host of her sons have been great seekers of God. Centuries after centuries there arose seers and poets, singing the joys and sorrows of a soul in quest of the One, philosophers reminding every man of the supremacy of contemplation: upward and inward movements through knowledge to the ultimate.

"Communion with Him and liberation from whatever hinders that realization, was for them the unique goal.

"Hundreds and thousands of men and women have consecrated themselves entirely to that end... We may rightly think that such a marvellous seed was not planted in vain by God in the Indian soul. Unfortunately, Indian wisdom is tainted with erroneous tendencies and looks as if it has not yet found its own equilibrium. So was Greek wisdom before Greece humbly received the Paschal message of the Risen Christ. Man, outside the unique revelation and the unique Church, is always and everywhere unable to sift truth from falsehood, good from evil.

"But once Christianized, Greece rejected her ancestral errors; so also, confident in the indefectible guidance of the Church, we hope that India, once baptized to the fullness of her body and soul, will reject her pantheistic tendencies and, discovering in the splendours of the Holy Ghost the true mysticism.

"Is not the message she had to deliver to the world similar to the message of the ancient Greece? Therefore the Christianization of Indian civilization is to all intents and purposes an historical undertaking comparable to the Christianization of Greece."

Hindus may have the necessary underlying spiritual qualities like a sense of the holy in abundance, but the Church has the Truth in its possession.

Therefore, "India has to receive humbly from the Church the sound and basic principles of true contemplation. The genuine Christian contemplation is built on the unshakable foundation of revealed truths concerning God and men and their mutual relations." The mystic East should be led by the doctors of theology of the West, the forest-sages by the university men.

On another occasion, he says:

"In that mystery, Hinduism (and specially Advait) must die to rise up again Christian. Any theory which does not fully take into account this necessity constitutes a lack of loyalty both to Christianity - which we cannot mutilate from its essence - and to Hinduism - from which we cannot hide its fundamental error and its essential divergence from Christianity.

"Meanwhile, our task is to keep all doors open, to wait with patience and theological hope for the hour of the advent of India into the Church in order to realize the fullness of the Church and the fullness of India. In this age-long vigil, let us remember that love can enter where intellect must bide at the door."

He hopes that "India cannot be alien to this process of assimilation by Christianity and transformation into it." But "should India fail in that task, we cannot understand, humanly speaking, how the mystical body of Christ could reach its quantitative and qualitative fullness in His eschatological Advent."

IV

The discussion will gain in fullness if we referred to two colloquies organized by Christian theologians of this approach. These were held at the invitation of Dr. Cuttat who attended them both personally. The first one was held at Almora in April, 1961; the second one at Rajpura, Dehradun, in the same month, next year. A general and sympathetic account of the second one is given by Bede Griffiths in his *Christ in India: Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (Publishers: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York). We ourselves shall discuss here only the first colloquy at Almora. It was attended by individuals connected with various Christian institutions, Catholic and Protestant, like Asirvanam, Kenkeri; Snehastadan,

Poona; Santi Bhavan, Calcutta; Vrindavan, Kottagiri; Jyotiniketan, Kareli. One Hindu, Shri Viveka Dutta, was also present at the discussion for the first few sessions. The summary of the papers and discussion was prepared by Fr. J. Britto C.M.I., of Dharmarain College, Bangalore, himself one of the participants. The summary is titled *Indian Interiority and Christian Theology*.

All the participants in this colloquy advocate a dialogue with Hindu India on a deeper level. But let us see what kind of mind they bring to the proposed dialogue.

As the *Indian Interiority and Christian Theology* tells us, the participants start with the assumption that "Christianity as the one revealed religion for all men, cannot be lacking in any truth necessary for the salvation of man; it has the guarantee of the Divine testimony."

But their procedure is not to be to denounce Hinduism forthright; on the other hand, it is to take different categories of Hindu thinking and "after exhausting all the positive points that Hinduism provides as solutions, proceed to show that Christianity gives fuller and ultimate solution to those and all other problems."

The intention is also not to inquire whether "Hinduism has some positive religious values which are wanting in Christianity"; for that is "not logically tenable", believing as they do that Christianity is "the true revealed religion for all humanity." But they are prepared to look at particular values more intensely realized by some Hindu sages which may direct "the Christian back to his own religion, in which he finds the same values more naturally embedded." This position is not without its modesty. It seems that Christians, if not Christianity, too can learn a few things even from the heathens, though these things are nothing but the neglected truths of their own religion.

But the participants soon forget the learning part and assume the teaching role, probably due to compulsion of habit. They become polemical. According to the procedure they laid down for themselves, they take different Hindu categories of thought and spirit and show that Christianity offers a better answer. One such category is Teacher-Disciple or Guru-

Shishya relationship, an important spiritual institution in Hinduism. After discussing it, the participants find that "the only person in whom the positive values of the Hindu Guru are best verified is Christ."

Similarly, after discussing the Hindu concept of history, the colloquy finds that the positive values found "in the Indian view of history have their full meaning and natural setting in the Christian concept of history."

The participants discuss Yoga too, its positive as well as its negative aspects. At the end, they find that while in Christianity the negative aspects are avoided, the positive aspects of Hindu Yoga "find their natural setting and full meaning in Christianity. Non-dualism, and dualism, Yoga absolutism and Bhakti personalism, Sankara and Ramanuja are in different ways related to Christianity. The Christian worships the Absolute of Sankara with the devotion of Ramanuja."

The Hindu concept of Avatarhood is discussed. It is found inferior to the Christian one. "Christ's incarnation is a unique fact, and not repeated in every age... He is true Godhead in true humanity."

Hindu symbolism and idol-worship have some positive points but the dangers are far greater. "The fundamental defect of Hindu idol-worship is that it is purely a human attempt so to say to trans-substantiate the material things into the divine without a prior incarnation, namely, without a-divine guarantee which assumes the human symbol, into the divine economy of self-communication to man. Man cannot by his own powers raise himself to the divine level, which far transcends him. Hence the Hindu conviction that when the priest recites the prayers over the idol it becomes inhabited by the deity is gratuitous assumption and hence superstitious."

But it is different with Christian symbolism. For example, "the Eucharist marks the culmination of human symbolism. In it the food of man is turned into the body and blood of God. There man's attempt to trans-substantiate the material world into the divine is wonderfully realized - the Eucharist may be taken as a summary and completion of all human endeavour to grasp the divine Reality in human symbols. Hence it should form the converging point of all religious cult."

Hindu Bhakti too has more demerits than merits. Its chief defects are that (1) "the notion of love itself is not perfect;" (2) "there is no integration between knowledge and love," - one has to choose between them; and (3) it lacks a "perfect concept of alterity and there is no proper concept of sin."

Nevertheless, the Bhakti of a Hindu could still be a "preparation for the final confrontation with the personal God who manifests Himself in the Christian Revelation."

Discussing *jnânamârga*, the colloquy finds that the Hindu doctrine of Advaita is irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of Trinity, but even that could become a step to the understanding of the doctrine of the three Persons in One. How? First, by opposing polytheism. Second, by its strong metaphysical bias for unity: "Only against the background of the unique and absolute of God can the doctrine of the Trinity and the immortal personality of man be properly understood. God in his providence insisted on the strictest monotheism, and uncompromisingly exterminated all tendency to polytheism, in the chosen people in the Old Testament, before revealing against the background of the monotheism the Trinity of Persons in that one God, in the New Testament. Hence Advaita with its strong metaphysical basis can be a *proper preparatio evangelica* for an understanding of the Christian message."

V

Once it is admitted that Christianity is the uniquely true religion, the summit towards which all religions are advancing, the liberal theologians will not mind conceding certain subordinate spiritual qualities and attributes and values to Hinduism. In this expansive mood, they generously admit that some European Christians "have felt the wealth of India's religious past." The deep inferiority which India has inculcated has even "led some of them to deepen their-own Christian inferiority." Some of them have been "struck by the vision of the spirit of poverty preached by Christ (but) so fully and cheerfully practised by millions in India." The religious outlook in which everything of every event is looked upon as a work of God, a manifestation of the divine, has impressed many. Many have noted with admiration "the so to say national aptitude for deep prayer and the contemplation of divine things which Indians manifest."

When the Pope came to India in 1964, he "praised" India's deep spirituality. But it is in the light of the above approach that this praise should be understood. It was not anything spontaneous or genuine. It was diplomatic and deceptive. In fact, it amounted to cheating, if cheating includes a double-tongued approach, half-truths spoken and full aim unstated. The Pope's "praise" concealed more than it revealed. It meant to say: Hinduism is very good. It is a useful preparation for Christianity. The Pope praised Hinduism for its *secondaries*, hiding a condemnation of its *primaries*.

His deputy in India, Cardinal Gracias, could afford to be more candid in putting forth the unstated aim. He bemoaned: "It is a matter of grave concern for us that hardly three percent of the local population in India could so far be drawn to receive the Grace of Christ over the last several centuries." The strategy may change but the aim remains fixed. It may be a soft-spoken approach now, but the goal is unaltered. Liberal Christianity is like Euro-Communism; the tactics and the slogans have changed but the mind remains the same.

In the past, in the heyday of British imperialism, fanatic Christians like Carey and Wilberforce were telling their people something like this: "The natives live in the sin and superstition and darkness of paganism. Surely God has not granted us their charge for nothing. He wants us to bring them to the light of the Gospel, to convert them to Christianity." But it seems the rulers were less convinced about the benefits of Christianity to the natives. But in a Christian country, they could not express this feeling or belief too openly. So they took to a more equivocal course. They pretended to agree with the crusaders but counter-argued thus: "You are very correct in your judgement of the natives. But precisely because they are superstitious, we must go slow with them and their religious beliefs; if we touch their religion, it would become a law and order problem and we may lose the Empire itself." This attitude of the British rulers saved India from the worst ravages of Christian missionaries.

But now the political equation has changed and also the ideas have changed. What was possible a hundred years ago is no longer possible now. The Church is also less powerful now even in countries nominally

Christian. Its pretentious claims jar on the more sophisticated ears and minds of the age. So a new liberal - or at least liberal-sounding - theology is in the offing, which is trying to give up the old method of forthright denunciation and taking the new method of partial praise, a grudging (and sometimes even genuine) appreciation of the values of a religion they aim to supplant.

Behind the praise of the neo-theologians, we can hear, if our ears are attentive, another message expressed sometimes openly, sometimes *sotto voce*. They are saying something like this: "You are too good to remain what you are. Your destiny is to become Christians. We see in your country spiritual things deep and uncommon. But God could not have planted these things amongst you in vain. He must have been preparing you for Christianity, for blessing you with the truth he blessed us with; in short, he must have been aiming to make you as good as we are."

The neo-theologians admit that the Hindus have lived a life of dedication and constant quest, that they have pondered over things spiritual from times immemorial. But, in spite of that, somehow, the *Truth* eluded them. Why? Because, as they seem to say, while the Hindus had the seeking, they lacked the key. They did not know Jesus Christ. God has to be found not in God but in Jesus Christ and the Church.

The Bible says: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. But to the Christian theologians, seeking and knocking, however dedicated and sincere, are not enough. For don't we meet the strange phenomenon that while the Hindus asked, as the neo-theologians are ready to grant, God gave it to the Christians; while the Hindus sought, the Christians found; while the Hindus knocked, it was opened unto the Christians. A mystery, perhaps a Trinitarian mystery, perplexing to the heathens but easily understood by the Christians.

The Christian theologians call pagan religions *natural*, while their own they call *revealed*. In this they pay to pagans an unintended compliment. The opposite of the *natural* is not the revealed, but the *artificial*, and there is something artificial about the Christian religion. A natural religion means that it is about things inherent and intrinsic; that it is about a seeking of the heart which is innate; that it is about *man* in his deeper search, and not

about a particular person or a church; that it does not deal with the accidental but with the universal. Its truths are not adventitious, added from *outside* by a *sole* leader or institution; on the contrary, these reside in the "cave of the heart," to put it in the Upanishadic phrase. These truths are also not fortuitous, happening by a lucky chance consisting in the appearance of a particular individual, or in the crusading labours of a church burdened with a self-assumed role. On the contrary, these truths happen because man in his innermost being, by *nature*, is a child of divine light. Man grows from *within*, by an inherent law of his being, responding to *That* which he already is secretly. The *purusha* or *person* within responds to the *purusha* without. *Tat tvam asi; tat aham asmi; sah tadasti.* (You are That; I am That; he is That.)

Christianity has two pillars: a narrow piety and a word-juggling theology. What is true in it is also found in other religions which it supplanted in the past and which it continues to do in the present as well; what it claims to be unique to it is merely intellectual bluff.

Christian theology, as it has developed, is not a product of a tranquil and purified heart; rather, it derives from a mind prejudiced, self-centered and self-righteous, a mind contentious and cantankerous, out to prove the other fellow in the wrong. It is an artificial mental construct with very little spirituality in it. Above all, like Islam, it is inwoven with bigotry and fanaticism and lacks charity, understanding and the deeper vision of the spirit.

Footnotes:

[1](#) First published in a New Delhi quarterly, *Manthan*, Volume 4. No. 3 (May 1982), and subsequently reprinted as a chapter in *Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1982, 1984, and 1992.

The Great Command and a Cosmic Auditing

APPENDIX 3

The Great Command and a Cosmic Auditing¹

The volume surveys 788 most important evangelizing Plans produced by Christianity during its career of over 19 hundred years. All these Plans relate to the Great Commission - the command that Jehovah gave through the mouth of His only Begotten Son, Jesus, to the believers to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28.19, 20). If there was also a command to improve their morals, it was neglected, but the one to preach and recruit more followers for their God was rather taken in earnest. They promised Him to make "all the peoples of the earth know Him and fear Him" (2 Chr. 6.33).

The Survey is a statistical marvel, a worthy sequel to the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (reviewed by us in *The Times of India*, July 14, 1985), by David Barrett, an outstanding statistician-evangelist and senior author of this volume under review. Quite in the spirit of the book, the two authors are introduced statistically as Missionaries who "have been involved in some 36 (10%) of all the 358 global plans between 1953 and 1988."

The book is divided into 4 parts and 28 chapters; it includes 10 Appendices, 27 Tables and Diagrams and a Bibliography, a selection of original and significant writings, classics, and other benchmark items on the subject of world evangelization.

The book does not include all the plans, but only a fraction of them representing merely "the tip of the iceberg." It however includes plans best known for their global significance and, as we approach modern times, most central plans of major Christian denominations or missions or parachurch agencies which each has over 5,000 foreign missionary personnel. The authors analyze these plans using 15 variables.

The biblical story that God created the world out of Chaos proves to the authors that He is a "God of order, of planning, of strategy." Similarly, the biblical observation that the "very hairs of your head are numbered" proves that God is also a great enumerator, and numberer. The authors do no more than imitate their God's skill and audit for us how His Great Commission has been followed by the believers.

Christianity has passed through 66 generations but for the best part of its life the Great Command has been neglected. "Disobeying the Great Commission: 59 Neglected Generations," has a separate chapter on it. During this while, there were only 2.6 plans per generation. But with the 19th century began the era of "five aware generations." During this time which also coincides with the heydays of Western Imperialism, the number of global plans per generation rose to 28. But the most "aware" and the richest in planning is the present century. During its first decade, the figure was 69 plans per generation, 321 during the 1970s, and the going rate is 1,200 global plans per generation.

In earlier centuries most global plans came from countries bordering on the Mediterranean. Then the shift took place to Europe, Russia and North America. Since AD 1900, the US alone has provided 247 global plans.

But while the plans have been abundant, their failures have been no less impressive. The book includes a chapter, "A Catalogue of Woes," which enumerates "340 reasons for 534 failed global plans." The reasons include such items as "ecclesiastical crime", "ecclesiastical gangsterism", "offering tempting inducements", the "use of laundered money", "mass religious espionage", "imperialism", "terrorism", etc.

Such reasons suggest as if these plans depended for their success on Christians being better than they were. But this is pure assumption. In fact, the reasons cited for their failure are often also reasons for their success. There could easily be a chapter on "X-number of reasons for successful Y-number of plans," and these would have rightly included imperialism, terrorism, coups, arrogance, etc. These indeed are cited when the authors discuss "Evolution of a global Evangelical movement" and name individually 304 years of evangelical significance. For example, they mention AD 323 for "attempts to spread gospel by law and authority" by

Constantine; or cite C 780 for "forced baptism of Saxon race by Charlemagne, 4,500 executed in one day for resisting, thousands more deported"; or AD 1523, when the "Spanish monarch orders Cortes to enforce mass conversion of American Indians... in Mexico, Franciscans baptize over a million in 7 years, with at times 14,000 a day... C 1550, 800,00 Peruvian Amerindians confirmed by one archbishop of Lima."

Resources

Next to political power in importance are money and propaganda. The authors tell us about the resources at the command of Christian churches. They tell us that today it costs "145 billion dollars to operate organized global Christianity"; it commands 4.1 million full-time Christian workers, runs 13,000 major libraries, publishes 22,000 periodicals, issues 4 billion tracts a year, operates 1,800 Christian Radio/TV stations. We are also told that there are 3 million computers and the "Christian computer specialists" are described as "a new kind of Christian army."

Missionary activity is the major plank of organized Christianity. At present 4,000 Mission Agencies operate a huge apparatus of Christian world mission manned by 262,300 missionaries costing 8 billion dollars annually. Every year, there are 10,000 new books/articles on foreign evangelization alone. The authors give an interesting estimate and tell us that Christianity has expended on its missionary activities a "total of 160 million worker-years on earth over these 20 centuries." But since a missionary does not live by God alone, it has cost the church exchequer "somewhere in the neighbourhood of 350 billion dollars", or about 2,200 dollars per year per missionary.

From time to time special plans have also been drawn for evangelizing the world. On 788 of them surveyed here, 10 million worker-years and 45 billion dollars have already been expended. Right away there are 387 global plans at work and 254 of them are making progress. One hundred fifty-five of these plans are called "massive", defined as those which each expends "10,000 worker-years, or over 10 million dollars a year, for an average of 10 years." There are still bigger plans, 33 of them called gigantic, "gigaplan", "each with over 100,000 worker-years, or 100 million dollars a year, or a total of 1 billion dollars over the years of plan's life." The biggest

current gigaplan is spending 550 million dollars a year on its missionary work.

We are told that though the church had "always had enormous resources," they did not always avail. Sometimes even well-endowed plans came to nothing. For example, in 1918, 336 million dollars were raised and then the plan was destroyed within a week. More recently, a gigaplan which raised 150 million dollars a year collapsed (did it?) in 1988 in a sex and management scandal which involved top evangelists. The reference is to Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart of the Assemblies of God.

Unreached people

But in spite of this massive effort, there are still "unreached people", places where the missionaries have not reached or where they have not succeeded. All these people have been "segmentized" into "bite-sized chunks" which number 3,000. They are placed under 5,000 missionaries of special calibre and training, well versed in research, logistics, briefing, monitoring, analyzing and coordinating, and modern communication techniques. Considering the nature of their work, they operate from places which are politically secure and which have modern facilities.

The greatest difficulty the missions are facing today is that they are being denied free run in many areas and face resistance from traditional religions or competing ideologies or nationalist sources. The authors say that upto AD 1900, "virtually every country was open to foreign missionaries of one tradition or another," but at present "some 65 countries are closed... with three more closing their doors every year." But the missionaries have risen to the occasion and in order to overcome these difficulties, they operate a wide-spread underhand apparatus while their theorists propound new ways and try new strategies for penetrating these areas. That these methods involve moral and legal objections provides no deterrence. As the authors put it, in situations where their basic rights as Christian missionaries have been denied, they "have not hesitated to operate illegally, or secretly," as all history shows. *The Evangelical Missionaries Quarterly* justifies the subterfuge required of covert missionaries thus: "God does not lie, but he does keep secrets." Translated into the ethical code of his followers, this attribute of Jehovah means: Ask no questions and you will be told no lies.

Secret Apparatus

Missionaries to these areas or "target countries" are divided into various kinds: Tentmaker, Residential, Clandestine, Mole, Tourist, Courier, Smuggler and Non-residential. Each category has a defined status and role. Advantage is taken of the fact that even a country most restrictive of missionaries maintains a variety of contacts with the West - commercial, diplomatic, technical, tourist. Thus men are sent out to these semi-closed countries who openly work in a secular job as technicians, diplomats or social workers but also secretly belong to a missionary agency. Such men are called Tentmakers a la St. Paul, who earned his bread by tentmaking but voluntarily worked as a missionary. This channel is highly organized. For example, *Tentmakers International*, Seattle, Washington, a Missionary body, runs a "tentmaker placement network", working closely with private and social agencies. It has a list of 15,000 secular jobs for which it recruits *tentmakers*. "Jobs are available world-wide. Choose your country, take your pick," it advertises. Then everything becomes secretive. A warning is issued: "Please use commonsense when talking about *Tentmakers International*. Confidentiality is a must."

The Clandestine is a "full-time missionary who operates illegally." In the restricted countries, "much ministry is carried in this way," the authors tell us. The *Mole*, a word used in certain Intelligence Services, is another such type. He is a "part-time Christian worker, an illegal residential alien." A *Courier* is a "visitor from abroad who illegally carries messages to, from, and between local Christians and *Clandestine* workers." Tourists also come handy for this purpose. Every year more than 100 million Christian foreigners enter those restricted countries, and hundreds of them "are persuaded to act as couriers by Western Agencies," the authors tell us. Another category is Smuggler, a "full-time professional and seasoned Christian worker who operates illegally as an itinerant." One of the most famous of them is Brother Andre, author of the best-seller, *God's Smuggler*.

These foreign types have their local counterparts which include categories like *Unregistered*, *Undergrounder*, *Messenger*, *Guerrilla*. For example, an *Undergrounder* is the citizen equivalent of the foreign Mole, a Messenger of the alien Courier. "Huge underground evangelizing networks

exist operated by messengers utilizing solely word of mouth - no letters, no writing, no telephone," the authors reveal. They also tell us that "around the world are many thousand Guerrillas," a category parallel to foreign *Smugglers*.

These two groups of aliens and citizens work in unison. To illustrate, the authors cite the example of the "Pearl Operation" of 1981. In this Operation, 200 tons of Bible, one million volumes in all, were landed illegally at night off Swatow, China, and all quickly taken away by some 20,000 Chinese Christians. We are told that the "Operation was masterminded by alien *Smugglers* and citizen *Guerrillas*, using a complex network of foreign *Couriers*, citizen *Messengers*, and *Clandestine* workers from different countries to alert thousands of ordinary Chinese Christians, large number of *Unregistered* pastors, and other part-time *Undergrounders* and *Moles*."

Martyrs

Sometimes these underhand workers are apprehended and punished; then they join the roster of Martyrs, who currently number 230,000 a year according to our authors.

Two such *Moles* or *Smugglers* were apprehended in Nepal in December, 1988. They were Mervyn Budd, 22, a Canadian, and McBride, 33, an American, both working for a US-based Missionary organization, called "Operation Mobilization." As soon as the news of their arrest was splashed over the world, other sentiments and forces came into play. People forgot to inquire who these two men were and only remembered that they had their "civil" rights. Jack Anderson wrote in his weekly column: "Imagine being thrown in jail for selling religious literature," making McBride's activity as innocent as that. He told us how American Congressmen like Robert Walker and Senators Richard Lugar and Clairborne Pell took an active interest and "put pressure on the Nepalese Government." Amnesty International too was active.

Weak and poor countries of the third world have hardly any chance against these pressures and tactics. While the UNO recognizes the right of the Missionaries to operate their highly-endowed and subversive apparatus, it offers the weak countries no protection against it.

Cosmic Auditing

The authors give us some very interesting figures. They have no use for the traditional biblical chronology which allows man a bare 4,000 years of sojourn on the earth (according to a 17th century computation, man appeared on the earth on October 23 of BC 4004 and the apostles were already getting ready for the end of the world in their times). Our authors however take a long stride, back and forth, and go back to 5.5 million years when Homo appeared on the scene and they traverse 4 billion years in future. Undeterred by the fact that the new perspective involves grave theological problems, they boldly audit for us the missionary activity for all this era.

By the time Jesus came, 5.5 million years had already elapsed and 118 billion men and women had already lived and died, all *ipso facto* destined for hell as they did not know Christ. But new prospects opened for mankind after AD 33 when the Kingdom of Heaven was announced and inaugurated. Heaven, empty until then, began to be populated though rather unexpectedly slowly in the beginning. But by 1990, there are already 8 billion *dead* believers (Church Triumphant), all qualifying for habitation in the new region. They are however still only 5.70% of unbelievers destined for hell, quarters across the street. But the demographic composition continues to improve in their favour. By AD 2100, they are 8.57%, and at the end of 4 billion years, they are fully 99.90%, the Christian heaven holding 9 decillion (one decillion is ten followed by 33 zeros) believers.

In AD 100,000, believers are still only 85% of the total living population. But by AD 4 billion, the gap practically closes and almost all are believers. The Great Commission is fulfilled and Missionaries are freed from their obligation to God and His Son.

The population figures given here take into account men whose longevity after AD 2,500 turns gradually into immortality, and new men and human species artificially created by mass cloning and genetic engineering (Missionaries of the future believing, brave new world will have a different role; they will increasingly be able to raise their own crop of believers through genetic technology); they take into account humans increasingly living on off-earth space colonies, then across other galaxies and universes.

In AD 4 billion, the "ultimate size of the Church of Jesus Christ," the authors estimate, will be "1 decillion believers," not counting 9 decillion dead by then.

This is indeed a cosmic auditing of the evangelical movement. David Barrett is a fitting Consultant on World Evangelism to the Vatican and to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, but one wonders whether these figures would excite them or depress them and whether they would know what to do with them. Figures and planning of this scale cease to be meaningful.

The Survey is eminent in statistics but poor in philosophy and spiritual wisdom. In fact, its psychic source is crass materialism.

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The Rise of a Global Evangelization Movement*, by David B. Barrett and James W. Reapsome published by The AD 2000 Series, 1989, reviewed by Ram Swarup in The Statesman, Sunday Edition, March 25, 1990.

Christian Ashrams in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

APPENDIX I

Christian Ashrams in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

This list has been compiled, in an alphabetical order, from several Christian publications. The date of foundation, wherever available, has been given in brackets.[1](#)

India

1. Aikiya Alayam, Madras, Tamil Nadu.
2. The Alwaye Fellowship House (1947), Alwaye, Kerala.
3. Anbu Vazhvu Ashram, Palani, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.
4. Anjali Ashram, Mysore, Karnataka.
5. Anusandhan Ashram, Bhanpuri, Raipur District, Madhya Pradesh.
6. Arupa Ashram, Aruppakotai, Tamil Nadu.
7. Asha Niketan, Bangalore, Karnataka.
8. Asha Niketan, Calcutta, West Bengal.

9. Asha Niketan, Katalur, Kerala.
 10. Asha Niketan, Tiruvanmayur, Madras, Tamil Nadu.
 11. The Ashram (1931), Perambavoor, Kerala.
 12. Asirvanam, Kumbalgud, Bangalore District, Karnataka.
 13. Bethany Ashram, Bapatla, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh.
 14. Bethany Ashram (1938), Channapatna, Bangalore District, Karnataka.
 15. Bethany Ashram, Lahal, Kerala.
 16. Bethany Nature Cure and Yoga Centre, Nalanchira, Trivandrum, Kerala.
 17. Bethel Ashram (1957), Gudalur, Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu.
 18. Bethel Ashram, Kattrapally, Warangal District, Andhra Pradesh.
 19. Bethel Ashram, Parkal, Warangal District, Andhra Pradesh.
 20. Bethel Ashram (1922), Tiruvalla, Kerala.
- Bethel Ashram, Trichur, Kerala.

- 21.
22. Calcutta Samaritans, Calcutta, West Bengal.
23. Catholic Church, Garhi, Bihar.
24. Catholic Mission, Rohtak, Haryana.
25. Chayalpadi Ashram, Angamoozhi, Kerala.
26. Christa Krupashrama (1949), Mandagadde, Shimoga District, Karnataka.
27. Christa Mitra Ashram (1940), Ankola, North Kanara District, Karnataka.
28. Christa Panthi Ashram (1942), Sihora, Madhya Pradesh.
29. Christa Prema Seva Ashram (1922), Pune, Maharashtra.
30. Christa Sathia Veda Ashram, Boyalakantla, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh.
31. Christa Sevakee Ashram (1950), Karkala, Karnataka.
32. Christa Sisya Ashram (1936), Tadgam, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.
33. Christa Yesudasi Sangha (1935), Ahmadnagar, Maharashtra.

34. Christa Yesudasi Sangha (1919), Malegaon, Nasik District, Maharashtra.
35. Christavashram (1940), Manganam, Kottayam District, Kerala
36. Christian Ashram (1930), Vrindavan, Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh.
37. Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, Karnataka.
38. Christian Medical Fellowship, Oddanchatram, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.
39. Christiya Bandhu Kulam, Satna, Madhya Pradesh.
40. Christu Dasa Ashram (1929), Palghat, Kerala.
41. Christukulam Ashram (1921), Tripattur, North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu.
42. Deepshikshashram, Narsingpura, Madhya Pradesh.
43. Dhyan Ashram, Manpur, Indore District, Madhya Pradesh.
44. Dhyana Ashram, Madras, Tamil Nadu.
45. Dhyana Ashram, Wynad, Kerala.
46. Dhyana Nilayam, Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

47. Dilaram House, New Delhi.
48. Dilaram House, Calangute, Goa.
49. Dohnavur Fellowship, Dohnavur, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu.
50. Evangelisation Centre, Paramkudi, Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu.
51. Fransaliam Vidya Niketan, Khamgaon, Buldana District, Maharashtra.
52. Friend's Centre, Rusulai, Hoshangabad District, Madhya Pradesh.
53. Gethesme Ashram, Muvathupuzha, Kerala.
54. Gospel House, Keonjhar, Orissa.
55. Gyan Ashram, Andheri, Bombay, Maharashtra.
56. Ishapanthi Ashram (1922), Puri, Orissa.
57. Jeevan Dhara, Rishikesh, Uttar Pradesh.
58. Jesu Christ Passid Ashram, Cochin, Kerala.
59. Jyoti Niketan Ashram, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.

60. Khrist Panthi Ashram (1947), Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
61. Khrist Sevashram, Rani, Assam.
62. Kodaikanal Ashram Fellowship (1934), Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu.
63. Kurishumala Ashram, Vagamon, Kottayam District, Kerala.
64. Little Brothers of Jesus, Alampundi, South Arcot, District, Tamil Nadu.
65. Madras Gurukul, Madras, Tamil Nadu.
66. Masihi Gurukul, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
67. Masihi Sadhu Ashram, Maranda, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh.
68. Meherpur Ashram, Nadia, West Bengal.
69. Menonite Central Committee, Calcutta, West Bengal.
70. Missionary Brothers of Charity, Calcutta, West Bengal.
71. Mitri Bhavan, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
72. New Life Centre, Pune, Maharashtra.

73. Nirmala Mata Ashram, Goa.
74. Om Yeshu Niketan, Bardez, Goa.
75. Prakashpuram Ashram, Udemalpet, Tamil Nadu.
76. Prarthana Ashram (1948), Neyyatinkara, Kerala.
77. Premalaya Ashram (1937), Chamrajanagar, Karnataka.
78. Prem Ashram, Kadari, Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh.
79. Saccidananda Ashram, Bangalore, Karnataka.
80. Saccidananda Ashram, Coorg, Karnataka.
81. Saccidananda Ashram, Narsingpur, Madhya Pradesh.
82. Saccidananda Ashram, (1950), Tannirpalli, Tiruchirapalli District, Tamil Nadu.
83. Saccidananda Ashram, Thasra, Kaira District, Gurajat.
84. Sanjeevan Ashram, Nasik, Maharashtra.
85. Sat Tal Ashram (1929), Bhowali, Nainital District, Uttar Pradesh.

86. Sevananda Nilayam (1929), Nandikotkur. Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh.
87. Shanti Ashram, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.
88. Shanti Neer, Harendrapur, Calcutta, West Bengal.
89. Shantivanam, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh.
90. Snanika Arulappara Virakta Math, Deshnur, Belgaum District, Karnataka.
91. Snehalaya, Pune, Maharashtra.
92. Sneh Sadan, Pune, Maharashtra.
93. Spiritual Life Centre, Narasapur, Pune District, Maharashtra.
94. St. Joseph's Boys Village, Periyakulam, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu.
95. St. Paul's Cathedral Social Services, Calcutta, West Bengal.
96. Suvartha Premi Samithi, Ranthi, Uttar Pradesh.
97. Suvisesha Ashram, Bidadi, Bangalore District, Karnataka.
98. Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, Triuchirapalli, Tamil Nadu.

99. Tapovansarai, Rishikesh, Uttar Pradesh.
100. Tirumalai Ashram, Nagargoil, Kanya Kumari District, Tamil Nadu.
101. TRACI Community, New Delhi.
102. Vellore Ashram (1930), Vellore, Andhra Pradesh.
103. Vidivelli Ashram (1932), Saymalai, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu.
104. Village Reconstruction Organsiation, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
105. Vishram, Bangalore. Karnataka.
106. Yeshu Ashram, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
107. Yesu Ashram, Bangalore, Karnataka.
108. Yesu Karuna Prarthanalaya, Kote, Mysore District, Karnataka.

Nepal

1. Christa Shanti Sangh (1952), Kathmandu.
2. Dilaram House, Kathmandu.

3. Dilaram House, Pokhara.
4. St. Xavier Social Centre, Kathmandu.

Sri Lanka

1. Blessed Sacrament Fathers, Colombo.
2. Christa Illam (1950), Kalmunai, Eastern Province.
3. Christ Seva Ashram (1939), Chunnakam, Jafna District.
4. Devasadan Aramaya, Ibbagmuva, North-West Province.
5. Devia Seva Ashramaya, Urrubokka.
6. Karuna Nilayam (1955), Killinochi.
7. Satyodaya Centre, Nawdha, Kandy.
8. Tulana Kelaniya, Dalgama, Colombo District.

Footnotes:

¹ This list took into account relevant publications upto 1988. More Christian Ashrams must have come up in the meanwhile (1993).

A Glimpse of Mission Finance

APPENDIX II A Glimpse of Mission Finance

The following figures of foreign funds flowing to a few of the Christian organisations in India during 1986, were provided by the Government of India. There are several hundred such organisations spread all over the country.

We have taken the figures from *Hinduism Today* which cited them in its issue of October, 1987:

	<i>Rupees</i>
1. Anand Niketan Ashram, Gujarat	1,435,000
2. Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel, Andhra Pradesh	17,548,000
3. Bhagalpur Prefecture Association, Bihar	5,603,000
4. Christian Institute for Study of Religion, Bangalore	6,741,000
5. Church of North India Childcare Centre, New Delhi	20,568,000
6. Comprehensive Rural Operations society, Hyderabad	22,092,000
7. Indian Baptist Mission, Bangalore	5,253,000
8. Indian Evangelical Church of Christ, Hyderabad	1,558,000
9. Partnership Mission Society, Seilmet, Manipur	6,012,000
10. Rural Action in Development, Andhra Pradesh	1,008,000
11. Eight(8) Catholic Dioceses	57,709,000
Total	145,527,000

Note: We have not tried to collect figures for more Christian organisations or subsequent years. We do not have to document the fact that foreign funds flowing to Christian missions are fabulous.

Thy Kingdom is the Third World

APPENDIX III

Thy Kingdom is the Third World¹

Tempted by Satan to number Israel, King David ordered a census of his people. This angered Jehovah and He offered him three alternatives to choose from : either three years of famine, or three months of destruction at the hand of his enemies, or the three days of the Lord. Counting on the great mercies of Jehovah, David chose to fall into His hand rather than into the hand of man. Consequently, the Lord "sent a pestilence upon Israel; and there fell seventy thousand men" (I Chron. 21).

In preparing this Survey,¹ Dr. Barrett has committed "David's sin", as a census was once considered in more orthodox Christian circles. But he is not without rival biblical support for his immense labour. "Even the hairs of your head are numbered," assures the Bible (Mtt. 10.30), proving Jesus's individual concern. On another occasion, God had ordered Moses to "take the count of the booty that was taken, both of man and of beast" (Num. 31.26). Thus biblically fortified, Dr. Berrett has taken his counting in real earnest and, indeed, has done it with a vengeance. Every single Christian of any sort appears as a single digit in some "760 distinct absolute numbers... 570 percentages, and in around 450 further derived figures (averages)". And so does the unbeliever for he is only the other side of the coin.

The *Encyclopaedia* is comprehensive and covers a wide span both in time and space. It begins with the death of Jesus and, covering the next 19 centuries, arrives at our own time and, without stopping here, makes projections till the years 2,000 A.D. It is also truly ecumenical. It gives global data of Christianity in 8 continents, 24 major regions, 223 countries. It give the number of Christians by their skin colour (7), race (17), ethnolinguistic family (71). It tells us how Christianity is spreading among 8,990 peoples speaking 7,010 languages and 17,000 dialects. Since the beginning of Christianity, every soul, dead and living, has been accounted for. And if the Church is an earthly pre-figuration of celestial realities and,

if to be baptized is also to be saved, then the *Encyclopaedia* also provides a statistical picture of the Last Day of Judgement, of the souls that will be finally saved and finally damned.

Besides figures, the *Encyclopaedia* contains other useful features. It gives a Who's Who of the Christian world, names of the more important 15,000 Christian organisations, a bibliography of 1,845 major works, a Chronology of World Evangelization (AD 27-1983), A Survey Dictionary of World Christianity, 1,500 maps, and 31 global tables. It is compiled by 500 experts in 190 countries; it contains 2.5 million words.

But can God's work really be surveyed in this fashion? Yes, seems to be the answer if the work consists in catechizing and baptizing. Like a good shepherd, the Church has been in the habit of counting its sheep, its new acquisitions, its functionaries, its martyrs and its saints. In the complicated world of today, enumeration has become even more important. Only recently, the Pope spoke of the need for "accurate and well-studied statistics". Dr. Barrett discusses the "theology of Christian enumeration" and tells us how it is useful for missionary "logistics". Jesus, *after* he had died and risen again, told his Apostles to go forth "and make disciples of all nations." This divine "mandate" and "Great Commission" calls for surveys like the present. These "help the followers of Christ to see to what extent they have been faithful to that commission, to perceive the magnitude of their task."

Falsification

Dr. Barrett is a quantifier and statician *par excellence*, but he is not an impartial historian or a disinterested philosopher. He unquestioningly accepts the Christian world-view and interpretative framework and gives them a statistical veneer. For example, the Christian establishment propagates the view that Apostle Thomas landed in India in 52 AD; it has no scholarly support but Dr. Barrett unhesitatingly accepts it and lends it an exactitude that belongs to numbers. Similarly, he tells us that the population of the two Americas was 14 millions at the time of their discovery. The new scholarship was not unavailable to him when he was compiling his *Encyclopaedia*, but he accepted the Christian-European view which wants

to believe that they occupied a relatively vacant land and the occupation involved little genocide.

Quantification falsifies in another way. It covers up many sins. It exhibits the process but hides the product. Can we adequately describe European Imperialism in terms of its present wealth, figures of imports, exports and investments? Similarly, can we describe the process of Christianization in terms of its converts? Describing the beginnings of Christianity in China, the *Encyclopaedia's* Chronology mentions 1306 A.D. as the year when "John of Montecorvino builds 2 churches in Cambaluc"; but it forgets to mention that Christianity started its career with the purchase of 40 Chinese slaves who formed the first native catechists and priests. Similarly, the Chronology mentions 1498 as the year of Vasco da Gama's voyage to the East, but it fails to mention that when he landed in India his flagship displayed a Cross and carried twenty canons.

But here and there we do get much tragic information though having no such sense of tragedy to Christian ears. 1518 is called the year of "Cortes and Spanish Conquistadores" in Mexico. In 1523, Cortes is ordered by the Spanish Monarch "to enforce mass conversion of Mexican Indians." As a result, "Franciscans baptize one million Amerindians in 12 years since conquest, often at the rate of 7,000 a day per missionary".

Whatever be Dr. Barrett's failings as a broader thinker and historian, there is however no doubt that he is a zealous missionary. He looks at everything from a missionary viewpoint. Christianity, for example, is now split into 20,800 denominations as he tells us. A conventional view will see in this fact signs of disunity, but our author points out the positive side. To him, this proliferation gives Christianity many faces and confuses the enemy. It makes it "far more difficult for hostile regimes to comprehend the phenomenon of Christianity in order to control it, suppress it, or eradicate it," to put it in his language.

He brings the same unconventional angle to bear on Christian 'Pilgrimage'. Seven per cent of the Christians are on the move as religious tourists which also takes many of them even to "communist and anti-Christian lands". To Dr. Barrett, these travellers are more than pilgrims. They display Christian power and have an intimidating and overawing role.

They represent " a major form of witness," and, to potential hostile regimes, "a disconcertingly effective demonstration of the latent power of Christianity should they attempt to interfere with it," as Barrett puts it.

World Evangelization

Dr. Barrett tell us that the professed goal of all Christian confession and communion is "world evangelization". To achieve that end, Christians have evolved many specialized institutions. These institutions train theologians, print books, run Radio and TV stations. There are 3,000,000 full-time Christian functionaries; 4,500 major Seminaries train the elite. Of these personnel, 250,000 are Foreign Missionaries trained in 410 world-wide "Foreign Missionary Training Centres". There are 3,100 Foreign Missionary Societies supporting their effort.

Christian Establishments are very diligent in promoting scholarship in theological subjects, linguistics and other fields. Different Christian denominations own and control 1,300 universities. Besides, there are Departments of Religious Studies at 1,500 universities which are significant for the study of Christianity, where they teach theology, divinity, missiology and Church history. The Christian denominations run 930 Research Centres; they bring out 3,000 scholarly journals in addition to another 20,000 magazines and newspapers of a less academic type, of which 4,500 are Roma Catholic. Christians have an early history of "apologetics". During medieval times, in their mutual debates, they found scholarship a mighty weapon. The realization also soon dawned on them that it can also be used with great effect for cultural aggression. Christianity has been destroying other cultures with one hand, and has been "recreating" and "rediscovering" them with the other. During the process, the victims learn to look at themselves through Christian eyes. All this is the silent work Christian scholarship.

Bible printing and distribution has also been an important Christian activity. In 1980, the global distribution of the full Bible was 36,800,00 copies, and of only the New Testament during the same year 57,500,000 copies. By this year, the United Bible Societies' members had distributed 432 million scripture selections - one for each ten persons in the world.

In the last decade, another media has also become very important - Radio and Television. The churches now own 1,450 Radio and TV station. In 1975 alone, they received 4,230,360 letters from the listeners of their programmes. Students of Christianity in India probably know that one organisation, *Vishwa Vani*, alone beams daily about six and a half hours of Radio programme in eleven languages of India. "Radio Converts" is now a new category on the list of mission's organisations that keep accounts of all the souls saved.

All this labour, systematic and sustained, compels admiration. But what supports it from behind? What is its seed-power, its psychic support? A great lack of larger charity towards one's neighbour whose Gods are regarded as false, who is considered damned on his own, and who has to be saved by someone other than himself.

The *Encyclopaedia* provides a good deal of this kind of important information but omits altogether church finance, something eminently suitable for statistical presentation. It gives no information about the budgets of different churches, their properties, investments, the salaries of their priests and missionaries, the Government subsidies and tie-ups, something which would have provided important social and economic data. Some years ago, Time Magazine wrote that the Vatican owned one-fifth of the industrial corporate wealth of Italy.

Conversions

The poor countries of the Third World which have been politically dominated till recently continue to be the special targets of missionary activities. Conversion is massive in Africa. Between 1970 and 1985, Christianity has won here 1,470,000 converts annually, or about 4,000 daily. In South Asia which includes countries like India and Sri Lanka, the annual gain, during the same period, is 447,000 converts or about 1,200 daily. In East Asia, the annual crop is 360,000, or about 1,000 a day. Strangely enough, it is gaining converts even in the USSR - 174,182 annually, or about 450 daily.[2](#)

But these gains are offset by losses in the rich countries of the West, the very heartland of Christianity. In Western Europe, North America, Australia

and New Zealand, it is losing annually 1,950,000 members, or about 5,350 daily. In terms of active, professing church-going members, the loss is even greater - 7,600 a day for Europe and North America alone.

We are told that the centre of gravity of Christianity is shifting from Europe and America to the Third World. This is a euphemism for saying that many of the countries of the Third World have been successfully colonized, that the people of these countries have forgotten their indigenous roots. They have even begun to be recruited to the missionary corps and they are taken out to countries other than their own in the Third World region for proselytizing work. They cost less and they serve as good stool-pigeons. Such recruits already number 32,500. In India, for example, out of a total of 5,979 foreign missionaries, 39 came from the Communist world, and 267 came from Third World countries like Burma, Brazil, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Philippines, etc. In the last three hundred years, Imperialism used its victims themselves to subdue each other. Christianity is doing the same.

Crypto-Christians

We have heard of "underground communism" and "crypto-communists", but the survey also makes us aware of a similar category of "underground church" and "crypto-Christians". These cryptos are affiliated members of the Church but this fact is kept a secret from their Government and even from their neighbours. Globally they constitute 4.9% of the total Christian population (1980). One would have thought that they existed probably only in the hostile Communist and Muslim countries, but the Survey reveals that they exist very much in India too where Christian conversion is open and enjoys legal and social protection. In 1980, about one-third (7,637,000) of the Christian population (3.9% of the total Indian population) was crypto-Christian. And the ratio is rising every year. During 1970-80, the average annual Christian converts were 175,000; of these more than half (88,000) conversions were secret. Partly the motive may have been to take advantage of the benefits meant for the Hindu depressed classes, but it may also be a policy matter of the Christian establishment. Such a large chunk sailing under false colours and probably working in different Government departments, civil, police and army, makes them subject to secret and continued blackmail of the missionaries. In any case, it is bad for their

morale and morals, and bad for national security. And as for the organisers of this clandestine operation, it is not unworthy of a semi-secret society.

Religious Liberty

The UNO's Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the principle of religious liberty and toleration. Dr. Barrett accepts this principle but his understanding of it is exclusively Christian. He interprets it ecumenically. To him, it only means that the Christians should show "genuine religious toleration to, all least, all other expressions of faith in Christ." But so far as other, non-Christian religions are concerned, religious toleration "does not imply that Christians should deny their convictions about Christ and his Church, or abandon proclamation, evangelism or conversion". The Christians retain their right to believe other "religions false and inadequate" and to "attempt to win (their adherents) to faith in Jesus Christ".

Dr. Barrett's understanding of religious liberty is thoroughly Christio-centric. Therefore, to him a country is not libertarian just because it gives liberty to all religions. Such a country ranks only fifth in the order of liberty. On the other hand, a country where the "state propagates Christianity" is at the very top; the second in rank are countries where there is "massive state subsidies to churches". There are 74 such countries where the state provides massive or limited subsidies to churches. No wonder with this kind of definition, countries like Venezuela, Guam, Gibraltar, Greece, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Philippines, etc. - no examples of political or religious liberty - stand at the top.

Hindus-Buddhists

Hindus and Buddhists are found in significant numbers in 84 countries each, but they are losing in number in most of them. The loss is the greatest in their own homes. Between 1970 and 1980, Hindus and Jains together lost in India 324,500 members; this loss was offset to some extent by some gains in North America, Europe and to a degree in Latin America. Thanks to the take-over of China by Communism, Buddhists have registered a massive, global loss of 910,000 a year. Different tribal religions, close to Hinduism and Buddhism in the spirit of tolerance, too have been losing

phenomenally - 2,200,000 annually, and the spiritual and cultural life of many countries has been badly damaged. Africa, for example, is now 45% Christian, and 41% Muslim, and only 12% tribal religionist. And as Dr. Barrett says, all these mass conversions under way "are accruing primarily to missionary religions aggressively engaged in proselytizing".

Followers of Taoism, a great philosophy with many points of affinity with higher Hinduism and Buddhism, have been doing so badly that they have not even deserved a separate mention. Confucianism too is a declining phenomenon according to Dr. Barrett's tables.

All this may be depressing to us in the East but these tables of converts may mean very little in the deeper analysis. These tables at best present a political-ideological map, not a religious-spiritual picture. The Hindu-Buddhist influence is of a different kind. It works as a leaven; it provides Yoga, meditation, and a culture of inferiority. It tends to change people from within, without changing their outer labels. In fact, hundreds of thousands of people in the world, particularly in the West, are already Hindu-Buddhist-Taoist without being so labelled. Even the agnostio-atheist movement in the West and in the Communist countries is Hindu-Buddhist in this deeper, spiritual sense, in so far as this movement follows intellectual honesty and wants to take nothing for granted and rejects unproven dogmas and pretentious claims and wants to build on "facts", though in this case facts belong to an inner realm.

But of course Hinduism and Buddhism should become more conscious of their role. There is no doubt that their present discomfiture is a passing phase. Similarly, Taoism and Confucianism too will regain their old place in the life of China once she overcomes her crisis of identity. The spirit of the East is rising again, not to fall prey to dubious religions and semi-religious ideologies but to make its just contribution to the good of the world.

Footnotes:

[1](#) World Christian Encyclopaedia, edited by David B. Barrett, Oxford University Press, 1982, reviewed by Ram Swarup in The Times of India dated 14 July 1985.

[2](#) The USSR was a communist country when this article was written.

Christianity Mainly for Export

APPENDIX IV Christianity Mainly for Export God's Legionaries

"Go into the world and preach the gospel to all creatures. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16.15-16), Jesus told his followers after he had died and risen from the dead. Christian scholars now know this biblical passage to be an interpolation but this fact has in no way cooled off their zeal for proselytizing. It seems proselytizing needs little biblical inspiration but embodies ecclesiastical aggrandizement and follows its own vested interests, political and economic. At the beginning of this decade, there were 249,000 missionaries in the soul-saving business.

Having been earlier in the missionary field, the Catholic Church still continues to dominate it, but the Protestants too are coming up fast. Of the total missionary force, their share is already 85,000 missionaries. Not long ago, Europe was the mainstay of the Protestant missionary activities but now America leads the field. In 1983/84, North America (USA and Canada) supported 67,000 overseas personnel. The *Mission Handbook*¹, sponsored by the World Vision International, an American evangelical agency, second largest in the field of missionary activity with an annual budget of 84 million dollars, provides useful data on the subject. The book bears no comparison to David B. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (1982) in comprehensiveness but in its own way and in its restricted field it is a good supplement. It contains financial statements which the *Encyclopaedia* neglects, perhaps on purpose.

Protestant Missions

The first Protestant missions "were state enterprises," as the *Encyclopaedia Americana* says. First the Dutch and then successively the Danish and the British Governments sent out missionaries. Then came

William Carey, a Baptist missionary from England supported by local church-bodies, to India. He gave a new impulse to missionary work. In the language of the *Handbook*, the modern Protestant missionary movement began "as a gleam in the eye of a shoe-maker (meaning Carey) as he contemplated the implications of Great Britain's role as a global power, and (as he) hitchhiked, as it were, on the back of international mercantilism". Carey stressed the role of private church-bodies of imperial mother countries in sending out and maintaining missionaries to their colonies.

This method of "corporate enterprise" was increasingly adopted by the evangelists of the Western countries and the number of Protestant missionaries rose fast, America outpacing them all. In 1968, North America's 411 agencies supported 35,8000 missionaries; in 1984, 764 agencies sent out 67,000 personnel, an increase of 86% in agencies and about the same in men. In 1985, North America was spending 1.3 billion dollars on its missionary operations.

On a first glance, the American role seems creditable but the zealots still find it below the mark. They point out that while the USA sends out only one missionary for its each 4,800 citizens, the ratio for Switzerland is 112,400, for France 112,300, for Netherlands 111,300, for Spain 111,260, for Belgium 1/1,54, and above all 1/328 for Ireland, a country poor in worldly wealth but rich in missionary zeal, a veritable example for richer Western national to follow.

Multiplication

Some may regard the method of multiple labour by many countries and denominations as inefficient and wasteful but not so the mission strategists. They point out that the method gives Christianity many faces which helps to confuse unfriendly elements. As Barrett puts it, it makes it "far more difficult for hostile regimes to comprehend the phenomenon of Christianity in order to control it, suppress it, or eradicate it".

"Tentmaking" Missionaries

The number of career missionaries is supplemented by "tentmaking" missionaries. They are professionals or officials of their Governments. They

are not missionaries in the strict sense but they are interested in the mission work. A study of 1,000 such men revealed that "almost half had led some one to Christ, and 20% were instrumental in planting a church".

Their role in countries where there are certain restriction on the missionary activities can be important. The number in these "restricted" countries is "veiled in secrecy, and should perhaps remain that way," the *Handbook* says.

The missionaries see in this "network" an enormous but yet largely untapped potential. Barrett, a totalist, urges that the missions should capitalize on the 300 million Christians that travel abroad on business or pleasure.

Gravity-Shift

Christianity is losing its hold in Western countries but they still keep it for export to the Third World. It was their veritable third arm and it continues to play the same instrumental role to-day.

Demographically, the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the Third World, though America and Europe still continue to be the paymasters. Latin America lost its home and religion long ago and it is now 97% Christian. Marxism is making serious inroads but it is equally hostile to its old culture and religions.

Africa is now 45% Christian. In certain countries like Uganda, the conversion rate is so high that "it has been difficult to keep records up-to-date". In Nigeria, 3,000 missionaries are at work. Both by natural increase and conversion 6.2 million Africans are being added annually to the Christian fold.

In the North, Islam competes and already one-thirds of the people are Muslims. But in both cases, the indigenous peoples and cultures and religions are at the receiving end.

In Asia too, the missions have made serious inroads. Philippines is 92% Christian; Korea 32 per cent. In India 6,000 missionaries are labouring, of

them 3,500 are Catholic and the rest Protestant.

American Protestant missionaries working in India have already created 22,000 local churches located in 90 people- groups - a way of their own in which mission strategists divide Indian people. At present, 154 American Church-agencies are participating in "Indian" work; they support 614 missionaries, a drop from 1,433 in 1979. This "lowering of the profile" is due to political reasons. But it has in no way affected mission operations. Local surrogates are found who though they lack the prestige of white skin yet enjoy two advantages: they are cheaper to recruit and they give an indigenous look to what has hitherto been an essentially white undertaking.

Now many missions are giving up their religious facade and adopting what they call "liberation theology" - a philosophy of direct political action. They float dubious organisations calling themselves Civil Right Groups, Action Groups, Forums and act through local political forces and ideologies of divisive significance. They see their chance in an India of subverted nationalism. New forces of fundamentalist beliefs, separatist loyalties and foreign finances, but mouthing libertarian slogans, are coming up and forming a new axis. Happenings in the North-West are links in the same chain.

Mission Difficulties

Though the missionaries come from wealthy countries, they have their own difficulties, particularly back home. They do not enjoy the old prestige and they work in an atmosphere of increasing scepticism. Missionaries from America have their own peculiar difficulties. In that country, there are no Tithes, no Concordats, no Governmental Appropriations for the support of the clergy; therefore they have to raise their own money. Different denominations have to compete with each other for attracting clients and the "religious" have to advertise their creeds, ideas and programmes in a truly market spirit. In order to raise money for their missionary work abroad, the evangelists have to paint lurid pictures of the depravity of heathen countries. For example, the Texas-based *Gospel for Asia* group, while emphasizing the need of redeeming the Hindus, recently wrote: "The Indian sub-continent, with one billion people, is a living example of what happens when Satan rules the entire culture... India is one vast purgatory in

which millions of people... are literally living a cosmic lie! Could Satan have devised a more perfect system for causing misery?".

In the same vein, the *Dayspring International*, a Virginia-based evangelical organisation, on a televised programme in January 1985, described India as land of "division, despair and death". It quoted Mother Teresa, holding that India was "in dire need of Jesus". In a country of images and brand-names, Mother Teresa is shown in many television programmes appealing for donations for evangelical work in India.

These televised and advertised appeals themselves cost a good deal of money. Many times, it consumes 25% of the money raised and that is considered normal in evangelical circles. But it has to be done and funds have to be raised for, as the *Handbook* says, "it costs money to stay in business," even if the business is evangelical. People are asked to make wise investment in God's work after the fashion of Luke's steward who cheats his master to win his debtors for his own future benefit (Lk. 16.1-8). The investors in God's work are promised that every heathen child "rescued will be there in heaven to welcome you," to quote Spiro Zodhiates, president of the mammoth American Gospel Ministry, in its newsletter of January, 1983.

Career Missionaries

Thanks to such pep-talks, money is easy to come but missionaries are still difficult to recruit. Therefore, the organisers of the show have taken to large-scale advertising. They put up billboards, advertise on TVs and in newspapers inviting young men to sign up.

They are paid handsome salaries. In 1985, each US missionary was costing 26,561 dollars yearly. Their terms of service entitle them to a year of furlough; they are entitled to pensions and retirement benefits. They are accompanied by their spouses. Some young missionaries have also been accompanied by their girl-friends. They teach that Jesus is love.

In the past, too, missionary work offered a career and many joined the mission to improve their economic and social status, but faith was not neglected and it was a requirement in a recruit. Now, however, it is hoped

that the missionaries would acquire faith as they pursue their career. And in many cases they really do, and quite a muscular and charity-proof one too.

The whole concept of missionary work is changing. It is no longer a vocation requiring life-long commitment. "Such a definition is no longer true," the *Handbook* says. Mission work is a career like any other career such as medicine, business, army or trade. "As a result, individuals move in and out of such a career with a surprising degree of ease." There are also many dropouts. We are told that "up to half of all new missionaries do not last beyond their first term". Every such dropout costs the missionary exchequer an extra ten thousand dollars.

A related phenomenon is sharp increase of short-term missionaries. In 1973, they were 10% of the total missionary force; in 1979, 32%; in 1985, 42%, or roughly 28,000 out of a total of 67,000.

"Service" Missions

There is a tendency to justify missionary activities on the ground that some of the missions run hospitals and schools. Mahatma Gandhi thought dimly of these services and often declared that these are not disinterested. The *Handbook* describes the interconnection between "services" and proselytising in the following words: "Through the effort of such service missionaries, the efforts of others involved in direct evangelism are made more effective and efficient."

Third World Missionaries

Not long ago, all missionaries were white. Now a beginning has been made to recruit others in the lower hierarchy of the mission. In 1980, out of a total of 249,000 missionaries, 32,500 were from the Third World. Their number is still small but it is bound to increase. For they cost considerably less and it also gives to missionary work a "Third World look". It is also a good strategy. Let Asians convert Asians - to put it in the language, somewhat modified, of Mr. Dulles.

India is becoming a good recruiting ground for overseas Christian work. In 1973, the Catholic Church had 3,420 Indian Roman Catholic on their

roll; but they included 2,000 nuns which caused a great scandal at one time but was soon forgotten.

India also receives missionaries from the Third World and even from Communist countries like Yugoslavia and Poland. Recently, missionaries came even from Communist China. The other day, a "Japanese" Catholic theologian also visited this author but was unlucky in him.

"Native" Missionaries

A related phenomenon is the growth of "native" or local missionaries. The Catholic Church also uses local missionaries, mostly from Kerala, for work in other parts of India. Discussing the Protestant missionary work in countries like India and Malaysia, the *Handbook* notes that "indigenous missionary movements have become strong". Speaking specifically of India, it says, "Today, the most fruitful ministries are carried by more than 100,000 pastors, evangelists and preachers." Full time Indian missionaries from organised societies increased from 420 in 1973 to 2,941 in 83 societies in 1983. These missionaries have seen remarkable growth in northern India, in places such as Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim. In Western India, Christian workers estimate that two new worship groups are formed every week through indigenous missionary effort. The Indian Evangelist Team has set a goal of 2,000 new churches by the year 2000. In Tamil Nadu, the India Church Growth Mission hopes to plant 1,000 churches in "unreached villages".

Insufficient Results

In spite of many gains in many parts of the world, missions are not always optimistic. Their effort is vast but the results are below expectations. In the last hundred years, there have been "at least fifty major clarion calls... to evangelize the world by a certain date", Barrett, the compulsive quantifier, tells us. But they all failed and those who gave the call "have gone to be with the Lord without seeing the completion of world evangelization".

Meanwhile, the very meaning of the word "evangelization" is uncertain. Its definition changes with the opportunity offered. According to one

definition, least demanding, a people are evangelized when they "have heard of Christianity, Christ and the Church"; according to a second definition when they "have heard the gospel with understanding"; according to a third definition when those who have heard with understanding also act and become converts and "a nucleus of disciples has been formed in them"; according to the fourth definition when the converts themselves become evangelizers. Thus evangelization sets up an expanding task, and its true goal is nothing short of world-conversion.

"Resistant" People

Jesus saw the multitudes and said to his disciples: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matt. 9.37). But the situation has turned out to be different. The labourers or missionaries are many but the harvest is small.

Christian divines had believed that once the Bible was taken to the people and they were told of Jesus Christ, they would flock and gather under the banner of Christianity. But now they are disappointed. Thanks to televangelism, Bible Societies and hotgospellers, there are not many "unreached peoples" left, yet world-conversion is not in sight. On the other hand, puzzlingly, the Christian divines are meeting "resistant peoples", people "who have heard of Christ and his gospel but who as a result of that hearing show little or no inclination to become Christians".

What causes this resistance? The missionary thinkers have come to the conclusion that major resistance comes from people who have their own religion and culture or people like the Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims who belong to "major culture-religions". They find they have better chance among people whom they call "animists". John Stott, in a Foreword to *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (1980), clarifies the point by observing that when Adoniram Judson died in 1850, he left 7,000 converts from animistic Karens, but a mere one hundred Burman converts from Buddhism. "Why was this?... How are we to explain the pitifully small 'dent' which has been made, for instance, on the 600 million Hindus of India or the 700 million Moslems of the Islamic block?," John Stott asks. His answer is contained in his question itself.

Counter-question

We may not agree with his answer but the animists and the heathens themselves have some questions to ask. How long will they be able to withstand the powerful, financially well-oiled onslaught of the missionaries? Are they to have no safeguards? Would the world conscience continue to sleep? Thanks to the powerful missionary lobby in the United Nations, its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that every individual has a right to embrace the religion or belief of his choice. But is there to be no similar charter that declares that countries, cultures and peoples of tolerant philosophies and religions who believe in Live and Let Live, too, have a right of protection against aggressive, systematic proselytising? Are its well-drilled legionaries, organised round a fanatic and totalitarian idea, to have a free field? Should not the Missionary Apparatus be wound up in the interest of justice and fair play?

Footnotes:

[1](#) *Mission Handbook: North American Ministries Overseas*, edited by Samuel Wilson and John Siewert, Monrovia, California, U.S.A., 1986, reviewed by Ram Swarup in *The Times of India* dated 13 and 14 March, 1988.

Proselytisation as it is Practised

APPENDIX V

Proselytisation as it is Practised¹

I did not realise I was stirring a hornet's nest in reviewing the *Mission Handbook* (March 13, 14). It invoked many rejoinders, most of them harsh. It helps inter-faith dialogue which the church has recently invited.

Many points have been made but, quite understandably I can only deal with a few more salient ones, and that too briefly. Mr Kuruvilla Chandy presents a justification for Christian proselytizing which is novel in its being so openly avowed. He compares it with proselytizing in politics where "fraud is proverbial", and with "aggressive advertising" of the commercial world. It is interesting that he finds nothing odious in the comparison. He argues that "proselytizing is normal to life."

One-Way Traffic

But this 'normal-to-life' theory of proselytizing is not supported by Christian theory or practice. The Church always regarded proselytizing as a one-way traffic. One could join it freely but one risked excommunication and later on even death in leaving it.

Perhaps a creed is best known by what it does when it holds political sway. As soon as Christianity came into power, heathen temples were defaced and closed and their revenues transferred to the Church. "We command that all their (heathens') fanes, temples, shrines, if even now any remain entire shall be destroyed by the command of the magistrates" was the order of the day (Theodosius Code, 380 A.D.).

The same methods were employed when Christianity moved to the north of Europe. In Great Britain and Germany, priests and monks moved about destroying the groves and shrines of the people. The last regions to lose their religions in Europe were Prussia and the Baltic states. In the beginning

of the thirteenth century, they were conquered and forcibly converted with the help of two religious-military Orders of Litvonian and Teutonic Knights.

During Medieval times, the Church taught that the Pope was "almost God on earth"; therefore the earth's sovereignty also belonged to him. In the capacity of a overlord, he gave away the newly-discovered Americas to the Spanish king and the Eastern part of the world to King Alfonso of Portugal, "the right total and absolute, to invade, conquer and subjugate all the countries which are under the enemies of Christ, Saracene and pagan."

Space does not permit us to narrate what Christianity did in these parts. Juan de Zumarrage, first Bishop of Mexico, writing in 1531, claimed that he personally destroyed over 500 temples and 20,000 idols of the heathens. From another part of the globe, St. Xavier was writing from Cochin to the King of Portugal: "To your servants you must declare as plainly as possible ... that the only way of escaping your wrath is to make as many Christians as possible in the countries over which you rule."

Thus the Christian history is itself the best contradiction of Mr Chandy's theory that proselytizing is "normal to life" and that it "is a freedom". Moreover, there is a more comprehensive approach beyond this one. Considered from a deeper angle, Christian proselytizing is a bigoted idea, a denial of God and his working in others. Mahatma Gandhi who studied Christian proselytizing closely says that it is the "deadliest poison that ever sapped the foundation of truth," that it is "arrogant", that it embodies a double falsehood: he sees "no spiritual hunger" in nominal converts and "no spiritual merit" in professional missionaries. He says that a missionary is "like any vendor of goods", and that if he had "power to legislate", he "should certainly stop all proselytizing."

"Social work" has been mentioned by several Christian writers as a clincher. Mr Ishtiyaque Danish however also gave us an inside view of it and showed us how it works in Indonesia. In India it works no differently and the Neogy Report is full of similar facts but the report was neglected and things have continued in the same old happy fashion.

The advantage of "social work" as a great support to proselytizing has been long noticed by missionaries themselves. India and Its Missions, an official Catholic publication, issued by its American Capuchin Mission Monks (1923), discusses the "*Spiritual Advantages of Famine and Cholera*" under that very heading! It quotes the report of the Archdiocese of Pondicherry to his superiors in Europe: "The famine has wrought miracles. The catechumenates are filling, baptismal water flows in streams, and starving little tots fly in masses to heaven."

About Christian schools, the same source says that "conversion may often be traced to the schools." Regarding their medical ministry, it says that a "hospital is a readymade congregation; there is no need to go into the highways and hedges and compel them 'to come in'. They send each other."

Certain subterfuges are described with perfect satisfaction. For example, in an operation case, prayers are offered for the patient in the presence of his relatives, the pagan servants or pagan pupil nurses "in language they understand". When the cure is effected, it appears "marvelous" to them and they "very naturally attribute the one to the other".

Who pays for these services? It is Indians themselves though the money is spent by the missionaries. For example, take education. In 1859, the British government decided to help them by the backdoor. It offered grant-in-aid to those "private" agencies who did work in the educational field. The Missions flocked. In his *Colonialism And Christian Missions*, Bishop Stephen Neil tells us that a "century of experience suggests that the missions were right in their decision... In thousands of villages where there was a Christian nucleus, the village teacher served also as a catechist, carrying out many of the duties which in older churches rest on ordinary ministry. About a third of the cost of educational work was borne by the private agencies, two thirds by the Government."

Old Order

He further adds that "even in independent India... the old order has continued in being without radical modification." It seems the Indians are

paying not only for missionary "social service", but also for their apparatus and for their own conversion by them.

Some writers have spoken of the "sacrifice" of the missionaries, their love of Jesus and the natives in choosing their career. This image-building may be good for enhancing the acceptability of missionaries but it is seldom supported by facts. For most people, missions have offered a lucrative career and they have joined it in order to improve their social and financial status. Bishop Stephen Neil tells us that the "missionaries of the last century were overdressed and by the standard of the time lived in luxury, their stipend being £ 200 a year." It will help clarity if we remember in contrast that Benjamin Jowett, the great classical scholar, was appointed as Regius professor of Greek language at Oxford in 1855-56 at £ 54 a year.

The suggestion that Europe and America are the paymasters has been resented. One local missionary protested that he and his wife are "supported by Christians from many parts of India". There is no intention of hurting anybody's feelings and what he says may be true. But it is more likely that people like him are supported by local communities and Bishops who themselves are supported by foreign sources.

There is much financial interlocking at the top and who gives and who receives and why can remain a mystery even after much investigation as recent events prove. However, we have the testimony of Rev. James Cogswell, head of the American National Council of Churches, that they have "consciously" decided to send more cash and fewer people. "American missionaries overseas cost a lot of, money," he explains, and it is "far better to send support to workers in indigenous churches."

New Policy

The new policy is dictated by new political climate and new economic factors. The local recruit costs less and his compulsion to prove his missionary zeal is greater. Politically he causes less complications and, rightly trained, he is no less earnest in his cause himself. A few months ago, Rev. Abel Govender, an "Indian" Christian Minister in South Africa, wrote to its president, P.W. Botha, that the country would lose God's divine protection if Hinduism were allowed to flourish. "K. P. Yohannan, a native

of India", as he is introduced by the editors of *American Gospel for Asia*, says the "enemy (Satan) has used Hinduism to enslave India in a system that dooms her people to misery in this world, as well as to an eternity in hell." Not many white missionaries could outdo their brown counterparts.

Several rejoinders invoked Mother Teresa's name to show that I did not even "spare her" and, therefore, what I said deserved no credibility. One could admire Mother Teresa and her work without admiring the ecclesiastical framework to which she belongs. British Imperialism had many conscientious officers but it did not take away from the fact that they served an iniquitous system.

Mother Teresa is a true daughter of the Church in having her mind and heart closed to the religions of the countries of her labour, even adoption. Sometime back, some European Vedantists learning that she was at the Vatican went there to pay their respects. She rebuked them for "betraying Christ".

Let me clarify the point a little further by bringing in Sister Nivedita. She is a lady Hindus are proud of. She helped India by helping it to rediscover itself. No higher service could be rendered to a nation in the grip of self-forgetfulness. She stood for national justice for India and she helped us by giving us national pride. This explains why Sister Nivedita is Hindu India's hero. This also explains why Western nations shower praise and money on Mother Teresa while Sister Nivedita remained unsung in the West and there were no contributions from that quarter even for her purely humanitarian work, like education and child care and relief work which she did with no less dedication, sympathy and loving care.

I had said that the *missionary* passage in Mark (earliest Gospel), 'Go and preach the Gospel to all creatures', is an interpolation. They questioned this statement. Well, my best defence is the Bible (RSV) itself which does not even give these verses in the running text but reproduces them only in a footnote. Similarly, the *Good News Bible*, while reproducing the verses, explains in a foot-note that "some manuscripts and ancient translations do not have this ending in Gospel," a euphemism for saying that the passage is a later-stage interpolation.

Anna Sujata Mathai expresses a wish that I too may "like St. Paul, who also hated Christians, one day be forced to face.... dazzling truth of Christ's compassionate love." A similar wish was conveyed in other letters which I received from some readers.

However, while thanking Anna Mathai, I must add that anybody who has a social conscience will make no such wish even for an enemy. Conversion made Paul a greater persecutor, on a larger scale, and a menace for centuries to come for other religions of the world.

Mr T.C. Joseph advises me to avoid an "endless number of books available with an anti-Christian view", but "read up books of a different kind which too abound." I assure him that I read no "anti-Christian" books and I am hardly aware of them. On the other hand, I read the Bibles, early Christian Fathers, Christian Catechisms, Christian Encyclopaedias, Christian directories, orthodox accounts of Christian missionary activities, histories of Protestantism and the Catholic Church held in high esteem by them. I find this literature consistently anti-pagan and I do not know what to think of a religion which teaches in and through its scriptures and its other literature written by its most devout, scholarly and pious sections such systematic hatred of all other religions and believes in a divine injunction to supplant them.

I must also add that Mr Joseph's division of books on Christianity into anti and pro lacks intellectual orientation. Besides these two, there is also a third category: the critical and historical studies of the Bible and Christianity. These are the most durable and solid and they have proved the most damaging to Christianity. It is works of top-notch scholars and theologians like Strauss, Renan, Buchner, Abbe Loisy, works of highest credibility which have proved most "anti-christian".

Scientists' Works

Similarly, it is the works of scientists like Copernicus, Galileo, Linnaeus, Buffon, Laplace, Lyell, Darwin and others which undermined the structure of Christian thought. Astronomy, geology, natural history added immense time and space to Europe's hitherto limited conception of the universe; it proved most subversive of Christianity.

The work of -subversion was complete with the West's discovery of the East. Science brought into discredit virgin birth, resurrection, and miracles; Eastern spirituality did the same to sole sonship, single revelation, special Covenants, proxy atonement, exclusive salvation, chosen fraternity, single life, authorised saviours and mediators, etc, In the religions of the East, the deeper Western thinker and seeker found inferiority, transcendence and universality unknown to him before; he found in them not commandments of some arbitrary deity but truths of his own innermost being; similarly he found in them a principle of tolerance, coexistence, benevolence and reverence which was new to him.

Footnotes:

[1](#) Article written by Ram Swarup in reply to a debate in *The Times of India* following his review-article 'Christianity Mainly for Export', and published in two installments in *The Times of India* on May 23-24, 1988.

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